

# Game Narrative Review

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**Your name:** Jasmin El-Tahry  
**Your school:** Sheridan College  
**Your email:** Jasmin.El-Tahry@outlook.com  
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**Game Title:** Fire Emblem Awakening  
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## Overview

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Fire Emblem: Awakening (henceforth FE:Awakening) is a tactical Japanese role-playing game that follows a mostly standard JRPG story formula; begin a journey, gather allies and defeat the world-ending evil. Where Awakening differs from the norm is in its expansion on themes surrounding family, parenthood, and how war and conflict affects generations. Its success sets the tone for future Fire Emblem franchise games Fates and Three Houses due to its exploration of character dynamics in the midst of war.

Awakening's story follows Chrom, the earnest Prince of Ylisse, and his amnesiac tactician Robin, the unknowing child of the enemy Validar. Together they lead a travelling army called the Shepherds, fighting back the growing threats and declarations of war from Plegia and Valm, two other nations with plans of conquest. The Shepherds defeat army after army, its members growing progressively closer to one another through the din of combat. Chrom and Robin successfully dispatch the armies of Plegia and Valm, with just the final threat of the Fell Dragon Grima on the horizon.

But what Chrom doesn't know is that he's destined to lose that final war. His daughter Lucina and the children born to members of the Shepherds arrive from the future and warn of the army's inevitable defeat, and the catastrophic future that arises from their failure.

# Characters

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## The Shepherds

Chrom's volunteer force of soldiers. Originally formed to protect the people of Ylisse from bandits and Plegian raiders, the Shepherds would go on to face the larger scale armies of Valm and Plegia.

Due to the sheer volume of characters within FE:Awakening not all of them can be mentioned. Those detailed below will primarily be used as examples to show greater trends within the full cast of characters and their writing.

### Chrom

*"In times of peace, maybe. But this is war. Kings, nobles, and peasants alike are all just comrades-in-arms. So please, don't wear yourself out trying to look after me."*

One of the game's primary characters, Chrom is the Prince of Ylisse and its future Exalt. He has a strong sense of justice and considers himself unsuited for the dull drudgery of royal life, preferring for himself the role of a warrior and army leader. Instead of wasting away as a fanciful prince, he instead forms the Shepherds, an elite force among the Ylissean armies, and befriends the player character Robin. Despite his companions' suspicion of the mysterious amnesiac, Chrom comes to trust Robin completely, standing by them even when his own daughter warns of Robin's future backstabbing.

That strong sense of trust and belief in others is Chrom's defining trait, one that determines his nation's death or survival.

*The most likely to break things.*

### Robin

*"We're not pawns of some scripted fate. I believe we're more. Much more... There's something between us all. Something that keeps us together... Like...invisible ties, connecting us."*

The player character of FE:Awakening, Robin is discovered by Chrom and his sister Lissa laying alone in a field, their memories gone. They quickly display a knack for battle tactics and are recruited by Chrom to the Shepherds, despite their murky origins. They quickly form a close friendship and bond of trust with the Ylissean prince that discovered them, and remain well-liked amongst their peers.

At the end it is discovered that Robin is the child of Validar, a Plegian tactician and loyal follower of the Fell Dragon Grima. Robin was planned to be Grima's vessel and bring about ruin to the continent, but thanks to future intervention, this doesn't come to pass.

(Since Robin is the player character, both their name and gender can be adjusted to player preference. For the sake of this essay, they will be referred to as Robin with gender neutral pronouns.)

*The biggest mystery of the group.*

### **Lissa**

*“Not another step, potato molester! Stealing food is wrong! Well, I guess I sometimes steal sweets from my brother’s pack. ...And gold. But that is totally not the same thing. It’s time for you to die, die, die!”*

Ylisse’s Princess and Chrom’s younger sister, Lissa has a friendly and exuberant personality hiding deep insecurity. Despite her royal status, Lissa is one of the more approachable members of the Shepherds, welcoming Robin into their ranks and bringing levity to most serious interactions she’s in.

At her core, Lissa doesn’t believe herself to be very capable, placing herself in a more supportive role as a healer. She’s quick to give up and even quicker to pass a task to someone more capable, a tendency unsurprising of Ylisse’s youngest royal.

*The girl most likely to snort.*

### **Maribelle**

*“Have you no shame? Ransacking other people’s property is so low class! Perhaps if you apologized, I might overlook your transgressions... What’s wrong? Bandages in your mouth? Oh well!”*

Maribelle is a prideful noble hailing from Ylisse’s aristocracy, as well as Lissa’s best friend. She’s sharp-tongued and quick to pick out others’ perceived failings, especially if they’re not members of the nobility. That being said, Maribelle is not critical for no reason. She is fiercely loyal and pushes others to achieve the best they can, regardless of her own standards. She’s cold and judgemental on a first meeting, but is quick to apologize and acknowledge her wrongdoings, warming up enough to call newcomers her friend and equal.

