LIGHTNING RETURNS™
F I N A L   F A N T A S Y® XIII

THE OFFICIAL MINI GUIDE

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THE OFFICIAL MINI GUIDE

ABOUT THIS MINI GUIDE

- The 24 pages in this Mini Guide are taken directly from Piggyback's 100% complete guide to Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII.

- You can read more about the Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII guide on the last page of this Mini Guide.

- There will be two distinct editions to the Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII guide. Both will be released simultaneously with the game on February 11 with details as follows:

The softcover **Standard Edition** guide includes a two-sided map poster covering the entire game world, is printed on high-quality paper, and has 324 packed pages.

The 356-page **Collector's Edition** guide is printed on high-quality paper and bound in a hard cover. It includes an extra-large two-sided map poster and a unique code for free download of the "Art of War" DLC, which comprises an outfit, weapon and shield. The guide is limited to just one print run and has two book marks for easy navigation. The extra 32-page section includes beautiful concept art and exclusive insights directly from the development team.

FOREWORD

Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII is a very special game for us. It is the result of several years' work on the trilogy, with all of the team's experience culminating to offer an outstanding concluding title. It is a synthesis of memorable features and faces from previous Final Fantasy XIII episodes, but also a new and distinct adventure in its own right.

When I look back, I realize that our decision to make Lightning Returns so, and to give full control to the player, was a bold move. With three difficulty levels, a world that evolves throughout the thirteen-day timeline, and the unpredictability of each player's choices, ensuring that the game remained fun and balanced no matter what was incredibly challenging; and this was a challenge that we embraced. We have worked hard to refine Lightning Returns so that there is always something in it for you, wherever you are and no matter what you have achieved to that point in the game.

This is precisely where this guide comes in. With so many things to be accomplished and uncovered in a game world teeming with opportunities, this book will be a teacher with boundless patience, a savior when things seem bleak, and a wise friend always on hand to offer the advice you need. It is encyclopedic, yet unfailingly accessible. Our longtime partner, Piggyback, has accomplished miracles in creating this authoritative (and beautiful!) companion tome.

I am pleased and honored to welcome you to the world of Nova Chrysalia, and I trust that this guide will help you enjoy every last moment of our game to its fullest.

Motomu Toriyama
Director, Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII

Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII is a very open adventure, with a structure so flexible that you may find yourself wondering how to approach it during its first few hours. All you know at first is that you control Lightning, and that your role as the Savior is to save the souls of the inhabitants of the Nova Chrysalia game world. This is achieved by completing quests, ranging from simple favors to extended storylines involving familiar faces from previous Final Fantasy XIII episodes.

The freedom that Lightning Returns offers in terms of how you complete its many disparate challenges is one of its principal charms, but also potentially a source of great confusion and heightened difficulty. Perhaps more so than the vast majority of RPGs, knowledge is your most powerful weapon in almost every situation. The completion of quests is your primary source of stat boosts, rather than the traditional approach of incremental growth through enemy encounters, and so advancing Lightning's abilities is a matter of accepting and completing suitable quests in an efficient order. This is complicated by the fact that quests may only appear at a certain time of day, or once other requirements have been met.

There are three categories of quests in Lightning Returns:

- **Main Quests:** These are multi-stage storylines that feature important characters from prior episodes in the Final Fantasy XIII trilogy. Main quests consist of numbered chapters, and must be completed by the end of Day 12 for you to be able to reach the final section of the story and its accompanying challenges. If you fail to fulfill any of them before the Final Day, you will hit the Game Over screen and must restart from Day 1. Main quests are (with one exception) tied to specific regions of the game world, and are automatically available in their respective locations once you complete the early tutorial-based sections of the adventure.

- **Side Quests:** These assignments are shorter than main quests, and involve a varied cast of characters encountered throughout the world. Many are solved by finding items and returning them to a quest vendor, or resolving a situation via individual steps that can be achieved immediately, though you will encounter some quests where the necessary tasks will span multiple days. The difficulty of each quest is represented with stars (☆), from one for the easiest to three for the most difficult.

- **Canvas of Prayers:** Right outside every Monorail Station, you will find a Canvas of Prayers – a notice board that you can consult by talking to the nearby Chocolina (01). Most of these tasks will simply require you to accumulate specific items, more often than not by defeating monsters or gathering collectible items. Make a habit of checking the Canvas of Prayers in each location at least once per in-game day, both to accept new missions and to turn in those that you have already completed. Some Canvas quests are interlinked: finishing one may unlock another.

Completing any quest grants you various rewards, including boosts to your attributes and items or pieces of equipment. In addition, you also obtain a hidden sum of Eradia for each main quest and side quest fulfilled. Eradia is the energy that Lightning obtains from the souls she saves (02). The Eradia you gather is transferred to the sacred tree Yggdrasil at the end of each day. By reaching certain Eradia milestones, you unlock additional days before the world ends.

Lightning begins with seven days to save the world. Completing each main quest will grant you an additional day. To reach the end of the game, you have to play until the end of Day 12 (which requires you to complete all five main quests). This gives you access to the Final Day. By completing a large amount of side quests, you can unlock a special "extra" day, which takes place after Day 12, and before the Final Day.

You are free to explore the world and complete objectives as you please. However, no matter where you are or what you are doing, every day ends at 06:00 prompt, at which point you are automatically transferred to the Ark, where time doesn't flow. The Ark is where Lightning transfers her accumulated Eradia to the Yggdrasil tree. Each new bloom that appears in the brief cutscene represents an additional day added to the potential timeline before she begins the next day.
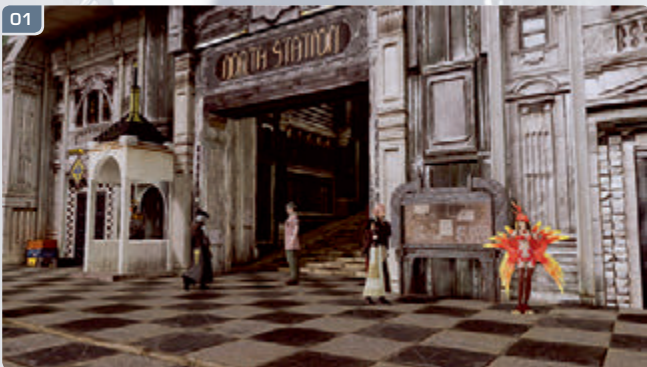
THE TIME FACTOR

The in-game time is represented by a clock display in the top-right corner of the field screen. Time flows continuously, and rather rapidly: one in-game minute corresponds to two-and-a-half real-life seconds. In the game, the passage of time is only interrupted in the following situations:

- During cutscenes and conversations with NPCs
- During battles
- While any menu is open (including shop interfaces and decision prompts)
- While the Chronostasis EP ability is active (see page 45)
- While you are on the Ark

Outside of these specific instances, time advances inexorably. With only thirteen days to complete all main quests, and ideally a good number of secondary quests, you might get the feeling that you can't afford to waste many minutes. However, there's actually no need to feel unduly pressured by this countdown. As it happens, thirteen in-game days is more than enough to complete all main quests and the majority of (if not all) secondary quests, even if you aren't always efficient, thanks to the power of the Chronostasis feature. Once you obtain this EP ability at an early stage in the storyline, you can activate it to temporarily freeze time.

EP is a finite resource that is primarily replenished by defeating enemies in battle. By engaging in a regular sequence of battles to obtain EP while attending to other tasks, it becomes possible to freeze time for extended periods. An in-game minute can, once you get to grips with combat and efficient EP farming, be extended to entire real-life hours with Chronostasis.

The following tips will help you make the most of your time in Nova Chrysalia:

- **Dashing:** You can increase Lightning's movement speed by holding R2/RT. Dashing depletes the blue gauge at the bottom of your screen, limiting the amount of time you can spend at this sprinting pace. Release the button at any time and the gauge will quickly refill. As a rule, you should get used to dashing almost constantly, but with regular short pauses to allow the gauge to replenish whenever

it is almost empty. The refill time is extended and the sprint ability temporarily locked if you fail to take this step, which also has the side effect of preventing Lightning from using her weapon.

