

FINAL FANTASY

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

RETROSPECTIVES: Every major entry in the series, revisited

INTERVIEWS: Glimpses into the future with current FF staff

PREVIEWS: Final Fantasy's future discussed & previewed

INSIGHTS: In-depth series commentary & opinion

AND MORE!



Hello! Perhaps you'd prefer if we said **Rally Ho**, as the dwarves of Conde Petie say, or **Lali Ho**, if you prefer. Or... **Famlusa**, as Spira's Al Bhed say. Welcome.

It's hard to believe that **Final Fantasy** is now **25 years old**. From humble beginnings it has grown to span a vast number of games and beyond, and has a uniquely wide-reaching fan base as a result.

It's difficult to represent every type of Final Fantasy fan, but we've had a damn good go at doing so in the pages of this digital magazine. Some fans are old-school, and prefer the 2D titles. Others point to the PS1 and PS2 as a golden age, while another group finds those games slow and would rather stick with the incredible spectacle of recent entries.

Perhaps you've only played **FFXIII** and its sequel, or perhaps you're one of the fans who lost interest after the PS1 days. Many of our writers have similar relationships to the series. Whatever piece of FF is 'yours', we hope you find something in here for you. If you're not a fan, we hope you can learn why we care and perhaps be tempted to check the series out for yourself.

This project was created by fans spanning a number of countries, communities, backgrounds and ages. We've tried to represent everybody. It's a collaborative effort where people have been able to write about the things they love about Final Fantasy - a way to underline just how special the last 25 years have been.

It's nowhere near exhaustive, but we feel it hits all the important bases - and every subject covered in here comes from a writer who feels strongly about the subject or game of their choosing. This is a tribute to the creators and fans of Final Fantasy as well as to all the incredible times the series and its fan base has given to so many over the years. It's also a note; this community is alive, special, and worth participating in.

Recent years have given voice to a sense of worry and apathy within this particular community, but in creating this what we've seen above all is high hopes for the future. From the upcoming **Lightning Returns** to dreams of a **FFVII** remake, the enigma of **Versus** right through to hopes for a return to the values of **FFIX**, there's a lot of love packed in these pages. That in itself is a testament to this series.

Happy Birthday, Final Fantasy. Thanks for reading.

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“RATHER THAN MAKING MY GAMES
EQUIVALENT TO FILMS, I WANT MY
GAMES TO SURPASS FILMS...

...THAT IS MY GOAL.”