*The most likely to toss in her sleep.*

### **Sully**

*“Don’t try to intimidate me with gossip. I’m a respectable lady, dammit. And no matter what that thing says, I assure you I’m a fine cook! Now gimme back that roster before I shove it up your undead exit pipe!”*

A brash young Shepherd and Chrom’s childhood friend, Sully doesn’t quite fit in with the other women in the army. She never found herself good at anything expected of

a respectable young lady, and preferred more traditionally masculine practices, like combat. Despite this preference, Sully does not revere men as better; instead she endeavours to prove that she and other women are no less than them. She is oft admired by other Ylissean women, who refer to her as *“The woman to end all men.”*

*The last one you want cooking.*

### **Miriel**

*“Curious, perhaps. Meriting closer study, certainly. Spontaneous reactive curiosity. Fascinating. But what is the underlying mechanism?”*

The most technical-minded of the Shepherds, Miriel's head is filled only with thoughts of study and science. Most of her interactions with the other Shepherds are awkward, where the other party ends up more a research subject than conversation partner. All things must be in order around Miriel and all proper procedures must be dutifully followed. This approach makes her exceedingly meticulous and dependable, if not a bit difficult to get along with.

*The most superfluous packer.*

### **Gaius**

*“Yes, I did. I told you that I left. I didn't vote for anyone. While those fools were haggling, I went to the mess hall and stole their desserts. THAT'S what I call interesting.”*

Gaius is a charming thief hired by Plegia to assassinate the Exalt, something he was not aware was part of the job description. Gaius has a “cool” personality and doesn't have it in him to kill, believing the job was more a robbery than an outright killing. He can be recruited to the Shepherds and quickly becomes known for his voracious sweet-tooth, sinking his teeth into anything sugared, and is easily rewarded with a sack of sweets. His approach to the more noble-blooded Shepherds is somewhat aloof and largely dismissive of their cushy problems, but he's empathetic and kind at heart, nearly always willing to lend a hand...so long as they sweeten the deal.

*The most frequent nosebleeder.*

### **Panne**

*“Despite our history, I never hated mankind. The exalt proved your race's worth. Until man-spawn slaughtered my people and put my warren to ruin, that is.”*

Panne is the last of her people, the Tanguel, a race of shapeshifters that were wiped out long ago by humans. She joins the Shepherds around the same time as Gaius, when Plegia attempts to assassinate the Exalt. Feeling a debt to the Exalt for a kindness paid to her people, Panne comes to protect her from Plegia's machinations to end her life

and reign. Panne isn't the most sociable character and tends to keep to herself. She's not completely used, nor entirely willing, to interact with humans and their very alien culture. Believing most of them frivolous and willingly ignorant, Panne often welcomes the curious, educating them on her people and their culture.

*The fastest at wolfing down a meal.*

## **Olivia**

*"It would honor me to have a part in giving her justice! Although all I can do is dance... And I'm not so skilled at that, if we're being honest."*

A shy and socially anxious young woman with a natural talent towards dance. Olivia's dances are able to revitalise the spirits of soldiers and any who watch her. Despite all her gifts with the art, Olivia doesn't believe her skill is up to par, a belief she is often chided on. Olivia is one of the last characters to join the Shepherds before the arrival of Lucina.

*The most mesmerizing singer.*

## **The Children**

The Shepherds' time-travelling children. The future they come from is a bleak one; their parents have all ultimately died in Grima's war, leaving the children with a broken country.

The children will always have the same mother (i.e Brady's mother will always be Maribelle, but their father can be near anyone). This comes with the exception of Lucina, whose Father will always be Chrom.

## **Lucina**

*"A land of pristine beauty, untouched by war. I've dreamed of such a place... And yet you brigands seem completely oblivious to its majesty. Disgusting. Perhaps a nice, hard strike from my blade will help open your eyes."*

The future princess of Ylisse and Chrom's lion-hearted daughter, Lucina inherited her father's war when she was still quite young, a war that had already destroyed the majority of her halidom. After deciding that her timeline was beyond saving, she ventures to the past with the other children of the Shepherds, determined to prevent her future from happening again. Lucina loves and admires her father deeply, but believes him knowing her identity may complicate her mission. In an effort to prevent this, Lucina dons a butterfly mask and the alias "Marth"; this alias is later abandoned after Lucina accidentally calls Chrom "Father".

Lucina inherited most of Chrom's traits, sporting his blue hair, kind-hearted nature, and slight awkwardness. She is the only child character integrated in the main storyline and thus cannot be skipped.