- **Optimizing journeys:** Another key factor to save time is to minimize the amount of travelling you do. There are simple rules you can follow to optimize your trips in any given region. Rather than running straight to a distant place to retrieve an item for a quest you just accepted, take the time to talk to all NPCs in your vicinity and agree to complete any assignment they give you during a journey. There is no limit to the number of quests you can have active at any one time, so it always makes sense to accept them immediately. You should also check the Canvas of Prayers whenever you pass it, and factor in exploration and shopping trips where possible. As a general rule, you should aim to multitask at all times, "clearing" an area of current objectives (where feasible) before you move on to another.

- **Remaining busy:** Whatever the circumstances, you should always remain active and avoid any downtime. If you are done with all optional activities in a location and have a few hours to spare before you can complete the next objective (for example, because an access gate is currently closed, or an NPC has yet to emerge), simply travel to another region and start fulfilling assignments there. Every minute of your time should be used to achieve something.

- **Influence of the time of day:** The entire game world is governed by the clock. The time of day can determine the availability of quest items, the presence of key NPCs, access to particular areas, and even the distribution of monsters. Knowing when you're supposed to visit an area (for example, by reading the quest descriptions carefully to take in such details) is hugely valuable information – enabling you to plan your travels accordingly. Naturally, our coverage of quests within this guide includes detailed information on all such considerations.

- **Feature unlocks:** Many features in the game are unlocked on a very specific day in the storyline. You will also obtain items and abilities on each visit to the Ark. This guide reveals the precise unlock progression for day-related unlocks, so you need never worry about missing anything.

Battle Screen

1
EP METER
Reveals how much EP you have available for EP abilities (see page 45).

2
ATB (ACTIVE TIME BATTLE)
You have three individual ATB gauges, each showing how much energy you have for each corresponding Schema. All three gauges fill gradually during combat, the two in standby three times faster than the one currently selected. ATB segments are depleted in proportion to the ATB cost of the abilities you activate with the face buttons of your controller.

3
STATUS ICONS
Shows any status effects affecting you. See page 41 for details.

4
HP GAUGE
Lightning's current health. It flashes red when her HP is low. This gauge is replenished automatically outside of combat in Easy Mode, but not on higher difficulty settings. See page 39 for a list of the various ways to restore your health.

5
ABILITIES
The four abilities set to the face buttons of your controller. Every time you press one of these buttons, the corresponding ability is activated, with its ATB cost subtracted from the ATB gauge. See page 32.

6
SCHEMATA
The name of your current Schema (see page 31). The colors of your Schemata names and the 🗡 ⚡ 🛡 marks correspond to each Schema's ATB gauge. You can instantly switch between Schemata by pressing L1/LB or R1/RB.

7
STAGGER WAVE
When you attack an enemy (especially with a type of assault that capitalizes on its vulnerabilities), you will gradually break down their defenses, a process represented by a Stagger Wave that appears on its HP gauge. As you get closer to staggering your enemy, the Stagger Wave will turn red. Continue to assail the foe with suitable attacks, and it will become staggered. Attacking a staggered target will inflict far more damage than usual. See page 38 for more details.

8
ENEMY INFORMATION
This reveals the type of the enemy you are targeting and its current health, as well as any status effects it may be enjoying or enduring. When you face multiple opponents, you can switch target with ✛.

COMMANDS

The following table offers a handy recap of the main commands you will use throughout the adventure.

PS3	XBOX 360	FIELD CONTROLS	BATTLE CONTROLS
L	L	Movement	Movement
R	R	Camera control	Camera control
✛	✛	Menu navigation	Change target
✕	A	Interact/Sheath weapon	Use ability
◎	B	Jump	Use ability
△	Y	Enter Main Menu	Use ability
▢	X	View map screen	Use ability
R1	RB	Attack/Ready weapon	Switch Schemata
R2	RT	Dash	View enemy information (Libra)
L1	LB	-	Switch Schemata
L2	LT	Dash	Overclock (see page 45)
L3	⯆L	Dash	-
R3	⯆R	Center Camera	Change view
START	▶	Pause	Pause; use recovery items or EP abilities (switch from one screen to the other with L1/R1 or LB/RB)
SELECT	◀	Enable/Disable mini-map; skip cutscenes on pause screen	From the pause screen, return to the Title Screen

EXPLORATION

Exploration is one of the most important activities in Lightning Returns. The game world is very large, with the four primary regions featuring countless points of interest, hundreds of NPCs to talk to, collectibles to find and many quests to complete. Scouring every last inch of Nova Chrysalia for new things to find or do is one of the great pleasures in this game, and you'll be surprised by how often your curiosity is rewarded.

Basic Movement

Travelling from one destination to another is extremely simple. You move Lightning around with L and control the camera with R. In addition, there are a handful of moves that will help you reach your destination:

- Hold R2/RT to dash. This enables you to sprint, which reduces the overall duration of your journeys. Dashing depletes the blue gauge at the bottom of your screen. Release the button and the gauge will refill quickly. If you fail to do so and empty the entire bar, it will turn red and will start replenishing itself at a slower pace – leaving you unable to run or attack until the process is complete.

- You can vault over small obstacles or gaps by pressing ◎/B (01). You can jump further than normal by dashing simultaneously. Note that you will never sustain fall damage, even from great heights, so feel free to attempt tricky leaps or take a plunge if a cliff offers a useful shortcut.

- Whenever you encounter enemies during your travels, be ready to attack them with R1/RB once in close proximity (see page 30). You cannot interact with certain aspects of the game world (such as collecting items and climbing ladders) when Lightning's weapon is drawn. Press ✕/A to manually stow it on her back.

Map & Mini-Map

When the route you must follow is uncomplicated, a quick glance at the mini-map alone is usually enough to guide your steps. If you need to plan a longer journey or find a more distant point of interest, you can bring up a full map of your current locale by pressing ▢/X.

Once on the map screen, you can scroll with L and zoom in or out as required with R. You have the option to place up to ten markers by pressing ▢/X, and even name them. You could use this to highlight a quest giver that you'll need to return to later, or if you locate an interesting opportunity to grind through battles for spoils, or an interactive item that you cannot make sense of yet.

01
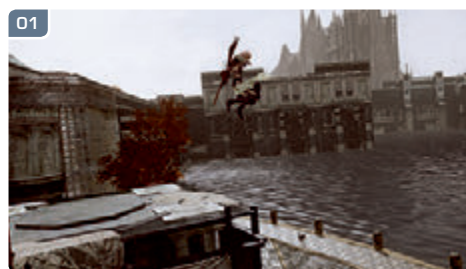
Saving

Lightning Returns employs an autosave system that automatically records your progress whenever you hit discrete story milestones, or when you travel between different locations in the game world. An icon appears in the top left-hand corner of the screen whenever the game is saving. You can also manually save and create additional save files (up to a maximum of 50) via the pause menu.

MAP & MINI-MAP LEGEND

🔺	Lightning	ⓘ	Destination Marker
⋰	Path of your recent steps	🏠	Inn
🔵	Ally	◆	Restaurant
🟢	NPC		Canvas of Prayers
🔴	Active Enemy		Outfitters
🟠	Quest Objective		Forge
✖	Site of your last battle		General Store
ⓘ	Main Quest Marker		Sorcery Shop
📌	Marker (Multiple Colors)		Monorail Station

Collectibles

Many collectibles appear in treasure spheres (`02`). Press ⊗/Ⓐ to open them. After a short delay, a pop-up message will reveal their contents (very often useful items, such as pieces of equipment), which are automatically transferred to your inventory.

In addition, you will regularly stumble across items that appear directly in the game world as small shining objects found on the floor (`03`), and can be picked up by pressing ⊗/Ⓐ in close proximity. Most of the time, these are medals that can be sold in shops, offering a secondary source of income. However, there are also instances where such collectibles are quest items, which you must pick up and deliver to the corresponding quest vendor.

The maps in this guide reveal the locations of every last collectible in the game. However, if you intend to complete a first playthrough with a minimum of assistance, the following treasure-hunting tips will be handy:

- Use Ⓡ to scour the environment for collectibles as you travel through new and old areas alike. Whenever you notice cul-de-sacs or alternative routes, take the time to explore these: they may well contain a reward to acknowledge your curiosity.