-HIRONOBU SAKAGUCHI



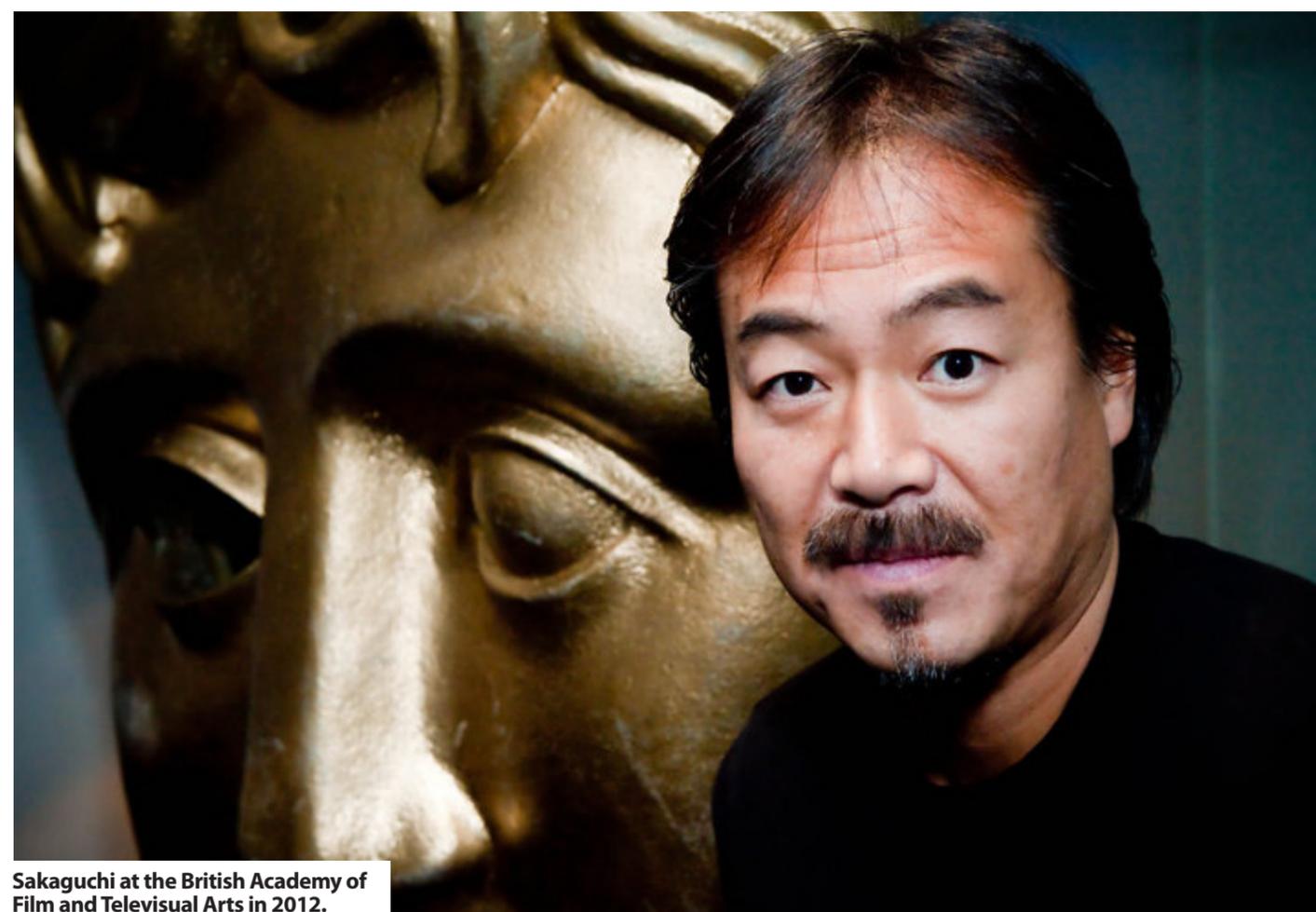
Chances are you've heard the legendary story of the creation of **Final Fantasy** before. A company on the brink of ruin gives its final video game a morbid name, one that is an admission of failure - and that game ends up being their salvation.

It's poetic, something that other struggling game studios can look to for inspiration - but it isn't actually true. It's merely one of gaming's urban myths.

Square was indeed in a bad place after suffering a string of unsuccessful Famicom (NES) games, but the naming of the series that would become their flagship was actually a far more personal action on the part of one man in his early twenties: **Hironobu Sakaguchi**.

"The name 'Final Fantasy' was a display of my feeling that if this didn't sell, I was going to quit the games industry and go back to university," Sakaguchi told gaming site Develop in 2007.

"I'd have had to repeat a year, so I wouldn't have had any friends - it really was a 'final' situation," he said. Little did the young Sakaguchi know that his final throw of the dice would go on to define his entire career.



Sakaguchi at the British Academy of Film and Television Arts in 2012.

Sakaguchi had always wanted to be a storyteller, and after being impressed by Enix's **Dragon Quest** he decided that his final attempt at successful game design would be with a title in the same genre - the role-playing game. Final Fantasy was born.

"The characters are like real people, crying and laughing, and because of that I am interested in dramatic presentation and visuals."

"I want to tell a story," he would later tell Japanese gaming magazine Famitsu. "The characters are like real people, crying and laughing, and because of that I am interested in dramatic presentation and visuals."

The same was true with the limited technology of 1987, Sakaguchi setting out to tell a uniquely detailed story for the era, pulling in top talent to help him. He enlisted the talents of **Yoshitaka Amano** to design the game's characters and logo while the scenario was written by anime writer **Kenji Terada**.

The core development team was just seven members strong. It included Iranian-American freelancer **Nasir Gebelli**, a man who'd prove so instrumental in the series' creation that **FFII**'s production would briefly follow him back to America so his work could continue.

Also present were **Akitoshi Kawazu** and **Hiromichi Tanaka**, both of whom continued to work with Square and Final Fantasy right up until 2010's **FFXIV**.

Rounding out the creative staff was **Nobuo Uematsu**, a young graduate and budding musician working at a music rental store to make ends meet.

"Among this group of friends that I had at that time, there was this one guy who predicted everyone's future," Uematsu told 1up.com in 2008.