*The least likely to get a joke.*

### **Kjelle**

*"I've made good progress in my training regimen. Should I shake things up? The terrain here is terrible, but it might make for a decent agility course... I'll have to dispatch these Risen first. That should be worth half a lap or so."*

Like her mother Sully, Kjelle is a knight at heart and despises weakness, especially within herself. When Kjelle was young she was trained strictly by her mother in all manner of skills befitting a seasoned warrior, all except riding. Kjelle has a strong proclivity towards heavy armour and values it greatly, referring to it as her constant companion.

*The most attached to her armour.*

### **Laurent**

*"Ahh, I see. How very fascinating... This era is so fortunate to have its texts still intact. It is a scholar's dream. And I shall need to read more still if I hope to catch up with Mother."*

Miriel's overserious son, Laurent greatly admires his mother and her scientific approach to all things in life. Unlike the other children, Laurent arrived from the future one year early, left completely alone in his search for his parents and a plan to stop the ruination of Grima. Despite inheriting his mother's calculating nature, Laurent deeply cares for others, often checking in with his allies and offering them the best advice he can.

*The one with the worst lens glare.*

### **Inigo**

*"I may be all smiles on the outside, but I'm actually pretty sensitive. And pessimistic. ...Oh, and I cry at the drop of a hat. Whenever a girl turns me down, I'm a complete mess for days."*

Olivia's son is known by all around him as an incorrigible flirt. He's friendly and charming, often asking women out to tea and proclaims his war-time pursuits are all for the sake of gaining the admiration of the women around him. In actuality, Inigo is quite shy, spurned on by his mother in childhood to try talking to others. Inigo continues to secretly practice his mother's dances in hopes of connecting with her after her death.

*The biggest night owl.*

## **Brady**

*“Oh, don't you worry, I'm gonna have me a nice, long chat with dear ol' Ma! You just sit there and drink your damn tea. So long, old-timer! ...Oh, and set this on top of the pot. It keeps the tea warm.”*

Brady is described as having a terrifying face, with a rough “punkish” way of talking. In many ways, Brady is the opposite of his mother Maribelle, but despite his appearance, Maribelle did teach her son many noble crafts. Brady is a huge softie inside, and often bursts into tears when emotions strike him. The scar on his left eye that lends to his intimidating appearance was actually from a snapped violin string, an instrument Brady loves to play.

*The most likely to incur friendly fire.*

## **Other Characters**

**Fell Dragon Grima** - The final antagonist of FE:Awakening, Grima is described to be a “world ending evil” and revered by the Grimleal as a God of Annihilation. In Lucina and the children’s alternate timeline, Grima has successfully taken over Robin as a vessel, bringing about ruin to Ylisse and dousing the world with their foot soldiers, undead humanoids called the Risen. Alternate Grima is the reason for Robin’s amnesia, having followed Lucina into the current timeline, the Fell Dragon failed to take hold of Robin, resulting in the loss of the player character’s memories.

**Validar** - Robin’s birth father and leader to the Grimleal, a religious sect of Plegia dedicated to Grima. Validar comes from a long line of cultists who hoped to bring about Grima’s return and become his vessel. They were unsuccessful until the birth of Robin, who bore the Mark of Grima on the back of their hand, signifying them as the next vessel for the Fell Dragon. Validar is a primary antagonist, and through dark magic is able to control their child.

**Exalt Emmeryn** - Chrom and Lissa’s older sister and the Ruler of Ylisse. Emmeryn endeavoured to bring peace between Plegia and her halidom, after her father, the previous Exalt’s, war-hungry tirade. Lucina manages to stall Emmeryn’s assassination after travelling back in time, but Emmeryn eventually sacrifices herself in a show of protest against Plegia and their war.

## Breakdown

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*“I see you’re awake now.  
There are better places to take a nap than on the ground, you know?  
Now give me your hand.” - Chrom to Robin.*

FE:Awakening sets the tone for its story by telling the player how it's going to end, and it does this by opening with two cutscenes. The first is a prophetic dream the player character Robin has, of how they will inevitably betray Chrom. The second is them waking up from that dream, discovered laying in a field by a very friendly and very concerned looking Chrom and Lissa.

The prophetic dream, while one of betrayal, establishes the relationship and trust between Chrom and Robin. It depicts the two of them battling Validar, a tall and purple clad sorcerer who slings magenta lighting and fire towards the pair. The dream is set in Robin’s POV, and thus the POV of the player, in which they are seen shielding Chrom from Validar’s lethal magic attacks. Robin eventually pushes Chrom out of the way of an unexpected spell, sustaining the brunt of the blow while Chrom rushes to their side.