- Certain quest items occur naturally in the game world – particularly in the Wildlands, where you will regularly encounter an assortment of mushrooms, plants and occasional seeds. Make a point of collecting these whenever you encounter them.

- Certain treasure spheres are initially locked, and require special conditions to be met before you can open them (such as a specified investment of EP, or the commission of a quest-giver). When you notice one of these, make a mental note of its position or leave a marker on the map. You can then backtrack to open them at a later date.

- In the Wildlands region, a few treasure spheres can only be reached once you have access to the gliding skills of a Chocobo.

Points of Interactivity

In addition to collectibles, you will encounter numerous points of interactivity throughout the game world. These can vary from plot-critical devices that must be operated to advance the story, to NPCs who can be engaged in brief conversations. To interact with devices or NPCs, press ⊗/Ⓐ.

- When you can speak to an NPC, a speech bubble (💬) will appear above that individual's head (`04`). In close proximity, a rotating circle and a "Talk" caption will indicate that you can strike up a conversation. Most NPCs will make contributions that have no specific relevance to your current objectives, though they might occasionally offer clues or make comments that direct you towards points of interest or refer to an ongoing quest. You will sometimes encounter NPCs with three question marks above their head, but no speech bubble per se: these are individuals that you will be able to speak to at a later date, usually during a quest.

- Interacting with certain NPCs will initiate side quests; you are given the option to decline these if you wish, though it makes sense to accept them, even if you do not intend to complete them until a later date. NPCs willing to offer you a side quest are marked with star symbols (⭐). The more stars (up to three), the more difficult or involved your task could be. It's also usually (but not always) an indication that a quest offers a better class of rewards.

- When you approach an object that you can interact with, a rotating circle and the "Examine" option will appear when you move within range. Not all points of interest are tied to main-quest or side-quest progression; some interactive elements can simply offer you information, such as Monorail timetables or signposts.

- In many locations, you will encounter destructible crates which you can smash apart with R1/RB (`05`). These may randomly contain generic items such as medals, which you can sell in shops. These crates sometimes also serve to block the path or partially obscure a point of interest such as a treasure sphere.

- Several areas in the game feature time-operated doors and gates. These only open at very specific times, which you need to take into account when you plan to visit the locations that lie beyond them. Once you examine such gates for the first time, the hours when they are open appear on your map permanently.

- You will encounter switches in certain mazes and dungeons, which you must usually activate to open a corresponding door.

Inventory & Gil

Every item that you collect is automatically transferred to your inventory:

- Garb, weapons, shields, accessories, and abilities are battle-oriented items, which you will need to prepare and improve your Schemata (see page 31 for details).

- Adornments are cosmetic items that you can select when creating Schemata. They have no purpose other than to customize Lightning's appearance.

- Components are ingredients required to enhance and level up abilities via the Level Boost feature, available at all Sorcery Shops (⬚ – see next section on Shops).

- Key Items are unique, quest-related objects, or notes with Libra information on enemy species (see page 45).

- All objects in the Other Items category are usually required to complete collection-oriented quests.

Most shopkeepers will purchase any item that you have no need for. Those marked with the ⬚ icon exist purely to be sold. Don't be too hasty in selling anything else. Pieces of equipment that seem obsolete can become useful again for new strategies or to prepare Sub Schemata, while Components are precious ingredients for the Level Boost feature that enables you to level up abilities later in the story. Most objects in the Other Items category have an application in a side quest, possibly one that you haven't even unlocked yet, or could even be kept safely for a subsequent playthrough. As a rule, accumulate as many items as you can during your journeys, from fireworks in Yusnaan to wild mushrooms and flowers that grow in the Wildlands.

For the avoidance of all doubt: you won't accrue much gil (the primary currency in the Final Fantasy universe) or, for that matter, profit in the long term by clearing out your inventory. Instead, your two main sources of income will be:

- ⭐ The rewards from the quests that you complete. Broadly speaking, harder quests lead to better gil rewards.

- 🐱 The enemies that you defeat. Each enemy type yields a specific amount of gil, though these amounts increase from Day 7 onwards. This reflects a corresponding gradual increase to the attributes of all monsters. Refer to our Bestiary for all details on the rewards you can potentially obtain from each enemy type.

Shops

There are several types of shop in the game, each offering unique goods or services. Note that the equipment sold differs from store to store, with their inventories being expanded over time, so be sure to visit the various Outfitters and Forges scattered across the continents regularly.

SHOPS OVERVIEW

ICON	SHOP TYPE	DESCRIPTION
	General Stores	Sell recovery items, which you can use to heal or revive Lightning, apply status enhancements, and cure status ailments.
	Outfitters	Sell garb, which are essential to create Schemata (see page 31) and improve Lightning's attributes; also sell adornments that enable you to customize her look.
	Forges	Sell weapons and shields, critical pieces of equipment to improve your stats and specialize your Schemata.
	Sorcery Shops	Enable you to strengthen your abilities, via both Synthesis (to improve abilities of the same type and rank) and, later in the story, Level Boost (to level up maxed abilities with components). See page 33 for details.
	Restaurants	Sell food that immediately restores Lightning's health at the moment of purchase. The more expensive the item, the more HP it will replenish.
	Inns	Rent rooms until an hour of your choosing, restoring all of your HP. Despite the latter feature, it's better to use items or restaurants to refill the HP gauge. Inns are only of use later in the story, once you have completed most quests and need to skip to a specific time of day to continue an outstanding task.
	Adventuring Essentials	Sell monster notes, which reveal individual monster weaknesses, how best to stagger them, and other useful Libra information that you can check during battle with R2/RT.
	Wandering Merchants	You will sometimes encounter wandering merchants in unexpected locations, most of whom will sell recovery items. However certain "rare" peddlers, who can only be found randomly in very specific locations, offer valuable pieces of equipment.

Skipping Cutscenes

While most players will want to see every last story development, there are instances (particularly after failing a difficult boss battle, or while replaying the game) where the prospect of revisiting lengthy cinematic sequences can be a less-than-enticing prospect. To skip cutscenes, press START/▷ and then tap SELECT/◁.

Lightning Returns employs a new variation on the classic Active Time Battle (ATB) system, combining the tactical possibilities of a traditional RPG with the tempo and visceral dynamic of an action game.

The number of attacks and abilities at your disposal is limited when the story begins, but you will acquire many more as you obtain additional equipment and defeat enemies. To avoid potential spoilers and an overload of information, this section is designed to act only as a generalized introduction to key features of the battle system. We offer an exhaustive investigation and interpretation of all related systems in the Inventory and Strategy & Analysis chapters.

Enemy Encounters

To initiate combat when monsters appear, approach them with 🕹 and tap R1 / RB to attack. Whether your attack connects or not has a significant influence on the battle that follows:

- If you take your target by surprise (▽) and your attack connects, you trigger a "great" opening: your enemies begin with 25% less HP than their maximum amount.

- If your opponent spots you (▽) but your attack connects, you trigger a "good" opening: your enemies begin with 10% less HP than their maximum amount.

- If you fail to attack your opponent, or your attack doesn't connect and your opponent attacks you instead, you trigger a "poor" opening: you begin with 5% less HP than your current amount on the Normal and Hard difficulty levels.

Fighting battles doesn't lead to direct character progression, but does reward you with valuable item drops (including abilities and items required to complete quests) and gil. It also supplies you with a sum of EP usually equivalent to the stature or relative difficulty of the battle you have just fought. Though Lightning acquires numerous EP abilities over the course of the story, the EP you accumulate is most often invested in the use of Chronostasis to freeze time (see page 45).

Early in the adventure, when Lightning's primary stats are low and your tactical options are limited by a small pool of available equipment and abilities, avoiding certain enemies is something of a necessity. There are three enemy "types" that you will regularly encounter during your travels: Chaos Beast, Feral Creature and Man-made Unit. Enemies are then further divided into three subtypes: small-scale enemy, mid-scale enemy and large-scale enemy. As a general rule of thumb, you can determine the relative difficulty of an opponent with a simple appraisal of their physical stature. The smaller an enemy is, the easier they will be to defeat.