"He said, 'Next week, something is going to happen, and it will eventually take Nobuo Uematsu to the world. You will be widely known.'"

"That following week was when I met Sakaguchi-san on the street, and he said, 'Why don't you come to the company because we need someone to really make music for our upcoming games and our creations.'"

"That happened exactly the week after the guy made that prediction. He told me that I needed to believe in him, but at that time I didn't really believe in him. Now I do."

The talent was in place to make a hit game - even if the team wasn't aware of it - and Sakaguchi led them in crafting his vision.

Included was a large world with numerous locations to explore and a surprisingly in-depth class system for the time.

The game was good - but when the finished product was presented to Square the company's management were at first reluctant to get behind it.

Production of cartridge games was expensive, and producing a lot of any new title was a risk even for large companies.

"The business side of the company, after taking a look at the completed product, said, 'This is only going to sell so much.' And I don't remember exactly what the number was but the forecast was around 200,000," Uematsu recalled.

For Sakaguchi, it wasn't enough. "I argued within the company, and pleaded: 'If we only make this many, there's no chance of a sequel - please make it 400,000'. But the costs were high, so as a company all they could think was 'that's a lot of money!' despite having this great game."

Uematsu remembers Sakaguchi's tenacity for his creation seeing him handling his own guerilla PR campaign - something the careful, crafting PR departments of today's company would balk at.

"In the first pack that came from the production facility, he took every single ROM to every publication that was out there at that time, and he basically did his own PR with the first Final Fantasy."

"So I considered him a very strong and brave man at that time for him to have gone out and done his own PR for his game. That was a moment we probably won't forget."

Sakaguchi, meanwhile, remembers a Square that did finally listen, creating significantly more than the initially planned 200,000 copies, showing faith in FF.

"The reason it became such a hit was thanks to Square's management taking a chance - for which I'm really grateful," he explained.

Square made 400,000 copies for Japan - and sold them all. After success with a localized Dragon Quest, Nintendo of America translated Final Fantasy and released it in North America in 1990.

Despite having to wait until 2003 to reach Europe, the original Final Fantasy has shipped over 2 million copies worldwide in its various incarnations.

The rest, as they say, is history.

By Alex Donaldson [@APZonerunner], Co-owner of RPGSite.net & UFFSite.net.



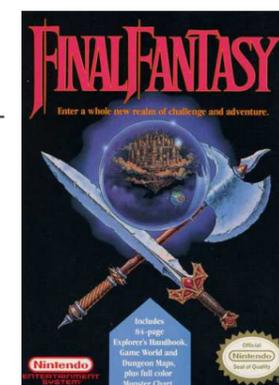
Uematsu in the studio for FFIIX.



Sakaguchi's masterpiece.



Yoshitaka Amano's art remains synonymous with the series.



Final Fantasy's original US Box Artwork.



FINAL FANTASY

Everything the **Final Fantasy** series has achieved can be put into perspective with the statement of one simple fact: the first title in the series was developed by a team of just seven people.

Much of the creation of the original FF has already been covered in the opening pages of this magazine. It's unlikely that the tiny crew slaving away on the title had any idea of what they were creating, even with the group listening to the rallying cry of FF's ambitious father **Hironobu Sakaguchi**.

Gameplay systems from the brilliant minds of **Hironobu Tanaka**, **Akitoshi Kawazu** and **Koichi Ishii** backed up Sakaguchi's vision with quality game design to match. The delicate balance between story and gameplay would later be said to define FF.

Limited system memory meant limited space for the story, created by Sakaguchi and written by freelance anime writer **Keiji Terada**. The game instead goes bare-bones, telling a surprisingly compelling story through optional conversations in the game's towns and through a few very specific major mandatory story beats.

Those mandatory beats are special; to this day there's still something incredibly memorable about the moment you raise your airship for the first time, the atmosphere before facing down each of the four fiends of the elements or the moment that Bahamut, King of Dragons, promotes the classes of your characters.

Moments like this define the game and set the tone for the series; they're the 1987 equivalent of the spectacle-driven CG sequences that the series would later become known for.

These punch-the-air moments put wind in your sails and give you the desire to slog through another set of battles to get to the next awesome moment.