*“You alright? That’s the end of him. Thanks to you, we carried the day.”*

Robin’s incoming betrayal is unwilling, shown visually by the red veins that enter their vision and the warping of the audio, distorting Chrom’s voice and eventually drowning it out with Robin’s heartbeat. All clues that point to Robin no longer sustaining control. When Robin stabs him, Chrom does nothing to blame them, instead saying -

*“Its not your...your fault. Promise me you’ll escape from this place. Please. Go.”*

The dream is the first obvious clue that Robin is a not-so-secret antagonist; the story tells the player that this event will inevitably happen, but there are other, more subtle clues that Robin is from the other side. The first is their outfit’s similarity to Validar’s, both are dressed in purple and gold robes, their similarities made all the more obvious when other Plegian characters are introduced with similar clothing. The final clue is in the second cut scene, where a mark lies on the back of their hand. It too carries a similar purple colour and sinister eye-based design.

For the remainder of the series, the cutscenes are used primarily to better communicate battle, but early on they also serve a secondary purpose - to visually show subtle foreshadowing. This is done initially with Robin and the Mark of Grima on the back of their hand, foretelling of their “evil” origin and eventual betrayal of Chrom. As the plot progresses, similarities between Lucina and Chrom are highlighted before their familial relationship is eventually revealed. Such similarities, like Lucina’s sharing Chrom’s fighting style or her sword being a replica of his, would not be as successful if communicated in FE:Awakening’s typical visual novel style.



Chrom and Robin's relationship is the centerpoint of the main storyline. Their developing friendship and trust sets up one of the largest themes in the story - the intimate relationship and trust that can be formed between two people. This is solidified by both Chrom and Robin being considered the main characters of the story; if even one of the two falls in battle, the player gets a Game Over. This theme is echoed in one of FE:Awakening's main systems: Supports.

## Supports and Gameplay

Awakening's gameplay follows a war campaign-type structure, and along Robin and Chrom's journey they recruit upwards of 40+ soldiers to the Shepherds. In Classic Mode, losing these soldiers in a battle will mean the character themselves is permanently dead in story and cannot be used again. Combat in FE:Awakening is very tactical and shares many similarities to chess and older war campaign games; however, unlike chess, these units are given faces, personalities, and distinct characteristics. These "pieces" are people, and how players get to know the majority of them is through Supports.

Supports are where the majority of character exploration takes place. While Fire Emblem does follow a linear, chapter-by-chapter storyline, most of its interest comes from the relationships formed by its myriad of characters.

The Supports themselves are small, visual novel-esque skits that give players an inside look into the bond forming between two characters. Each character (excluding Chrom) can have around 20 possible supports. With each Support the player sees, the better they know the character.

Their tones vary depending on the pair, ranging from light-hearted and comedic to emotionally wrenching and intimate. The former serves to add levity to the story, a refreshing breath of air to break up the usual wartime story formula, while the latter offers deep emotional insight into the character and their personal story. Some supports are a combination of the two, creating peaks and valleys in the interaction.

Supports are gained when characters bond during combat; if two viable characters are in adjacent spaces during a fight, their relationship will improve. This game mechanic functions under the pretence that these characters are growing closer over the course of the war. In theory, facing a life or death situation side-by-side with a companion will inevitably bring those two characters closer together on a personal level.

The bettered relationship manifests itself as substantial stat increases. Whenever the two characters are paired together they gain either +1 or +2 increases to every stat, making them more effective together the closer they are. This substantial betterment of the paired characters is reminiscent of unit cohesion within the military, specifically Social Cohesion

*"Social cohesion is the extent to which group members like each other, prefer to spend their social time together, enjoy each other's company, and feel emotionally close to one another."*

The supports show the social cohesion between the characters, which translates into increased effectiveness when paired together in combat. A closer pair doesn't just mean stat increases, it also means they're more likely to perform assisting actions in combat, such as jumping in to defend their partner from an incoming attack or slipping in a strike to finish off an enemy. The characters are shown to be more in sync and effective in battle when they establish a close relationship.

The nature of Supports is also very intimate. FE:Awakening doesn't really focus on group dynamics, but more so the relationship between two individuals. This is reflected in the bond of trust shared between Robin and Chrom, who establish and grow their relationship in a war-torn time period. A conversation between two people is more vulnerable, direct, and isolated from outsiders.

A successful Support teaches players something about the characters involved in it. It shows how they interact with opposing or similar personalities, shows their vulnerabilities or fears, and features a small arc of minor character development.