Fighting most mid-scale and large-scale monsters is impractical (and, for the most part, suicidal) during the opening day or two of the adventure. Lightning Returns does not pull its punches: its most powerful "random" monsters can and will spawn in their natural habitats from the moment full world exploration is unlocked. As you grow in confidence and competence, however, with Lightning's prowess improving in tandem, you'll gradually reach a point where you can compete against larger foes.

Before then: you run away, and pick only those fights that you can hope to win.

Whenever you need to avoid an impossible or potentially difficult and protracted battle, use the following advice.

- If you can put enough distance between Lightning and an enemy, they will automatically despawn. There are also certain map areas (such as villages in the Wildlands) where enemies will not appear. If you encounter a foe on the periphery of such locations, running inside its boundaries will cause the monster to disappear.

- At her full dash speed, Lightning can easily outpace the more sluggish enemy varieties. The more fleet-footed enemies may keep up with her, but will almost never move close enough to initiate combat during a straight-line sprint.

- Faster opponents can be annoyingly dogged in their pursuit, trailing Lightning with apparent ease over long distances. There are two primary ways to shake these persistent adversaries. The first is to note that all enemies have a similar stamina limitation as Lightning: after sprinting for a time, they must briefly pause to recover. If you time a dash carefully, you can sometimes accelerate out of their range at that precise moment. Secondly, weaving between or around scenery elements will often cause monsters to pause for a moment as they navigate past the obstruction – and often, a moment is all you need to extend the distance between Lightning and the monster to cause a despawn.

- Combat will only begin if Lightning is actually struck by an enemy. This means that it is possible to brush past (or even jump over) potential adversaries in close confines.

Note that you cannot interact with NPCs while enemies are in the vicinity. You must either fight to remove them, or run away until they fall out of range and automatically despawn. You can actually use NPCs as a distraction to facilitate your escape.

ATB (Active Time Battle)

Lightning's available energy at any given time during battle is represented by her ATB gauges. Every ability that you use consumes a portion of the ATB gauge of the Schema currently in use.

You have an individual ATB gauge for each Schema. All three gauges fill gradually during combat – the two in standby three times faster than the one currently selected. ATB segments are used in proportion to the ATB cost of the abilities you activate with the face buttons of your controller: every time you press one of these buttons, the corresponding ability is activated, with its ATB cost being withdrawn from the ATB gauge.

Switching between Schemata to make the most of each ATB gauge and carefully measuring the pace of your actions to maintain a steady assault, never ending up with all three gauges empty simultaneously, is a fundamental battle strategy.

Schemata

A Schema is a set of various pieces of equipment and up to four abilities, which you can allocate via the Customize Schemata entry at the main menu. You can have up to three Main Schemata available in combat.

During battle, you can switch between each Main Schema (🗡 ⚡ 🔱) at any time to make the most of their strengths, and of their respective ATB gauges.

SCHEMATA: OVERVIEW

ICON	PART	KEY ATTRIBUTES	AVAILABILITY	NOTES
🗜	Garb	Various	Garb can be purchased at Outfitters, or received as a reward.	This is the most important part of a Schema. Not only does each garb come with unique auto-abilities offering various features and attribute boosts, but they also provide native abilities that cannot be changed. In addition, your garb determines your maximum ATB, and your default ATB (how full a Schema's ATB gauge is at the beginning of each battle). Choosing the right garb for any given situation and ensuring that your active Schemata complement each other is truly essential to your success. Turn to page 35 for more details on how to balance your Schemata configurations.
🗡	Weapon	• Strength (🗡) • Magic (🔮)	Weapons can be purchased at Forges, dropped by defeated enemies, or received as rewards.	The weapon you assign to each Schema increases your character's Strength and Magic attributes (see page 34), which in turn define the damage you can deal. Many weapons also come with auto-abilities that can have decisive applications or confer useful boons in combat (see page 32).
🛡	Shield	• HP • ATB Speed (📑) • Guard Defense (🔍)	Shields can be purchased at Forges, or received as rewards.	Shields have a bearing on the Schema's HP (and sometimes other attributes too), but from a defensive perspective, their most important parameter is Guard Defense, which governs the Schema's ability to resist damage while you are guarding. Turn to page 34 to find out more about attributes, and page 32 for more details on guarding.
✂	Head Accessory	Various	Accessories can be found in treasure spheres or received as rewards.	Head accessories are primarily used to increase your offensive or defensive stats. They only affect the Schema they are equipped to.
🔘	Arm Accessory	Various		Most arm accessories grant you status enhancements or increase your resistance to status ailments or elemental damage, though some have more unique properties. Arm accessories affect all three Main Schemata.
🎴	Abilities	Various	Abilities are dropped by defeated enemies, or found in certain treasure spheres.	Abilities determine which actions you can perform during battles, and constitute the backbone of the gameplay. See page 32 for details.

Note that you can customize the appearance of each Schema with adornments (01), which are sold by Outfitters and can be obtained as quest rewards. You can also rename each Schema by selecting its name in the top-left corner of the screen, or adjust the color of a garb with ▣/Ⓧ.

During battle, you can switch instantly between your Schemata, at no cost and without penalty: all you have to do is press L1/LB or R1/RB. Each Schema has its own ATB Gauge, which recovers at a rate determined by the ATB Speed attribute (📑 — see page 34) of that Schema. The higher this value, the faster the ATB Gauge will replenish, making the corresponding Schema all the more useful.

Once you have prepared your Main Schemata, you need to choose your default Schema (🏳) with ▣/Ⓧ. This not only determines your debut Schema at the start of every battle, but also determines Lightning's appearance while roaming the world and during cutscenes.

In addition to the Main Schemata, you can prepare up to six Sub Schemata. These are not available during battle, but you can easily swap them with your Main Schemata from the main menu with △/Ⓨ. When you start facing enemy types that potentially require very specific tactical approaches, this feature enables you to rapidly redefine your Schemata without having to spend too long tweaking individual configurations.

01

Setting up your Schemata is pivotal to being prepared for the many battles that await you. To optimize your ability and efficiency, you will generally need to assign clear roles to each Schema to address and exploit the strengths and weaknesses of your opponents. We dedicate a section to character specialization on page 35. Before we get there, though, let's take a look at the different elements that give each Schema its own unique identity.

Abilities

There are four types of abilities, each corresponding broadly to a specific role you can assign to one of your Schemata. If you have played Final Fantasy XIII and/or Final Fantasy XIII-2, you will remember these distinct "roles" from the Paradigm system. Note that you can find an exhaustive list of all abilities, with all parameters and assorted details, in the Inventory chapter.

ABILITIES: OVERVIEW

ICON	TYPE	DESCRIPTION	CORRESPONDING ROLE*
⚔	Physical Attacks	Attacks that inflict damage based on the Strength attribute. The greater the Schema's Strength, the more damage is inflicted. Certain advanced abilities have special properties, such as interrupting enemy attacks.	Physical Schema: a role specialized in dealing physical damage (especially to staggered foes) and building up or maintaining the Stagger Wave.
🔮	Magic Attacks	Spells that inflict damage based on the Magic attribute. The greater the Schema's Magic, the more damage is inflicted. Many spells have elemental attributes, making them ideal to exploit enemy weaknesses (see page 40).	Magic Schema: a role specialized in staggering foes and dealing magic damage.
🛡	Defensive Abilities	Defensive abilities enable you to reduce (or evade, or counter) the damage dealt by enemy attacks: the greater the Schema's Guard Defense attribute, the less damage you take while guarding. Certain advanced abilities have specific purposes, such as healing or restoring ATB.	Defensive Schema: a role specialized in tanking enemy damage.
📘	Ailment Spells	These inflict status ailments to your enemies, which is a great way to hinder them and lower the danger they pose significantly. Turn to page 41 for a description of all status effects.	Ailment Schema: a role specialized in inflicting status ailments to your opponents.

* A Schema can, of course, be configured to offer a composite of more than one role if required. See page 35 for more details on character specialization.

Obtaining Abilities: There are two ways to acquire abilities. First, almost every piece of garb comes with native abilities. Simply equip the garb, and you have access to the abilities inherent to it. However, you should note that native abilities cannot be removed, as indicated by their padlock icon (🔒). You can acquire new abilities by defeating enemies (and occasionally from treasure spheres). Whenever you obtain one that you're interested in, quickly open the main menu to equip it to the relevant Schema.