Originally Released:
December 18 1987

Available On:
NES, MSX, WonderSwan Color, PS1, GBA, Mobile (iOS, Windows, Android), PSP, PSN (PS3, Vita), Wii

Key Staff:
Hironobu Sakaguchi, Yoshitaka Amano, Nasir Gebelli, Nobuo Uematsu, Kenji Terada, Hiromichi Tanaka

Article by: Alex Donaldson

That previously mentioned visit to Bahamut is also a nod to greater gameplay. Here it gives the relatively simple classes a boost, opening up new equipment and offering new levels of depth in their customization for the final stretch of the game.



"It's probably fair to say that Final Fantasy is timeless."

It's a minor thing by modern standards, but it speaks volumes of the ambition the team had towards implementing the more intricate system design that Final Fantasy would later have from the very beginning. It's also a rare moment that an RPG this young ties character abilities to a major story event.

It's true that large parts of FF's DNA was ripped from its inspiration, **Dragon Quest**, but turn-based random battle encounters are only the tip of the iceberg of this incredible game.

As it turns 25 it still finds itself being consistently upgraded and rereleased, most recently for iOS and Windows Phone devices. Each time it sells to both old fans and new audiences enthralled by its brilliant simplicity alike. Time can be a cruel master - but FF's maiden voyage fares better than most.

Based on that - and the legacy left in its wake - it's probably fair to say that Final Fantasy is timeless.

Alex Donaldson [[@APZonerunner](#)] is the Co-owner of [RPGSite.net](#) & [UFFSite.net](#).



Hironobu Sakaguchi

The Father of Final Fantasy

Credited: FFI (1987) - FFX-2 (2003)

Now: President, Mistwalker Corp



Widely credited as the father of **Final Fantasy**, Sakaguchi masterminded the original title for the Famicom (NES) and gave it its distinctive name. After the runaway success of the original title, Sakaguchi shelved plans to return to university in favor of remaining at Square to make FF sequels.

Sakaguchi went on to work as Director on **FFI-V** before sitting back to contribute to **FFVI** as its Writer and Producer - stepping down as director early on in order to supervise several other projects including the massively popular **Chrono Trigger**.

FFVII saw him consult heavily on design and contributing the overall plot whilst remaining in the Producer role.

It was on Sakaguchi's suggestion that writer Kazushige Nojima included a major character death in the game.

FFVIII saw him step back to a more distant Executive Producer role, handing control to others in order to focus on development of his ill-fated foray into movie direction and production, **The Spirits Within**.

The failures of that project would arguably color the rest of his time at the company and set in motion the chain of events that would later see him leave. Before that time arrived, Sakaguchi still had much to contribute to the series.

He'd return to a more hands-on role as Producer for the nostalgia-laden **FFIX**, which began life as 'FF Gaiden', a side story intended to celebrate the past of the FF series.

Despite that more involved role, he'd return to Executive Producer for **X** and **XI** - despite the latter's MMO status being his suggestion. He'd even play a minor role in the birth of **Kingdom Hearts**. His final full credit was as Executive Producer again on **FFX-2** - but he's also named in **FFXII's** Special Thanks.

In these years he set the tone of games by choosing their staff, placing the likes of Hiroyuki Ito and Hiromichi Tanaka in charge of titles like FFIIX and XI.

Sakaguchi went on to found his own new production company, **Mistwalker**, whose titles including **Lost Odyssey** and **Blue Dragon** would be considered as spiritual successors to his work on Final Fantasy.

In 2010 he revealed he had a copy of **FFXIII**, but was struggling to find the time to play it. His personal blog is still illustrated with a caricature of himself in the style of a SNES-era Final Fantasy battle sprite.

His two most recent games have been for iOS devices, based around surfing and tower defense. The former is a passion of his that he indulges regularly in his home of Hawaii. [[@auuo](#)]



ファイナルファンタジーII

Hironobu Sakaguchi was right to plead for more copies of Final Fantasy to be printed - the game was a runaway success. Only one thing could cement its place among RPG legends like Wizardy and Dragon Quest completely, however - a sequel.

The big names from early in FF's history assembled once more: **Tanaka, Kawazu, Uematsu, Amano, Terada** and of course Sakaguchi, who was now managing a more substantial team of developers.

After loudly cheerleading the first game, the expectation to deliver a satisfying follow-up was placed squarely - no pun intended - on his shoulders.

The themes of crystals, warriors, world travel and time itself could've easily supported a second game - but instead most of these elements were thrown away, setting a precedent for each new FF being all-new.



