

Project Summary: I created this developmental editing note as part of a study in how a developmental editor's skills can be used to edit a gaming narrative. I played the game, took notes, and used Youtube videos and a fan's transcribed script for reference. This note is written as if this is a second round developmental edit.

Dear Nihon Falcom Editorial Team,

Thank you for allowing me the incredible privilege of joining Adol on his latest journey in *Ys Seven*. Dragons, corruption, genocide, an impending apocalypse—Adol and his companions certainly have their work cut out for them in Altago, which is great because players are in for quite a ride.

The narrative in *Ys Seven* is already pretty solid. It's structurally sound, engaging, and unique. There were a few missteps in characterization, dialogue, and in specific scenes and narrative arcs, but there is nothing that requires a complete and total overhaul. Given the solid foundation you've already provided, fixing the few problems that do exist won't require too much additional effort.



## Overall Impressions

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My edit consists of observations and changes to the game's structure, language, and narrative. This includes the beginning and ending, pacing, structural observations, dialogue, reactions, quirks, narrative arcs, coincidences, and missed opportunities. It might seem like I've listed everything in the narrative, but each of these sections also contain effective examples that we won't even consider changing.



## Structure

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In this section, we'll take a look at how the narrative is structured, how the structure of the beginning and ending impacts the narrative, and whether or not any major cuts or additions are warranted. This is a top-level overview of the large blocks of which the narrative is composed.



## Beginning and Ending

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*Ys Seven* begins at a natural point in the narrative. Adol and Dogi sail into Altago harbor about six months after the events of *Ys VI*. Due to a ceasefire between the kingdoms of Romn and Altago, it's finally possible for Adol to explore the region. The pretext for their arrival is, of course, to find more adventure. Given Adol's proclivity for washing ashore unconscious in strange, new lands, this relatively calm introduction is rather refreshing. The introductory scenes proceed at a natural pace, even though players know Adol is bound to get wrapped up in something sooner than later.

The brief backstory about the ceasefire between Altago and Romn also helps set the scene in Altago City. A ceasefire isn't a peace treaty, so it's entirely expected that the Dragon Knights are tense and guarded against unfamiliar faces. Even a few of the townsfolk initially react negatively to Adol's presence.

After a brief exploration of the city, the player will find themselves trapped within its walls. It's at this point that Adol and Dogi encounter the not-so-charming Commander Raud, who, along with his entourage, are trying to force a flower girl, Mia, into going on a date with him. It's a disgusting show of power that Raud will soon be known for. Of course, Adol and Dogi intervene, but they get accused of and arrested for spying. In prison, Raud interrogates and harasses them until Commander Scias intervenes and takes them to King Kiemarl, who has requested their presence. Adol's reputation as an avid adventurer naturally precedes him.

The plot naturally proceeds from this point as the king asks him to examine some nearby ruins that were recently unearthed in an earthquake. The Dragon Knights failed to find anything, but Adol, being an experienced adventurer, might have better luck. The king lifts the mandate that prevents them from leaving town, and the game truly begins.

There's nothing to complain about in this structure. It's a natural introduction to the world of Altago and its capital city. The brief stint in prison spices things up a bit before the adventure

truly begins. It also serves to inform the player that, despite the ceasefire, circumstances are tense and caution is required. It also introduces some of the narrative's major characters.

There are a few issues with the story's ending, but as these are primarily narrative concerns, we'll explore those in the narrative section. Structurally, the narrative comes to a natural conclusion.



## Pacing

The narrative's structural pacing is also sound and logical. Given that the narrative is structured around the five tribes and the five dragons of Altago, it makes sense that each tribe and dragon is a major scene. The general flow of the narrative and the game is to reach one of the tribe's towns, conquer the nearby dungeon, visit the dragon at the temple's altar, and repeat. There are a few scenes strewn throughout these events; for instance, the sub arc to find the scarlet crystals to help cure Iskan Fever. Events such as these help prevent the structure from growing stale. The optional sub quests also help to keep the structure fresh.

The only instance in which the pacing takes a hit is after Adol escapes from torture and meets up with the other party members in Iska. It's at this point that an earthquake further disrupts the flow of energy in Altago and temporarily disables all the warp points. It narratively makes sense because it's an ability granted by the dragons and is naturally dependent on the energy within Altago.