Using Abilities: To have access to abilities in battle, you simply need to assign them to a Schema (see previous section). Once you have allocated the ability of your choice, you can use it in combat by pressing the corresponding face button of your controller while employing the Schema in question. Many attacking abilities are designed to be performed on multiple consecutive instances to create a combo, with the final strike in the sequence offering increased damage. To use an ability multiple times, you can either press the necessary button manually in accordance with Lightning's movements, or simply hold the button down. Holding the ability button makes a lot of sense for guard abilities, as this ensures that there are no potential interruptions in your defense. The only downside to holding the button is that it prevents you from achieving potential Perfect Timing bonuses (see page 39), though this is an advanced feature that will take a little time to master.

Button Mapping: As you become more and more familiar with the combat system, you will soon realize that it makes sense to think carefully about how you allocate abilities to the face buttons of your controller. For example, if you have attacks infused with the same element in two different Schemata (such as Aero with one, and Aerora or Galestrike with another), try to assign these abilities to the same button. This way, when you face an enemy variety that is susceptible to the Wind element, you could potentially switch between the Schemata concerned without releasing the button. You can push this even further by deciding in advance that you will always assign certain types of moves to a given button. For instance, all guard moves to ⬜/❌; all Fire-elemental attacks to ❌/Ⓐ; and so forth. This will give you an edge in battles, helping you to know instinctively what buttons to press in accordance with your current circumstances.

Synthesis & Ability Levels: All abilities have a level, which appears in their name. Initially, you will mostly have Lv. 1 abilities, but as you progress in the game, you will receive abilities of higher levels. What's more, you will soon unlock the Synthesis feature, available in Sorcery Shops (🔲), which enables you to fuse abilities of the same level to upgrade them, and ultimately to level them up once they reach their limit via the Level Boost feature unlocked on Day 6. Read the section on Synthesis to the right for more details.

Rare Abilities: Certain abilities appear in yellow in the game, and have a small star on their icons. These rare abilities are invaluable in that they are imbued with an auto-ability that provides additional benefits.

Auto-Abilities

Auto-abilities (◎) are perks, passive traits that permanently boost the Schema they apply to (and, in the case of arm accessories, to any active Schema). They come in all forms, from those which enhance basic attributes such as HP, ATB, stagger capability, Strength and Magic, to those that affect elemental attacks and resistances. A few only apply in very specific circumstances, such as one auto-ability that offers a bonus whenever Lightning attacks an opponent from behind.

Auto-abilities can sometimes be extremely valuable, and even entirely justify settling for the otherwise poor stats of whichever piece of equipment or ability they belong to. In a highly specialized Schemata configuration, auto-abilities often have critical significance whenever you choose abilities or equipment for a given Schema. For example, a +15% increase of your Magic attribute can prove invaluable for a magic-oriented Schema that uses elemental spells (leading to a +15% boost to the damage you cause). Any bonus to damage (or ailment) resistance is a blessing for a defensive Schema designed primarily to tank enemy assaults.

To see details about the effects of auto-abilities, move the cursor to an item or ability and press R2/RT, or simply consult our comprehensive list on page 250.

Synthesis

Once they are unlocked during the storyline, you can visit Sorcery Shops to strengthen your abilities by synthesizing them with abilities of the same type and rank — for example Attack Lv.1 with Attack Lv.1. The first ability you select is kept and upgraded during the process. The second ability you select is consumed and lost.

You will find a brief overview of the system here. You can find an in-depth presentation in the Strategy & Analysis chapter.

- Synthesizing physical abilities (▨) and magic abilities (▧) increases their Attack parameter by one increment (for example, from x1.00 to x1.05), making it more powerful (in this case, by 5%).

- Once an ability reaches its limit (its final increment), it is marked by an icon (⬈). At this point, synthesizing it further has no effect on its Attack value.

- The synthesis process usually keeps the best parameters of the two abilities that are fused. For instance, if you synthesize an ability with a low ATB cost, and another with a high Attack value, the resulting ability will have both of these features.

- If the two abilities that are being synthesized each have an auto-ability, the source ability has priority over the consumed ability — in other words, the auto-ability of the first ability that you select will prevail.

- In addition to a boost to the source ability's Attack parameter, the synthesis process may occasionally lead to extra bonuses, such as the reduction of its ATB cost, or the appearance of an auto-ability. These are usually extremely valuable.

- Synthesizing defensive abilities (▨) and ailment abilities (▨) is not necessary, as they are always maxed by default — their parameters cannot be raised any further.

- A maxed ability (marked by the ⬈ icon) can be leveled up via the Level Boost feature that is unlocked at all Sorcery Shops from Day 6. Leveling up abilities often results in spectacular boosts to their main parameters, and sometimes in additional bonuses, such as a reduction of their base ATB cost. As a consequence, abilities that you level up at Sorcery Shops (especially those that you have nurtured from Level 1) cost less in terms of ATB than those of equivalent levels that you obtain from defeated enemies.

- After leveling up an ability, you can repeat the whole process again (synthesizing it incrementally, and leveling it up) to reach even higher levels. This feature is partially restricted during a debut Easy or Normal playthrough, but fully unlocked during a subsequent Hard playthrough after you complete the main storyline for the first time.

Attributes

Attributes are the parameters that determine each Schema's efficiency. Each attribute has a bearing on one or more gameplay elements. Once you are confident enough to start creating specialized Schemata (see page 35), you need to pay close attention to each Schema's attributes, making sure that those most pertinent to the role are maximized.

You can also increase your attributes with pieces of equipment (see page 31) and auto-abilities (see page 32).

ATTRIBUTES: OVERVIEW

ICON	ATTRIBUTE	DESCRIPTION
	Strength	Affects the damage you deal with physical attacks. An essential attribute for damage-dealers using physical strikes ([icon]): abilities such as Attack, Heavy Slash, Blitz, and so forth.
	Magic	Affects the damage you deal with magic attacks. An essential attribute for damage-dealers using magic attacks ([icon]) and ailment-oriented Schemata ([icon]): abilities such as Ruin, elemental spells, debuffs, and so on.
	Guard Defense	Affects how well you resist damage when using a guard ability ([icon]). An essential attribute for defensive Schemata.
	HP	Your maximum HP value, when your HP gauge is full. This attribute is only of primary importance for defensive Schemata.
	ATB Speed/ATB Recovery	The speed at which a Schema's ATB gauge is replenished. This is a crucial attribute for all Schemata.
	Maximum ATB	A Schema's bonus to the Maximum ATB value. The higher this parameter, the more abilities you can use in quick succession with a full ATB Gauge.
	Default ATB	Your ATB value at the start of each battle.
	Physical Resistance	The reduction applied to any form of physical damage you sustain. This is only relevant for defensive Schemata.
	Magic Resistance	The reduction applied to any form of magic damage you sustain – again, this is only relevant for defensive Schemata.
	Stagger Power	The amount by which an attack contributes to increasing the target's Stagger Wave (see page 38). This is usually measured with letters, with A being the most efficient, and E the least efficient.
	Stagger Preservation	The amount by which an attack contributes to maintaining the target's Stagger Wave (see page 38). Also referred to as Stagger Time, this is usually measured with letters, with A being the most efficient, and E the least efficient.
	ATB Cost	The cost of an ability: in other words, how many points are removed from your current ATB Gauge.

Character Progression

Throughout the adventure, Lightning becomes stronger in many ways. However, and unlike most RPGs, her attributes do not increase via the accumulation of experience points during battles, but instead by completing quests. Each quest that you complete – be it main quest, side quest or a Canvas of Prayers task – rewards you with bonuses to your main attributes. It is usually the case that longer or more difficult quests offer better stat bonuses. As quest completion is also the principal story requirement to reach the ending, there is a very strong incentive for you to tackle as many missions as you can.

In addition to these bonuses, there are other factors that contribute to your character progression:

- **Better equipment:** As the in-game days pass, shop inventories are expanded and you have access to much more powerful (albeit more expensive) equipment, from garb to weapons and shields. Later quest rewards and items dropped by advanced enemies can also provide you with valuable objects. Superior equipment can contribute a very significant bonus to your combat proficiency.