The mythical crystals were replaced with mystical torches and tomes of ultimate magic, and the nameless, faultless Warriors of Light were replaced with a band of would-be rebels against a powerful empire.

In this, **Final Fantasy II** offers a glimpse at what's to come in the future of the series. Its story of an Emperor seeking world domination and a cast of rebels each with their own motivations, emotions and flaws casts a lengthy shadow that later iterations would stand in.

An increased story focus means that Nobuo Uematsu's compositions aren't just background music, but represent story themes such as the rebel forces' valor and the cruelty and ferocity of the Empire - again a sign of what's to come.



Memorable moments such as learning the Wild Rose password, riding a Chocobo for the first time ever, and the coming-and-going of allies pepper the sword-and-sorcery affair with a very FF personality.



Originally Released:

December 17 1988

Available On:

NES, MSX, WonderSwan Color, PS1, GBA, Mobile (JP, iOS), PSP, PSN (PS3, Vita), Wii VC

Key Staff:

Hironobu Sakaguchi, Yoshitaka Amano, Nasir Gebelli, Nobuo Uematsu, Kenji Terada, Akitoshi Kawazu, Ken Narita

Article by: Tony Garsow

While FFII marked the debut of many concepts and ideas that would stick around for the long run, it also made notable missteps.

It's strange usage-based character growth system is exploitable to the point of being broken. A bit of know-how is all it takes to make the game not the least bit challenging.



Those who played legitimately were treated to a purgatorial slog through frequent nail-biting encounters - though difficulty was lowered in remakes. The game's dungeons were labyrinthine and easy to get lost in - and thanks to these two things I died ad nauseum.

FFII represents a reinvigorated team stretching its creative legs and taking the franchise into uncharted waters all while still tying the sail to the mast.

Forged into the game are elements that would define the series; great characters, memorable story, an emotive score inspired by the themes at the game's heart and gameplay that is refreshingly different to the previous game. All these are seeds that sprout and blossom in the series ahead.

Perhaps what the game has to teach us is that this series shouldn't necessarily be defined by taking what we know and love and superimposing it onto a new game, but instead by the ambition to go somewhere entirely new, building a brand new experience that is merely based off that familiar formula.

While some scornfully consider FFII's legacy as one of a broken game, I prefer to remember it as one that served as an experimental birthplace for the best of what we've come to expect from Final Fantasy.

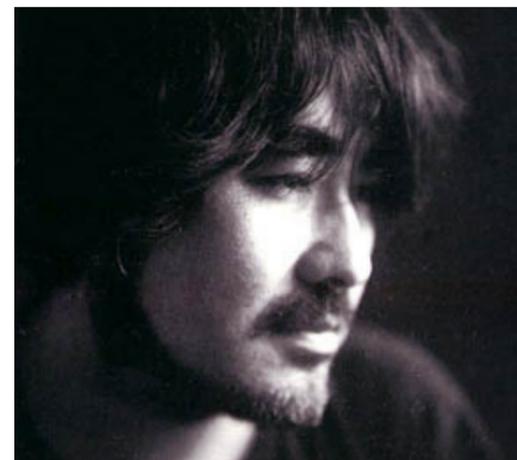
Tony Garsow [[@FFNTony](#)] is the Editor of the fan site **Final Fantasy Network**. [[finalfantasy.net](#)]

Yoshitaka Amano

Fantasy Virtuoso

Credited: FFI (1987) - FFXIII-2 (2012)

Now: Freelance Artist



Yoshitaka Amano is about as associated with Final Fantasy as people come. He's the first thing most see of any FF game - he designed the logos for every major FF title with the exception of **FFIX**.

Beyond that, Amano's artwork would serve as the design for the vast majority of the cast and monsters of the first six FF titles. He'd also be one of the major character designers on FFI. **FFVII, VIII, X, XII** and **XIII** saw him designing the logo and producing illustrations of characters designed by other artists in his unique style.

Amano's art is created through printmaking - carving imagery into wood or copper, then running ink in it and transferring that ink to paper. His style is remarkably unique and immediately recognizable, and is widely associated with Final Fantasy.

Nasir Gebelli

The Seminal Programmer

Credited: FFI (1987) - FFIII (1990)

Now: Retired



An Iranian-American who'd been turned away from employment at **Nintendo**, **Nasir Gebelli** was a vital figure in FF's birth. Bringing programming expertise others lacked, Gebelli ensured that the underlying code that was the backbone of FF worked as intended.