This occurrence is somewhat frustrating because it's also at this point that the player must revisit every shrine in the game. Warping cuts down on backtracking, but that's not an option. Fortunately, most of the frustration in this situation is removed by the bell that Adol receives from Clarius, which opens new pathways between areas he's already visited. These pathways are full of enemies and are relatively short. It doesn't completely stop the pacing from taking a hit, but the new areas provide players with a healthy challenge while they journey back

to familiar areas. It's a solid solution considering the alternative is solely backtracking. It even adds in a little tension because the player can't immediately jump right back into the journey.



## Other Structural Observations

I've grouped the rest of my structural observations together because there's actually nothing major to point out. The narrative's structure, which flows from start to finish uninterrupted, serves the narrative well. The major characters all serve a purpose, and the order in which the scenes take place is logical. In conclusion, the overall structure of the game's story is strong and perfectly supports the narrative. I have a few suggestions regarding several scenes, but it's unnecessary to add or cut anything major.



## Language

For our purposes, language is close-up view of how the narrative is built. In this section, the primary issues we'll examine pertain to dialogue, reaction, and other minor quirks.



## Dialogue

One dialogue problem that frequently occurs is related to how NPCs react to the currently controlled character. NPCs often talk about characters like they aren't in the party. NPCs also don't seem to recognize they're talking about the person to whom they're currently talking. They also impart information that certain characters would already know. For example, if the player explores the desert town of Segram while using Mustafa, who is obviously from Segram, characters still tell him information about the nearby temple that he'd already know. This also happens to Cruxie when she replaces him in the party; NPCs continue to talk about her health in the third person, even when she's talking to the them.

This seems like a minor issue, but it happens so frequently that it quickly becomes distracting. As a specific example, in Segram, the following dialogue is triggered by a specific NPC regardless of which character speaks to that NPC: "The villagers take turns tending to

Cruxie's needs while Mustafa is off dealing with titanosaurs and such. As the village elder, Mustafa has to leave on hunts and surveys quite often, so it's the least we can do for him." The dialogue itself is fine. It's only weird if the player is using Mustafa because then it seems like the NPC doesn't realize Mustafa is standing in front of them.

The easiest way to fix this issue is to use content that already exists. The previous example could be tweaked as follows: "We'll still take turns tending to Cruxie's needs while you're off dealing with the titanosaurs and such. It's the least we can do for you." It's a simple fix, and it's no longer distracting. This does mean that each character from each tribe (Elk, Mustafa/Cruxie, Mishera) needs slightly different dialogue when the player is using them in their respective hometowns. This situation doesn't occur with Sigroon because Altago City is inaccessible during her time with the party. Aisha is also always disguised, so the citizens of Altago City don't recognize her.



## Reactions

A few scenes are also missing expected reactions. The most prominent example is when Dogi and Geis rescue Adol from the coliseum. Just prior to this, Adol was still being whipped by the Executioner. He's shirtless, bloody, and clearly wounded. I wouldn't expect there to be time for Dogi to say anything in the moment, but even after they escape to Iska, he never says anything about it. It seems odd that Dogi wouldn't say anything at all about his best friend's terrible wounds or his imprisonment and torture. A brief scene in Iska would fix this.

Sigroon and Cruxie also don't react when the player warps for the first time. Neither character joins the party until much later in the game, so they're both unaware of Adol's ability to use dragon energy to warp throughout Altago. They should both say something the first time they warp. A brief conversation about warping and how it's possible would easily clear this up. More importantly, Cruxie has no reaction to visiting Iska. It's a land in flux between dimensions populated by a supposedly dead tribe, which is accessible through a magical bell. All of that

would be shocking to her. Granted, she hears the voice of the Flame Dragon, so she has some experience with the mystical entities in Altago, but her total lack of a reaction in Iska is odd.



## Minor Quirks

Lastly, there are a few minor dialogue quirks that need to be revised. After Altago is covered in a dense fog and attacked by monsters, Adol and company split up to check for survivors. At the harbor is a guard who says, “I hear the harbor's in really bad shape, too. I know the attacks were sudden, but couldn't the Dragon Knights do anything against the monsters?” He's standing in the harbor when he says this, which makes it a painfully obvious conclusion. It's a simple fix—remove the first sentence of the guard's dialogue.