- **Better abilities:** From Day 7 onwards, the enemies you encounter grow stronger on a daily basis. This gradual elevation of the overall difficulty of combat has its merits, one being that monsters begin to drop abilities of higher levels. They will also surrender more rare abilities in post-battle spoils, which can drastically improve both your offensive and defensive efficiency.

- **Ability Synthesis:** As you accumulate abilities in great quantities from defeated enemies, you can eventually employ the Synthesis feature offered by Sorcery Shops ([icon]) to upgrade abilities of the same level, and ultimately to level them up once they reach their limit (marked with the [icon] icon). By manually leveling up abilities (especially the rare ones), you can further hone your combat skills.

Character Specialization

Character specialization is an all-important aspect of the game. If your Schemata are versatile and broadly similar – for example, one physical attack, one elemental spell, one area-of-effect technique, and one guard move in each Schema – you will do fine during the first few hours in the game. This is a natural approach for beginners, as you do not have access to ailment spells initially. It also makes sense to be able to block or attack with any Schema. However, if you stick to this strategy, your overall efficiency in battle will be extremely limited in the long run – especially from the moment you start fighting stronger enemies. Indeed, the various roles you can assign to your Schemata rely upon completely different attributes, and having average attributes leads to mediocre battle performances.

We discuss the details and requirements of character specialization in the Strategy & Analysis chapter, but for now you should at least understand the general underlying mechanics.

SPECIALIZATION: OVERVIEW

KEY ABILITIES	ROLE	DESCRIPTION	KEY ATTRIBUTES	
	Physical damage-dealer	A specialist in physical damage, especially the damage dealt during a stagger sequence. Can also contribute very efficiently to staggering enemies.		Strength
				ATB Speed
	Magic damage-dealer	A specialist in magic and elemental damage, which can greatly contribute to staggering enemies by exploiting their weaknesses.		Magic
				ATB Speed
	Tank/Damage sponge	A defense specialist, capable of tanking (or evading, or countering) even the most powerful enemy attacks without losing much health.		Guard Defense
				HP
	Ailment Schema	A specialist in status ailments, who can make a world of difference in battles by reducing key enemy attributes.		Certain auto-abilities
				Magic

Given that there are four principal roles, and you only have three Main Schemata that you can use in battle, at least one of your Schemata will have to fuse two specializations.

Here is a description of a typical Schemata configuration that can prove very successful against more powerful enemies. Naturally, this is only one possibility among many, and you should feel free to adapt this to your style and needs, and to experiment with the system yourself. Consider the following configuration as a very efficient setup that will remain reliable throughout the entire adventure. You will find more suggestions and a complete presentation of the system in the Strategy & Analysis chapter.

Schema 1: Ailment Schema (). This essential role focuses on debuffing and debilitating your enemies. Though you may initially think that launching standard attacks would be more useful, think again: status ailments severely hamper your foes, and can have various effects, such as greatly increasing the damage you deal to them, or significantly reducing the damage they deal to you. There are many ailment abilities that work wonders (see page 41), though you will have to choose a maximum of four for this Schema. Deprotect, Deshell, Imperil and Slow tend to be effective choices in most instances. If you decide to opt for only three of them, you can use the fourth ability slot for a guard ability (making this Schema your tank –).

Schema 2: Magic damage-dealer (). This profile requires a very high Magic stat (with Strength and HP being irrelevant), and will usually need to have access to elemental spells of all four elements – which means that all four ability slots will be used up. Choose an elemental garb that suits your needs, and complement its native ability with your best spells of the other three elements.

Schema 3: Physical damage-dealer (). This profile requires a very high Strength stat (with Magic being irrelevant), and at least two standard physical attacks, one that can deal massive damage to a single target, and one with an area of effect to hit multiple opponents simultaneously. An additional elemental (but physical) attack can be a boon against enemies vulnerable to the element in question. This leaves you with at least one free ability slot, which you can keep for a guard ability (giving this schema a second role: tank –), or for an attack likely to interrupt enemy actions.

If you follow this general configuration, your defensive Schema will be either the physical damage-dealer or the ailment Schema. This choice really depends on your personal preferences, but you must ensure that your Schema with a secondary "damage sponge" role has a large amount of HP, a strong Guard Defense stat (from a shield), a powerful guard ability, and perhaps even a related auto-ability (such as an increase to damage resistance).

Battlefield Properties

Once you've struck (or been struck by) an enemy on the field screen, you are automatically transferred to the battle screen. Wherever you are in the game, the battlefield is always the same in terms of size and shape: it's a circular arena, where you are free to move around with ⬅.

Lightning walks at a rather slow pace during combat, so the instances where it makes sense to use this feature are fairly rare:

- The most common is when you identify that an enemy type has very specific attack restrictions. For example, if you notice that an opponent will only strike at melee range, you can move away from it to prevent it from attacking while your ATB gauges are being refilled. The opposite (deliberately remaining at close range) can be effective against foes who only perform ranged attacks, or favor weaker assaults when Lightning is in close proximity.

- There are also certain enemy types that are easier to stagger if you catch them from behind, or if you destroy one of their body parts by striking at certain vulnerabilities (01). Any body part that you manage to destroy will severely hamper the victim, usually causing an instant stagger and preventing an adversary from performing a specific (usually powerful) attack.

In almost all other cases, however, you are better off using abilities and making the most of your ATB gauges in a direct offensive, rather than wasting precious time by walking around the battlefield. The defensive Evade ability (02) can be used to roll in any direction, which is much faster than walking, but this is costly in terms of ATB, and there are few applications to this move.

Note that you can control the camera with ⓡ, and switch between near and far views with R3/🕮 (03 & 04). The far view can prove handy when you are facing many enemies in combat, or want to assess your exact position on the battleground.

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Combat Flow

Fighting battles in Lightning Returns is almost akin to dancing or playing a rhythm game, with switches between Schemata being the beat of the melody, and the activation of abilities its notes. The important thing to keep in mind is that you do not dance alone: the behavior of your enemies partly dictates the pace of each encounter, requiring you to adapt your steps to best counter your foes. If they attack, you guard; if they resist a specific type of damage or element, you switch to the opposite one.

The point is that you usually need not worry about moving your character around, or jumping, or performing other feats of agility: your sole concern is to activate abilities with the face buttons of your controller, and switch Schemata when appropriate with L1/R1 or LB/RB.

A typical sequence of events in a combat encounter might flow in the following manner:

A. You open the battle with your ailment Schema, weakening your opponent with status ailments (see page 42).

B. You switch to a stagger-oriented Schema to build up your target's Stagger Wave, for example with elemental attacks (exploiting the target's weaknesses – see page 43) until you cause a stagger.

C. You switch to a damage-dealer Schema to hit your staggered victim with your most powerful attacks.

D. Whenever necessary, you quickly switch to your defensive Schema to tank any attacks launched against you, then immediately switch back to the previous Schema to resume your assault.

E. You keep repeating this cycle until your enemy falls, making any adjustments required during the process (for example healing, or casting a status ailment again if the enemy cured or recovered from its deleterious effects).

Once you know your three Schemata ability sets by heart, you can actually spend most of your time with your eyes focused on your opponent. Calmly but resolutely activate your abilities one after the other in sequence, only briefly switching in and out of your defensive Schema to guard every time you notice your target initiating an assault (which is foreshadowed either by a characteristic move such as an arm swinging, or by a text box with the imminent attack's name appearing directly above the foe).

With practice, battles do become like a dance, with the general tempo (your strategy) dictated by the enemy type you're facing, and more contextual actions (such as guard moves or the activation of powerful attacks) leading to smooth and precise transitions between your Schemata.

Prioritizing Targets

When you face multiple opponents, you are free to change targets during battle with ✥. This feature has various applications:

- Sometimes you may want to take out a certain enemy first: perhaps eliminating a single powerful opponent surrounded by weak minions, or taking out a fragile foe who has a propensity for healing or buffing his more attack-focused companions.
- You can also benefit from switching targets when you launch area attack spells. Choose an enemy in the center of a group to inflict damage on as many foes as possible (05).

As a rule, you should always try to thin enemy numbers quickly whenever you fight groups. Any enemy outside your current view can prepare and perform an attack that you won't even see coming, which will make it much more difficult to guard in time.