He remained with Square for several years, working on **FFII, FFIII** and **Secret of Mana** before returning to the US. Look out for the text 'Programmed by Nasir' in games - it's basically his digital signature. He's now retired, and currently lives in California.

Kenji Terada

Storytelling... in under a Megabyte

Credited: FFI (1987) - FFIII (1990)

Now: Freelance Writer/Director



Never a **Square** employee, **Kenji Terada** was bought into the production of the original FF as a freelancer to make up for a deficit on the team - they needed a writer. Sakaguchi had aspirations of writing and delivering an epic story, but he wasn't a writer.

Terada was a freelance writer known for his work in anime - and that made him a perfect fit for Sakaguchi's vision. Working with Sakaguchi's outline, he fashioned the stories of **FFI, FFII** and **FFIII**. He's still writing and directing Japanese animation to this day.



The game that almost never was for Western-based fans, **Final Fantasy III** is incredibly different to its predecessors and equally as special all thanks to one word: Jobs.

An evolution of the concept of selecting a character class for each party member at the opening of the original FF, FFIII takes the idea one step further: what if you could change class at any time?

These new classes were titled jobs and are unlocked and earned as the game progresses from a single class available at the game's onset. Switching jobs consumes CP, a predecessor of AP, which is earned through fights.

Jobs brought numerous skills which would become a staple of the series with them. Most notable of all is the debut of the 'Summon' ability, which also marks the debut of many of the beasts associated with the skill.



The job system is a genius invention; with twenty-two different classes available in the original release of the game, a vast number of skills were on offer compared to the previous two games.

The breadth of possible battle strategies multiplied massively, and with it FFIII offered a new sense of difficulty in battle and satisfaction when successful.



While the job system offered significant expansion over the previous two games, FFIII's story was actually something of a step back from the plot-heavy, empire-squashing narrative of **FFII**.

The game chose to return to the original FF's set up of four unnamed warriors, placing the blank group on a quest which becomes an epic tale of crystals, floating continents and a struggle against a powerful antagonist that is a beast-like woman enshrouded in clouds.



FFIII's simplistic story is compelling for 1990, but the original release only tells half the tale - as the game was later greatly expanded by its 2006 Nintendo DS remake. By then FF fans expected a dramatic storyline with a suite of recognizable characters - and simply releasing the blank-slated FFIII cast to the West wouldn't do.

"FFIII sports genius in the job system, heart in its story and incredible reinvention in its remake"

For its 3D remake the cast were given names - Luneth, Arc, Refia and Ingus - and personalities, each designed to extol core values of the crystals themselves - courage, kindness, affection and determination.

Names and personalities mean the group were also given dialogue, and though the story is the same on the DS, it's driven now by the main cast rather than just the ongoing events around them.

While the original was successful, FFIII found the acclaim it deserved in the form of over 900,000 sales of the DS version in the West - and that's not counting subsequent rereleases on Android, iOS and PSP.

The game suits a portable form perfectly, a perfect pick-up-and-play take on the FF formula - addictive, challenging and entertaining.



FFIII is a brilliant swansong for many of FF's creators. This is the last that **Kenji Terada** would write and **Nasir Gebelli** would program and **Hiromichi Tanaka** departed until FFXI at this point. What a legacy they left.

FFIII sports genius in the job system, heart in its story and incredible reinvention and renewal in its remake and eventual Western release. These things define Final Fantasy - and therefore so does FFIII itself.

John Davison is an English Teacher, Translator and RPG enthusiast based in Tokyo, Japan.

The Long Journey

Final Fantasy III took a massive 16 years to make it West in the form of a full 3D Nintendo DS remake.

FF has generally been well-supported with localizations, but some games in the series remain exclusive to their motherland.

- 'International' versions of some titles featuring added content remain Japan only. Most significant of those is **FFXII's 'International Zodiac Job System'** release which adds a job system not unlike **FFIII's** to the game.
- **Before Crisis**, a mobile game telling the story of **AVALANCHE** and The Turks prior to the events of **FFVII**, was also never localized. Hopes for a DS or mobile port persist.
- A game based on the **Final Fantasy Unlimited** anime and several Chocobo spin-offs also remain Japan exclusive.
- Big-budget mobile-turned-PSP Fabula Nova Crystallis title **Final Fantasy Type-0** remains Japan-only.

Here's hoping some of these titles eventually make it to Western shores!