After Scias reveals himself to be the mysterious man in black, he attacks Adol, who is forced to lose in this fight. Afterward, Scias says, “This won't do. Adol... Didn't you overcome numerous ordeals all throughout Altago? The Great Dragons must be crying with embarrassment at your grievous misuse of their powers!” The severity of his comment is worsened by how royally he just whipped Adol. It's also a tense moment because Scias could literally slaughter the entire party. Despite the circumstances, Dogi replies, “Oh, no you didn't!” There's no way to read or hear that like it isn't some sassy come back. Scias goes on to explain that believing in Adol is foolish, but Dogi's line has all but destroyed the seriousness of the scene. There's also an easy fix here—delete the line; there's no reason for it.

Geis is also guilty of a cheesy one-liner. After the previous scene, the party travels to Ruins Island to visit the Sea Sanctum. When discussing Scias and what he told them, Geis calls him a “Damned egotistical crap-face.” It's out of character for the stoic Geis, and it's shockingly childish considering the severity of the situation. It's another line that can easily be deleted without any loss to the scene.

## Narrative

We'll spend the rest of our time examining issues within the narrative. These issues are more complicated than the other issues we've discussed, and they'll require more time and effort to address. In this section, we'll discuss issues related to the Iskan Fever narrative arc, coincidences, and missed opportunities. To kick off our discussion, let's explore what works.



## Narrative Strengths

Part of what makes the narrative unique is that it lacks a primary antagonist. The story isn't about a power-hungry individual seeking world domination or world destruction. The antagonist is actually more abstract because it's technically humanity itself. Everything that happens in *Ys Seven* is a direct consequence of humanity's unchecked desires. The Edonians leave their home on Ruins Island and push out the Iska tribe based in Altago City to capitalize on trade opportunities. This event sets in motion everything else that happens, and that was several hundred years before the game actually starts.

Orbus and Zanzibar's economic policies improve trade but further disadvantage the poor citizens who live in Old Town; people who are already suffering. The death of the king further throws Altago into chaos, which allows the nefarious pair to further commit to their plans. This despair contributes to Altago's imbalances and strengthens the Iskan Fever outbreak.

While Tia ultimately triggers the Rite of Demise, she isn't the antagonist either. It's true that her actions would result in everyone's deaths, but the Rite is also a reset button. It stops the pain and suffering of the Altaginians and creates the conditions in which Altago can be reborn. The reveal that she controls the Rite is unexpected and particularly devastating, especially given her kind demeanor and relentless hope.

The Dragon Warrior's role is also unique. It isn't just a title for the person chosen to fight for humanity because the entire construct is a setup. Even after Adol proves himself to the dragons, they're never really on his side, and the reason for that isn't apparent until sometime near the narrative's end. A potential plot hole is that Scias could have killed him anytime after

the Rite had begun. This is especially true when the two fight in the palace; however, Tia calls him off because they need his despair, “The higher the hope, the deeper the despair... And the Rite requires the deepest of despair. We shall have them suffer a bit longer.”

Generally speaking, in most RPGs and action-adventure games, the chosen, regardless of the title, is a bastion of hope. They struggle to save their loved ones and the deck is stacked against them because the antagonist is well prepared and stronger than them. In *Ys Seven*, though, the entire system is stacked against the Dragon Warrior. As soon as the Rite begins, the rules dictate that, despite his strength and determination, Adol will more than likely lose. After all, how do you fight against despair? It’s an abstract concept fueled by complicated circumstances.

While *Ys Seven* uses a standard good vs. evil setup, the antagonist and the system in which the protagonist fights is wholly unique. The narrative’s twists and turns are enjoyable and well developed. As a whole, the story succeeds at creating a unique world with a fascinating mythos. With that said, there are a few issues that need to be revised to ensure the narrative is as strong as it can be.

I’ve also no narrative concerns about the game’s characters. All the playable characters are unique and have interesting back stories that are sufficiently explored throughout the narrative. I’ve already mentioned a few quirks in the previous section, but as a whole, the major cast is solid. There are several oddities with the major NPCs, which we’ll look at below.



### Arc: Iskan Fever

The most notable arc that requires attention is Iskan Fever. The primary offender is the scene in which Adol and the party follow Tia to the waterway under Altago City in the hopes of locating some leftover scarlet crystals. This entire scene is problematic for a number of reasons. First, Daleyon mentions to the party that there could be scarlet crystals under the city after Adol fails to convince Zanzibar to give them one for Maya. This isn’t the first instance in which the



party has dealt with Daleyon or Zanzibar. Why does Daleyon remember this now? Furthermore, why would he know about this possibility? A waterway isn't an appropriate storage location for an item that is essential in deterring the effects of a lethal endemic disease.