There are 3-4 levels in a support, starting from C-support (the lowest) to A-support (highest platonic support). Characters that share no familial blood and are of the opposite sex have access to S-supports, given that they have not S-supported with another character. These mini character arcs follow a simple story structure:

Support Level	Narrative Implication	Stat Increases
C-Support	Characters are just starting to get to know one another, or are reminiscing/reestablishing a pre-existing bond. The first interaction is often positive, but some begin with characters starting off on the wrong foot. Establishes the Support's tone.	+1
B-Support	A show of the characters deepening their bond or understanding of one another. These supports tend to be the most action heavy,	+1
A-Support	The pair's bond is solidified and understanding is reached between the two. The solidified relationship isn't always necessarily friendship, but affirms trust.	+2
S-Support	The romantic support available to characters of the opposite sex (and are unrelated). Characters confess their romantic feelings and exchange a ring. This is a requirement to gain Child characters.	+2

This structure creates small-scale character development. FE:Awakening includes permadeath, which can befall every character in the game (with the exception of Chrom, Lucina and Robin). Since they can die at any time, there is little opportunity for them to grow and develop within the main storyline, and this puts them at risk of remaining static. Supports help avoid this by having characters grow or learn something by the end of A-Support. This growth doesn't massively change their character, as it has to stay somewhat consistent when they participate in other Supports. But it does allow for small moments of development, like when Sully wrongfully accused Gaius of thievery.

*"I've always prided myself on judging people fairly and without prejudice. But as soon as I saw my gem was missing, You were the first person I thought of." - Sully and Gaius' B-Support.*

Here Sully is established to already have qualms about profiling people, but in her interaction she was proven to still capable of jumping to conclusions. Gaius assuages her saying -

*" Well, it's not like Chrom or Lissa would be ransacking your things, now is it? Suspicion and a lack of honor are all just part of the thieving game."*

But Sully, still put off by her prejudice, offers to help Gaius with his personal training, understanding that she did something wrong. Through getting to know Gaius, Sully learns to be more careful of her snap-judgements and grows as a character.

### **Characterizing the Shepherds.**

Over the course of the first thirteen chapters, Fire Emblem doles out approximately twenty-four unique characters to explore.

Unlike Chrom, Robin, and Lissa, most of these characters will not make a substantial appearance in the main plotline. They typically have a short intro and explanation for joining Chrom and his Shepherds.

While the acquisitions of these characters are spaced out, with usually a few joining each chapter, this overabundance of characters means they only have a short window of time to make an impression, and communicate *who they are*. How this is done is through their archetype.

Archetypes are easy shorthands for understanding who a character is in a small window of time, and Fire Emblem makes full use of them. The characters each have a defining archetype, one that is easily recognizable from western and eastern literature, or formed throughout the lifespan of the Fire Emblem series.

For the Shepherds themselves, these archetypes often surround a role or a job, and if not, then their job is highly linked to their identity. Examples of this can include

Maribelle for the Noblewoman archetype (or Oujo-sama) vs Olivia who has the Shy Girl archetype with her role as a dancer being highly linked to her identity and character.

Other jobs can include the likes of scholar, farmer, mercenary, or knight. The characters are part of an army, and their role suggests a reason for why they're recruited. These roles communicate the existing skill-sets and personality traits of the characters to whom they are assigned.

Keeping the first set of characters within recognizable archetypes keeps a mental load off the player as they already know who the character is supposed to be, and so they can instead skip straight to seeing them in action.

For example, Gaius is the thief character, who first appears in Chapter 6 and arrives alongside the Plegian forces to assassinate Ylisse's Exalt, Emmeryn. He was recruited by the Plegians under the impression that this "job" was a robbery of the royal treasury, not that he'd be aiding in the death of a monarch. Upon speaking to him, it is made abundantly clear that he has no interest in killing, and that he only joined in the attack for some quick coin.

*"I'm a thief see? Bust open doors, crack into chests...that kind of thing.*

*This lot said they wanted to break into some type of vault.*

*Nobody said anything about murder. I'd just as soon sit this one out"*

Here, Gaius establishes a moral compass, as well as what exactly his profession is, granting him the "Lovable Rogue" archetype. The traits that come with it are the following: Proclivity towards thievery or "rogue-like" behaviour, often manifesting physically as light fingered-ness and dexterity; originating from a working class or poor background; a moral compass that typically involves a "no-killing rule"; and due to the archetype's high level of romanticization — a charming personality and/or appearance.

Most of Gaius is kept neatly within his archetype with the rare subversion. His character is predictable, but not unentertaining. This is due to the application of the archetype's traits in Supports.

Gaius is light fingered, but this also means he's good at needlework, allowing him to help the less dextrous Lissa with her embroidery. He comes from a modest background, which allows him to scold the highly privileged Chrom. His moral compass, or suggested "no-killing" policy appears with Maribelle, when he tells her he framed her father in order to save her life.