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Stagger

By striking at enemy vulnerabilities, you can break down their defenses and stagger them. Attacking a staggered enemy will deliver far more damage than usual, enabling you to end battles more quickly and efficiently. Managing to stagger your opponents is one of the most essential keys to being able to defeat them – this is especially true against large-scale creatures and bosses.

When you attack an enemy, you will see a Stagger Wave on its HP gauge. The more this wave increases, the more effective your attack was. To speed up the process, always try to exploit your target's weaknesses (see page 40). For example, hitting an opponent with a susceptibility to the Fire element with Fire-infused spells and attacks will usually lead to a quick stagger. As you get closer to staggering your enemy, the wave will turn from blue to yellow and then to red (06). Keep hitting the foe until it is staggered.

Abilities can contribute to stagger-building in two ways:

- Some abilities have excellent **Stagger Power** (⚔), which means that using them significantly increases the amplitude of the Stagger Wave.

- Other abilities are primarily equipped for **Stagger Preservation** (⚔), meaning that they maintain the wave, preventing it from being reset until the next attack with high Stagger Power is ready to be performed.

The attack that causes the stagger on an enemy enjoys a massive damage multiplier, which makes powerful abilities even more useful in that regard. The word "Staggered" appears above the victim, who usually reacts physically – for example by collapsing or kneeling down. The victim remains staggered only for a limited time, so always try to make the most of these precious seconds.

Indeed, most enemies will be severely weakened while staggered, for example taking more damage, becoming vulnerable to status ailments, or even suffering from certain stagger-exclusive ailments (represented by hexagonal icons).

This makes staggering the fastest and most effective way to take down most monsters. To maximize your damage output during a stagger, you might occasionally choose to employ the unique Overclock EP ability, which freezes time in your favor (see page 45).

Some enemies have more than one level of stagger. This means that, while they are staggered, you can repeat the process and stagger them a second time, leading to even greater results. The victim will generally react physically to each stagger. For example, a creature might kneel down during a first stagger, then completely keel over if you manage to reach the second level of stagger.

It's worth noting that some enemies will be staggered when you guard one of their attacks just before it lands, or when you strike right before or after one of their attacks. Such "Perfect Timing" moves require practice but reduce the duration and difficulty of certain encounters enormously once mastered.

Perfect Timing

The efficiency of certain abilities can be enhanced by performing them with Perfect Timing, which usually means that you execute the move during the final animation frames of a previous action.

- Offensive abilities that you can link in a combo will be ever more powerful if you unleash them right as the last physical attack strikes or when the prior spell is unleashed. Perfect attacks deal more damage, but they require you to tap the relevant face button of your controller with the right tempo. They are, naturally, impossible to achieve if you hold the button instead.

- Defensive guard abilities are also far more effective if you activate them right before the enemy's attack lands. Perfect Guard reduces (and may even negate) the damage sustained by Lightning, and can trigger an instant stagger on certain enemy types as a fringe benefit.

- Striking certain enemies just before or after they perform a signature attack can also trigger an instant stagger.

Whenever you perform an action with perfect timing, you will see a glowing aura surround Lightning (07). Perfect timing is a high-level technique that requires quick judgment and extensive practice, though its merits are substantial.

Healing

Unless you're playing on Easy Mode, where your HP gauge is replenished automatically outside battles, healing Lightning can be something of a mystery early on in the adventure, as the only curative abilities at your disposal involve consuming EP and items that you can carry in very limited quantities. As you advance in the storyline, though, you will receive additional slots for recovery items, extra EP, and equipment offering new abilities, which makes HP maintenance less of a problem.

You can see your HP gauge at all times in the bottom-left corner of the screen, whether you are on the field screen, on the battle screen, or even in menus.

Here is an overview of the various methods you can use to heal in the opening hours of play:

Recovery Items: These are consumables that you can use both during battles (START/▷, then L1/LB or R1/RB to change screens) and outside battles (via the main menu). There are various types of potions, of varying potencies, and some with additional effects such as the endowment of buffs. Check out the Inventory chapter of this guide for a complete list. You can purchase recovery items from the multiple General Stores scattered throughout the world, and from Hope (in return for EP, rather than gil) during each visit to the Ark.

EP Abilities: You can also use these abilities both during battles (START/▷, then L1/LB or R1/RB to change screens) and outside battles (via the main menu). They consume EP, and some of them can be used to restore health. Curaga, which is available from the start, refills your entire HP gauge. See page 45.

Restaurants: There are restaurants to be found across all four continents (though the Dead Dunes has only one). These all offer various dishes that will restore HP instantly. The more gil you spend, the larger the restoration.

Inns: Staying at an inn replenishes your entire HP gauge, though this is at the cost of both gil and, more importantly, time. Considering that you have a limited amount of hours to complete your objectives, we would suggest that you heal at restaurants instead. Inns are designed to be of utility later in the story, when you have relatively few outstanding quests and need to accelerate time for one reason or another.

Mediguard: You are likely to obtain the Mediguard ability during your first trip to Yusnaan, as it is dropped by the Flanitor enemy type. Being able to top up Lightning's health while blocking (or in quiet moments against weak opponents) reduces the need to burn through healing items or EP. There are other abilities that can offer similar properties, but these only become available at a much later stage in the game.

Regen: This status enhancement causes your HP to slowly replenish over time during battles until the effect expires. Though you cannot cast it with an ability, there are a few ways to trigger it (mainly via certain potions and, later in the story, noteworthy equipment).

Allies: An ally acquired during the course of the main story in the Wildlands can cast healing spells on Lightning.

The most important point to understand about healing is that the ideal scenario is to avoid taking damage in the first place. The key to avoiding injuries is guarding, which you should learn to do with unfailing efficiency. To increase your chances, make sure you always assign your guard abilities to the same face button of your controller (for example, ⊙/✕), and start holding that button immediately when you notice an incoming enemy attack, while simultaneously switching to the relevant Schema.

With practice, this will become a second-nature move that you perform instinctively in every battle. In easy encounters, guarding with Mediguard is enough to negate enemy damage, and heal as a fringe benefit. You can even use Mediguard to restore Lightning's HP after staggering more trivial enemies. Against tougher opponents, it's usually safer to resort to guard abilities with higher resistance to damage (such as Heavy Guard). Taking no or little damage without being able to heal is better than taking more damage than you can hope to heal with Mediguard.

Death, Game Over, New Game+

In Lightning Returns, **death** isn't really a danger, and losing a battle won't send you to the Game Over screen. Whenever your HP gauge is entirely depleted, you are requested to select any of the means of revival at your disposal: either a recovery item such as Phoenix Down, or an EP ability such as Arise.

If you consume all of these and run out of options to revive Lightning, your only option is to **escape** the battle with the corresponding EP ability (which costs 0 EP). Escaping a battle rewinds time to before the battle began, resetting all of your parameters and belongings to their previous state, but this consumes an hour of the in-game time on Normal or Hard Mode – making it an inconvenient solution if activated too frequently.

Indeed, whereas occasional uses of the Escape ability can be perfectly acceptable, repeated usage will lead time to flow too fast, preventing you from completing key objectives. If you fail to complete all five main quests by Day 13, when the world is set to end, you will reach the **Game Over** screen. Your only option then is to restart the adventure from Day 1.

When this happens, you have the option to activate the **New Game+** feature, which enables you to begin the adventure anew while keeping practically all of your equipment and attributes from the previous save file. This, naturally, gives you an incredible edge in your new playthrough.

Damage Types & Elements

All attacks in the game are either physical or magic in nature, the former dealing damage based on the Strength attribute, and the latter based on the Magic attribute.

Both attack types can be either non-elemental (neutral) or elemental – in other words, imbued with an element from a subset of four elemental varieties.

DAMAGE TYPES & ELEMENTS

ICON	MEANING	ICON	MEANING
🗡	Physical	❄	Ice
✋	Magic	⚡	Lightning
🔥	Fire	🌀	Wind

Each enemy has a set of affinities, which determine the amount of damage they sustain from attacks.

DAMAGE AFFINITIES

DESCRIPTION	MEANING
Weakness	The enemy takes extra damage.
Normal	The enemy takes standard damage.
Halved	The enemy takes reduced damage.
Resistant	The enemy takes very little damage.
Immune	The enemy takes no damage.
Absorbed	Attacks will actually heal the enemy.