It's not like the waterway used to be livable at some point either. It is quite literally just a waterway. There's no reason for the crystals to be there. After Adol manages to fight off the monster in the waterway to get the crystals, Tia doesn't even take all of them. The player can still see the mound of them in the waterway after she departs. Why wouldn't they take every single crystal? It's not like anyone else knows about them, and who better to have them the Adol and Tia?

Scarlet crystals are also problematic. Iskan Fever is endemic to the region; everyone knows about it, and everyone knows it's deadly. It doesn't make sense that the kingdom wouldn't stockpile these crystals in case of an outbreak. Granted, Zanzibar and Orbus push for policies that allow Zanzibar to monopolize the crystal market, but the monopoly begins at some point before the game's narrative. The outbreak that occurs in the narrative obviously isn't the first outbreak, but the kingdom seems wildly unprepared for the current one.

King Kiemarl either has some crystals or buys them, but he apparently does use them to stave off his disease. He fully admits to allowing the monopoly to form by not preventing it in the first place. It's also something that would have never happened, though. The monopoly is known to exist by the time the party departs for Segram. It's unclear how long the king has been ill, but given the importance of these crystals, it just doesn't seem likely that he'd allow something like this to occur.

Despite the king's illness, it's not actually difficult to break up a monopoly. He could easily order the Dragon Knights to seize the crystals if Zanzibar tried to ransom them to him. There's no indication that Iskan Fever occurs outside of Altago. The crystals are only useful to the Altaginians. Even the fear of merchants rebelling against the kingdom doesn't seem likely

under these circumstances. There's no logical reason the king would allow this monopoly and allow Zanzibar to keep his stockpile.

To fix these issues, we first need to decide whether or not the crystals should be in the waterway. Considering that the level and boss fight are already built, the crystals have to stay. Therefore, we need a compelling reason for the crystals to be in the waterway. One idea to consider is that Zanzibar might have used the waterway to illegally transport the crystals to the harbor. It's unlikely anyone would go to the waterway, so it's an obvious choice for clandestine transportation. It's also full of monsters, so it's entirely possible that his men might have dropped some fleeing for their lives.

As for how Daleyon knows about it, have him say he heard about it in town. There's a rumor going around that Zanzibar is using the waterway to transport crystals. This creates a legitimate reason for the crystals to be in the waterway, and it gives Adol and Tia a realistic reason for going in there. Adol and Tia can also take all of the crystals and give them to Daleyon. When the outbreak worsens, Daleyon currently says that he'll be unable to treat the incredible amount of cases in such a short time period, which works with the revised scene.

As for the king, add a scene in which a guard tells him their stockpile is low and that Zanzibar is unwilling to cooperate. This will force the king to take action against him. It should also occur directly before his death, which is relatively close to the beginning of the outbreak. This means that he'll be unable to deal with Zanzibar before his death, which will still allow Zanzibar to monopolize the crystals during the outbreak.

As for the king's knowledge, he would be unable to stop it if he didn't know about it. If he only learned about it recently, say, on his deathbed, it would have been impossible for him to stop it. This idea is logical because Orbus and Zanzibar are in on the conspiracy. While Orbus is motivated solely by money, he's also not one to give up. If the king is honorable, he'd be

unwilling to ever allow such a monopoly, which would force Orbus and Zanzibar to coordinate behind the scenes.

Another solution to Iskan Fever is to slightly tweak the dialogue to suggest this is the first outbreak. If people recently learned that scarlet crystals are necessary for treatment, then it would stand to reason that a power-hungry merchant such as Zanzibar would immediately coordinate to stockpile them. It would also explain why there's no stockpile readily available in case of an outbreak.

Iskan Fever is thematically important to the narrative. It's a physical manifestation of the ills that plague Altago. It parallels Altago's decay at the hands of the corrupt. It's also more terrifying than the other abnormalities because there's no cure. Famine, abnormal weather, and titano attacks aren't nearly as bad as an incurable disease that slowly petrifies the body and eventually results in a slow and painful death. Iskan Fever is also what leads Tia to begin the Rite of Demise, so it's especially important that this arc be free of any plot holes.