These instances, and many of Gaius's other Supports, utilize different interpretations of his archetypal traits. They are adapted to the variety of existing tones, including Cordelia's comedic attempt at sprucing up his personal grooming or Maribelle blaming his past thievery for the hardships in her family. Proper application of a familiar archetype's traits means variety in their interactions.

This contrasts the poor execution of Miriel's archetype. Miriel is the "scholar" and she does not offer much, or any, variety in her Supports. Little is learned of Miriel in

her interactions, besides reaffirming that she's in a constant pursuit of knowledge. As a result, her character stays noticeably static, and falls flat in comparison to her peers.

## **The Children.**

*“But why? What happens in the future?!”*

*“The Fell Dragon Grima is resurrected.  
His roars are a death knell for man, a scream that silences all hope...  
Death everywhere...”  
- Lucina to Robin*

Chapter 12 is when Lucina joins her father and the Shepherds. Having gone under the moniker “Marth” to hide her identity from Chrom, Lucina reveals that she came from a future where nearly all the Shepherds had died, leaving behind their country and children to the designs of Grima. Lucina warns Chrom that her future was unsavable, and that her only remaining option was to change the past and prevent it from happening again.

Unlike their parents, most of the children are allowed more depth and complexity. While many of the Shepherds' identities are linked to their professions (thief, pegasus knight, scholar) the tropes the children occupy are more personality-centric (playboy, soft-hearted punk, tsundere) with less of a focus on their individual roles in the army.

This allows for a greater focus on who the children are, rather than what they do. Their identities are no longer how they can contribute to the war, but how they were affected by it.

The children's arrival brings the consequences of the war to the forefront. They come into the story already having experienced the height of its damage, and subsequently having their psychology shaped by it. The parents are confronted with this reality, with the horrors their child had, or would have, to go through; many of the children arrive with seemingly well-adjusted personalities, but hide painful upbringings behind them.

For example, Inigo is the typical flirt and playboy, with a habit of sweet-talking almost every girl he comes across. He appears to have a happy disposition, and talks cheerfully despite the cruel future he comes from. This is his first impression to the audience and to his parents. In his Supports, his father is perplexed and eventually frustrated by his son's frivolous nature.

*“You can barely walk, and you're still thinking about girls?! Be serious for once!  
It's like you travelled back from the future just to fool around or something...”  
- Inigo's father*

This causes an argument between Inigo and his father to ensue, Inigo shouting -

*“You may think me a dandy and a fool, but a lot of people depended on me in the future. Every day, I was out there fighting Risen and risking my life.*

*Even with you and Mother gone, I had to pretend I was fine. That I wasn't hurting.*

*...You said I looked like I didn't have a care in the world? Well I'm sorry to tell you but that's not the case at all.”*

*-Inigo to his father*

Inigo's personal experiences and fallout with his father is an example of how the children's experiences bring more weight to the story's main conflict. Not just for Inigo and the other children, but for the parents themselves. Until this point, the motivations for the parents' participation in the war were watery at best, like Gaius joining for a handful of sweets. However, being shown how the war affected their children connects them on a personal level, now that they are acting out of love for another.

The children are traumatized by the deaths of their parents and the war they had been raised in, and each has constructed their own coping mechanisms. Through their Supports, players learn that these coping mechanisms were shaped by how their parents raised them.

For example, in his support with his father, Laurent is very concerned with being “grown up” and how that means he doesn't need emotional support. He has formed a type of hyper independence in which he feels like he should not have to rely on anyone. This worldview was shaped by his highly rational and somewhat emotionally unavailable mother, whose primary interest is the pursuit of knowledge unaffected by emotional biases. It is through this worldview that Laurent learned how to cope with his reality and deal with his trauma: he would rationalize everything and not allow emotions to sway him. He is unaware that this very way of thinking is inherently immature and unhealthy, a fact which is later taught to him by his (presumably) less emotionally stunted father, who tells him that relying on others is, in fact, a very adult thing to do and is necessary for survival. Because of Miriel, we can better understand Laurent's characterization.

The existence of the children also brings insights into the future development of the mother characters. In conversing with their future child, the mother is often surprised by the actions taken by their future selves.

Upon meeting her daughter Kjelle, Sully is told that she stopped giving Kjelle riding lessons, telling her daughter that she was simply unsuited for horseback.

This action is in direct conflict with the Sully that players know. Sully does not believe in talent. She's a knight who had to work twice as hard in her field to be taken seriously by her male counterparts, and thus believes practice can, and should, be used to surpass anyone's lack in natural ability. Sully knows herself well, and can't imagine why she would take such an action, that is, until she spends more time with Kjelle.