Once you have identified a creature's weaknesses, it is up to you to adapt your Schemata accordingly to take advantage of them. For example, if a creature is weak to the Fire element, but resists magic damage, equipping a Fire-imbued physical ability (such as Flamestrike or Heat Blitz) to a Schema dedicated to physical damage will lead to optimal results. If you stick to abilities (even the most powerful ones) that enemies resist, your attacks will have very limited effects on them.

There are several ways to further enhance the effects of your attacks when attempting to exploit enemy weaknesses.

- Certain recovery items, including various sorts of potions, can grant you status enhancements. These increase one damage type (physical with Bravery, magic with Faith) or provide elemental properties to otherwise neutral attacks (the En- buffs, such as Enfire, Enfrost, and so on).

- You can equip certain accessories that produce similar effects.

- You can equip various pieces of equipment offering auto-abilities that enhance one specific type of damage or element.

- You can cast the Imperil status ailment on your enemies, adjusting their elemental damage affinities by one level (for example from "Normal" to "Weakness").

You also have various means at your disposal to increase your resistance to all types of attacks from your opponents:

- Many pieces of equipment, especially accessories, offer effects or auto-abilities that can increase your resistance to any and all types of damage.

- Certain abilities, such as NulAll Guard, increase your efficiency when guarding against specific types of damage.

- Various status enhancements can improve your resistance to one damage type – see next page for details.

Status Enhancements

Status enhancements (also called **buffs**) are beneficial status effects that improve the defensive or offensive prowess of the user – be that Lightning (08) or an enemy (09). They play a decisive role in determining the difficulty, duration and final outcome of the more demanding battles.

Status enhancements cannot be bestowed by abilities, but only via the use of recovery items or accessories. Each buff has a specific purpose, as revealed in the following table.

STATUS ENHANCEMENTS: OVERVIEW

ICON	ENHANCEMENT	EFFECT
	Bravery	Raises the target's Strength stat, increasing the damage inflicted by physical attacks.
	Faith	Raises the target's Magic stat, increasing the damage inflicted by magic attacks.
	Protect	Increases the target's resistance to physical attacks.
	Shell	Increases the target's resistance to magic attacks.
	Haste	Increases the rate at which the ATB gauge fills.
	Vigilance	Increases the target's resistance to interruptions.
	Regen	Slowly restores HP over time.
	Veil	Increases the target's resistance to status ailments.
	Enfire	Strengthens attacks imbued with the Fire element, imbues non-elemental attacks with this element.
	Enfrost	Strengthens attacks imbued with the Ice element, imbues non-elemental attacks with this element.
	Enthunder	Strengthens attacks imbued with the Lightning element, imbues non-elemental attacks with this element.
	Enaero	Strengthens attacks imbued with the Wind element, imbues non-elemental attacks with this element.
	Reraise	Revives you once if your HP gauge is entirely depleted.

The Ark

The Ark is Lightning's base of operations, where time does not flow. You are automatically returned to the Ark at 06:00 every morning, no matter where you are and what you are currently doing. Your EP meter is refilled to its maximum level in the process.

During every visit to the Ark, you will find a gift from Hope, taking the form of a cubic treasure box (01). Make sure you always open these gifts, as their contents are valuable, from new EP abilities to special garb that you can use in battle.

You can also talk to Hope to learn more about various concepts and characters, but more importantly to acquire special recovery items (see page 39) in exchange for EP. Some of these items are very rare and cannot be obtained anywhere else.

The Ark also features the Book of Conquest, a record of the highest battle scores received from all unique enemies (mostly bosses and Last Ones) that Lightning has fought and defeated. Examine the book to activate these records, and you will be able to challenge these fallen enemies again in their most powerful form. These battles offer no rewards: they are purely available for sport and practice.

Chaos Infusions

Chaos Infusions are pockets of Chaos that appear without warning in your environment (02). Inside a Chaos Infusion, several factors make your opponents significantly more difficult to beat:

- Monsters' HP, Strength and Magic are all boosted by 50%.
- Monsters restore HP indefinitely through a permanent Regen effect.
- Monsters are more resistant to interruptions, regardless of the attacks used.
- Monsters are able to quickly shake off any status ailments.
- Status ailments last longer than usual on Lightning.

However, there are some advantages to be found in battling monsters within Chaos Infusions. You will have a better chance of receiving items, and will receive a multiplier on your post-combat haul of gil and EP. Furthermore, Chaos Infusions feature Soul Seeds, collectibles that you can pick up and sell for a sizable price to traders that appear on each continent.

The moment you defeat the creatures spawned by an Infusion, the Chaos will disperse. It is up to you to weigh the risks and decide for yourself whether or not to fight or stay clear of combat. If you are unsure, you can always briefly step inside the boundaries of the pocket, and identify which enemy type spawns. Engage it if it belongs to a species that poses you no threat, and retreat otherwise: you can then eliminate the enemy from outside the Infusion, or move away and come back in the hope that another, weaker enemy type will spawn instead.

If you are competent at avoiding enemies as they pursue Lightning, you can make daring forays into Chaos Infusions to collect any Soul Seeds in the area without actually entering combat. However, as defeating enemies in Chaos Infusions is a significant source of EP, it's generally worth your while to wait for a suitable opponent and capitalize on the opportunity to gain the improved spoils.

EP & EP Abilities

Lightning's Energy Points (EP) are represented by the meter in the bottom-left corner of your screen. You can spend these points to activate EP abilities (or to buy recovery items while on the Ark).

There are multiple ways to restore your EP:

- EP is fully restored when you return to the Ark at 06:00 every day.
- Each enemy you defeat rewards you with a set amount of EP. As a rule, the tougher the foe, the more EP you get for eliminating it. Most enemies of the large-scale subtype yield large sums of EP when they fall, making the weaker varieties very efficient targets to refill your EP meter.
- Enemies that you defeat in Chaos Infusions grant you a far larger EP bonus.
- Recovery items of the Ether category (rare items that can only be obtained as rewards later in the game) refill portions of your EP meter.

The limit of your EP meter – in other words, your maximum EP – can be increased by completing main quests. Fulfilling these in priority can prove very helpful, as several EP abilities have very handy applications. You can find the full list of all EP abilities (some of which are unlocked on later days, as gifts from Hope on the Ark) in the Strategy & Analysis chapter, but the following list will give you an idea of how important even the earlier abilities can be:

- **Escape:** Enables you to flee from battle and rewind time to just prior to the battle, at the cost of one in-game hour on Normal or Hard difficulty (no penalty on Easy).
- **Curaga:** Fully restores Lightning's maximum HP.
- **Arise:** Revives Lightning from the KO status and restores HP in relation to the amount of EP consumed.
- **Overclock:** Slows the in-game time to a crawl during battles, enabling Lightning to move and attack with impunity.
- **Chronostasis:** Halts the in-game time flow for a brief period, which can be essential to complete objectives before a gate closes or you are warped back to the Ark. By efficiently farming EP from large-scale enemies, this ability enables you to freeze time for virtually as long as you need.
- **Teleport:** Instantly warps you to Monorail Stations, settlements, and other landmarks that you have previously visited.

To activate EP abilities, simply open the main menu on the field screen, or the pause menu on the battle screen (START/▶), then L1/LB or R1/RB).

The Outerworld

You have access to various networking features in Lightning Returns to communicate with other players, as long as you have an active internet connection and requisite sign-ups/subscriptions. The online environment that is available via your connection is called the Outerworld.

You can post about your experiences in the game, share your battle scores, and view screenshots and messages from other players by talking to certain residents of Nova Chrysalia. People whose names appear in blue in the field are carrying messages posted by other players. You can change your current Outerworld parameters via the Settings option in the main menu.

ENLIGHTENING

"With so many things to be accomplished and uncovered in a game world teeming with opportunities, this book will be a teacher with boundless patience, a savior when things seem bleak, and a wise friend always on hand to offer the advice you need. It is encyclopedic, yet unfailingly accessible. Our longtime partner, Piggyback, has accomplished miracles in creating this authoritative (and beautiful!) companion tome."

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