## Coincidences

There are a few coincidences throughout the narrative that require your attention. The first occurs with Raud and Aisha outside the waterway. After a brief argument, Aisha takes Raud aside and reveals that she's the princess. He acquiesces and leaves. Dogi asks her what she said to him, but she brushes him off. Neither him nor Adol press the issue further, and there's no reflection about the situation. My suggestion here is brief: use an emoticon to show that Adol, Dogi, or both are at least curious about the situation. There's only one person who could possibly silence Raud: a military general or a member of the royal family. A question mark or ellipses would show that they're aware of how odd this situation is. It's already a pretty big coincidence that no one recognizes Aisha as the princess; this particular coincidence is pushing it.

A more severe coincidence occurs when Cruxie hears the voice of the Flame Dragon when the party returns to Segram to visit the Fire Sanctum. The Flame Dragon gives her the incantation required to access the Fire Sanctum because Mustafa doesn't know it. None of the dragons before or after this event willingly help Adol and the party. It's out of character for the dragon because they aren't supposed to interfere. Mustafa can either know the incantation ahead of time, which he would have learned from his father, or he can find it in his father's records. Either way, the dragon can't provide them with it.



## Missed Opportunities

Before I conclude, we'll look at a few missed opportunities. These two scenes have the potential to strengthen the narrative if they're revised.

When Elk learns the incantation for the Earth Sanctum, the screen fades to black and a dialogue box informs the player that he learned the spell. It unfortunately looks cheesy and weakens the serious tone of the scene. It disrupts the scene because this dialogue box exists outside the narrative, and it's unnecessary. There are several easy solutions. If nothing else, just don't fade to black and have Elk say he learned the spell. It's basic, but it will no longer break the scene. The Eldress could also whisper it to him. Either way, the goal is to avoid the scene change and the dialogue box.

The ending is more problematic and requires a more eloquent solution. The ending up to Tia's death is excellent. It's full of emotion, and it represents a natural conclusion to the events leading up to that point. The problem is in the epilogue, which is narrated by Aisha, and specifically the part involving Adol. His portion is narrated on a black screen. It's also surprisingly brief and basically amounts to him helping to rebuild for a while, eventually saying goodbye, and leaving for his next adventure. The portion that follows, about Maya, has an image of her in the flower fields with Aisha's narration.

Aisha's narration tells the player that everyone worked together to rebuild Altago; the five tribes come together to work as one like they did hundreds of years ago. Everyone, minus Geis (which is in character for him), attends the treaty, but we don't see what happens to Mustafa, Cruxie, Elk, and Mishera afterward. A single image of them reuniting with their families or working to restore their respective homes would go a long way in making the conclusion feel complete. While there are members of the various tribes working together during this sequence (we see them in the harbor and the city square), showing the major characters in these scenes would be useful. They were essential to the narrative as well, so it seems odd that they don't make much of an appearance during the ending sequence. Adol and Dogi could also be in this sequence while Aisha is narrating it. The player could see them helping while Aisha is narrating it like she does during the rest of the sequence.

I appreciate the attempt in trying to create a different ending than seen in the other games. Generally speaking, Adol and Dogi always say goodbye and then sail off for their next adventure. It becomes formulaic, even if it does perfectly fit with their characters. However, Adol and Dogi need an ending that at least fits with everyone else's. Ending with Maya in the flower field is an excellent final scene, though. It's a nod to the major positive narrative themes (hope and love) and representative of Altago's potential future.

It's better not to see Adol and Dogi leave. We've seen it before, and not showing it here leaves the next game's beginning more open for development. That said, make sure Adol and Dogi feature at least as prominently as everyone else in the ending sequence. Another scene or two to preface their leaving would help balance the sequence. The ending's focus is on Altago's rebirth—which it should be—but Adol and Dogi are also a part of that rebirth.

## Conclusion

While the narratives of the previous *Ys* games have been enjoyable, *Ys Seven* in particular stands out as one of the stronger titles. Altago feels like a real world, each tribe is

unique, and the complicated story it tells, one of hope against the deepest of despairs created by our worst instincts, is thoroughly engaging. Players are in for an absolute blast.

Begin revisions with the narrative issues. These are the most pressing and require the most work. The language issues are relatively minor, but anything that disrupts the player's experience should be revised. Fixing these issues will result in a stronger narrative and a better game.

Thank you again for sharing Adol's latest adventures with me. I look forward to actually playing the game when it's released. Please let me know if you have any questions during your revision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott MacDonald", with a stylized, flowing script.

Scott MacDonald