*“Well, I think I figured out why I didn't teach you how to ride in the future.”*

*“Oh no! Does this mean you're going to stop giving me lessons?”*

*“Just listen: it takes a special talent to navigate a mount around a battlefield. But it's not the be-all, end-all of combat. Everyone has their own unique skill set. I think I probably wanted you to find your own way to fight.”*

*“But why? Riding is a crucial skill.”*

*“Because I'm your mother.”*

*“What?”*

*“One tiny slipup can cost a warrior her life out in the field. And if I saw a risk, no matter how small, I'd want to nip it in the bud.” - Kjelle and Sully's A-Support*

Characters interacting with their future children shows how parenthood changed, or adjusted, their principles and beliefs. The risk of young Kjelle pursuing riding, in future Sully's eyes, would increase her chances of being felled in battle. In the face of survival and the preservation of her child, future Sully shifted her steadfast rejection of “natural ability”.

Unwavering morals and worldviews are seen as absolute in fiction, especially when said worldviews are noble, but our views adapt to our surroundings and current situation. We may adjust them out of necessity, or when we encounter something that directly contradicts it.

The effects parenthood has on the Shepherds shows their development beyond the story, and how their characters changed with the passage of time. They can't always understand why they would take certain actions in the future, and that's because they changed in an environment they have not yet experienced. It shows that they, as characters, are ever-evolving.

## **Strongest Element**

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Fire Emblem's strongest element was its depictions of parent-child relationships. It shows a variety of different personality types navigating parenthood and what comes with it. This is a direct result of how Fire Emblem chose to structure its child system. Each parental character was first written and established as their own person, with their own character flaws, traits and motivations, *then* they entered parenthood. Their character is not dependent on their role as a mother or father, nor does it begin with the lives of their child. This results in a large array of parenting styles and different expressions of parental love that are consistent with their established characters.

This can be seen especially clearly in Maribelle, who holds civility and “noble-like” behaviour in the highest esteem. Maribelle's child is Brady, who is very much her opposite, so much so that she did not believe he could possibly be her son. Her parenting-style as described by Brady was “spartan-like”, tutoring him in tea ceremony,

violin, and proper diction. Well, a large chunk of Maribelle's teachings did not stick, and her thuggish son's speech remained rough. The majority of their Supports surround her trying to correct his speech, and out of love for his mother, Brady does his best to appease her wishes, eventually succeeding and correcting his diction. Maribelle, despite her high standards and intensity, is highly affectionate and loyal, and ends up preferring that her son return to his natural way of speech. Their relationship is teasing, with many conflicts arising from their warring personalities, but each expresses love and care to one another and ultimately reconciles.

Her established character guided how she would parent her future child, and this in turn gave them the most interesting parent-child relationship in *Awakening*. Maribelle could have easily fit into an evil mother archetype, but her pre-existing complexity avoided that. This is true for many parents in the game, who are no longer relegated to a "good parent" or "evil parent" role. These black and white archetypes tend to fall flat, providing little interest in the character. Instead, the parents of *Awakening* are allowed to love and interact with their children through very realistic conflict, creating strong and authentic relationships rather than idealistic ones.

## Unsuccessful Element

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Panne is one of the most poorly written characters in *Fire Emblem Awakening*. The majority of her Supports and conversations refer to her race of people - the Tanguel. Despite Panne providing heavy amounts of exposition on them, the game gives players little reason to care about her people. Players are *told* about them, their struggle, and how they have died out, leaving Panne as the only survivor, but never are they given relevance in the story. The Tanguel, and thus the basis for Panne's character, are treated as an afterthought, forced into the world solely to exist within Panne, dominating her interactions and relationships.

This is a symptom of a greater narrative error, in that most of the Shepherds (excluding the children) have little grounding in the story's worldbuilding. Their backstories are barebones, only explored through conversation with other characters, where, once again, the player is *told* instead of *shown* their origins. Their motivation for joining the Shepherds are weak as a result, their fight in the war only made personal once their children enter the story.

Understandably this comes from the high volume of characters; not every single one can be explored in depth and included in the main storyline, but there are possible fixes to this, found in *Awakening*'s successor, *Fire Emblem: Three Houses*. One fix is weaving more character stories into main story chapters - such as making the location of a battle someone's hometown or including a family member as a minor enemy. A second fix is including their reactions to recent plot developments — how did they feel about the death of the Exalt? How do they feel about the enemy nation Plegia? Do they have sympathy for them, or do they deem them an irredeemable evil? Answering these questions chapter to chapter can give the story more weight while making the characters feel more intrinsic to the world they reside in.



## Highlight

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One of Fire Emblem's best moments was Lucina's confrontation with Robin. Lucina knows that her father would eventually be betrayed and killed by his faithful tactician. While this is in no way Robin's fault, as it occurs when they are under the control of either their own father or Grima, it is still an event that occurred in Lucina's past and she wishes to correct it. She finds Robin and attempts to kill them, but they are saved by Chrom's intervention... at least that's what usually happens. Normally this scene is a show of trust between Chrom and Robin, how even when knowing of Robin's future betrayal, they still choose to work together to prevent it. This changes, however, if Robin is Lucina's mother. Instead, Lucina's resolve wavers, now faced with the choice of either killing her mother and ensuring Chrom's survival, or letting her mother live and risking her father dying later down the line. Robin, on hearing Lucina's reasoning, can accept her death at the hands of her child; she takes the moment to tell Lucina how she's proud of her, and how much she loves her. This breaks Lucina down, and she lays down her sword, unable to take Robin's life.

This is one of the most emotionally charged scenes in the game, and highlights FE:Awakening's strength in writing parent child relationships. If the conflict was just between Lucina and Robin as acquaintances, then it would just be Lucina killing her father's friend, but that doesn't necessarily have to be the case. Lucina loves her mother Robin, and her decision to kill her mother before her inevitable betrayal, wracks Lucina and the player with emotion. Robin is the player character, a surrogate through which players project themselves into the story, making Lucina their surrogate daughter.

## Critical Reception

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**IGN, Audry Drake, 9/10** - Drake praises Awakening's expert characterization stating that few games could *"so readily attach a player to such a wide array of characters, or keep each addition to such a large, revolving cast so distinct and memorable, but Awakening achieves both"* and that they felt motivated to keep each one of their characters alive to see them grow and develop. Drake also warns of turning off Classic mode, stating that it removes the pressure to keep these beloved characters alive and *"doing so would be electively stripping the game of one of its more profound features."*

**Nintendolife, Jon Wahlgren, 9/10** - Wahlgren cites many of Awakening's predecessors in his review, speaking at length about long-time fans and their reactions to Awakening's more forgiving stance on permadeath. He concludes that the main drive behind Awakening success was its accessibility to new players, while providing a robust battle-system for Fire Emblem veterans. While Wahlgren speaks at length of Awakenings tactics and strategic gameplay, he also states that *"Watching these personalities interact and build relationships is its own kind of reward off the battlefield."*

## Lessons

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**Archetypes are not necessarily bad, and often necessary.** While it is poor practice to repeat the same characters over and over with little variation, archetypes provide a solid foundation for both the author and audience to easily grasp a character. They are part of the public's mental libraries and are easily subject to adjustments that can make them unique. This is what made it possible for the large cast of characters to be implemented into FE:Awakening without making it overcrowded and difficult to track.

**Conflict between two characters is more impactful if there's the expectation of love.**

A fight between close siblings is more poignant than a fight between strangers. People who love each other often get into conflicts, and when a loved one is on the other side, it makes a character's choice to stand against them more tortured. This is true for relationships where love exists, used to exist (an ex-friend), or should exist (an absentee father). The difference between Lucina's confrontation with Robin as her father's friend, versus Robin as her mother, is stark. When their sequence of interactions are set side by side, they are roughly the same; the difference is in the nature of their relationship.

**Characters are taught how to deal with trauma.** Every character, and person, deals with trauma and heartache differently. The tools with which they are equipped to cope are often built during their childhood, when their worldviews are still being formed and they can grasp their sense of self. All the child characters lost their parents to a common tragedy, but each of them came out dealing with the resulting trauma differently. Laurent became hyper independent, Inigo shuts away his own despair, and Lucina resolved to fix everything.

**Growth is lifelong.** Characters will continue to grow long past their roles in the story are over. Change should be expected as they experience parenthood, loss, or any other large-scale events in their lives. This was true with Sully, when parenthood and years at war shifted her otherwise unshakable perspective on talent. Her future-self, although still her, has clearly changed over the years, eventually becoming the "Sully" that Kjelle was most familiar with. In writing, it's important to consider what would cause someone to change over time, and how their perspectives would change from teenagers to adulthood.

## Summation

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Fire Emblem: Awakening came out around the time the franchise was expected to end. Developers were told that if the game failed to sell less than 250,000 copies, then the franchise would come to a close. Awakening was released as an anniversary game, celebrating the Fire Emblem franchise with multiple references to older games.

Awakening's explosion of popularity revitalized its success, bringing in new fans thanks to its involved writing and complex child system. A system that was so popular, it was implemented in Awakening's successor: Fates, despite the latter's story never calling for it. While the game and its story isn't perfect, Awakening's portrayal of parent-child relationships and intimate, one-on-one relationships brought new players to a once-gated community.

## Citations

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