Article by: John Davison

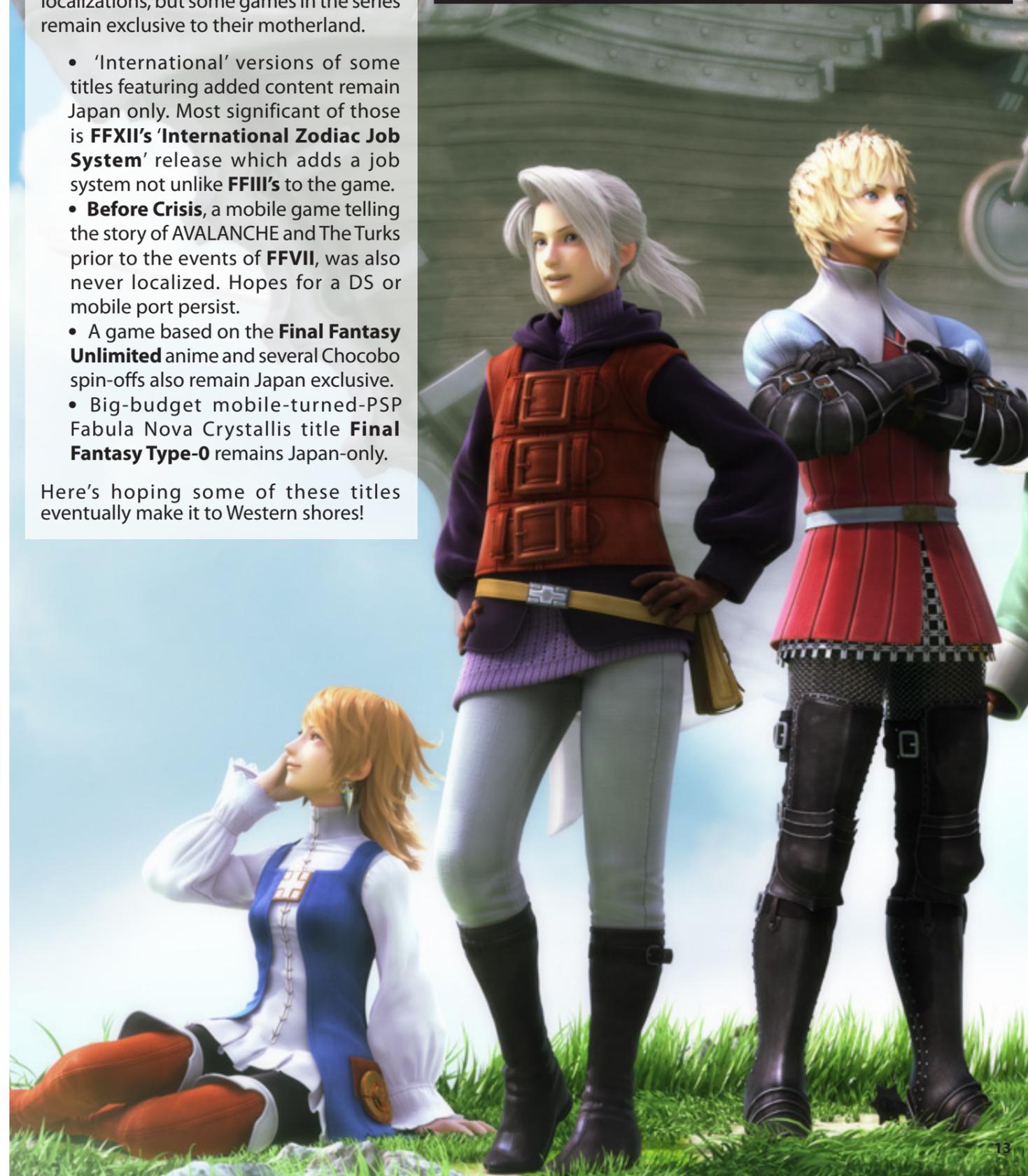
Originally Released: April 27 1990

Available On:

NES, DS, Wii VC, iOS, Android, PSP

Key Staff:

Hironobu Sakaguchi, Yoshitaka Amano, Nasir Gebelli, Nobuo Uematsu, Hiromichi Tanaka, Kenji Terada, Ken Narita





FINAL FANTASY IV

ファイナルファンタジーIV

At school I remember debating with a friend on which was better - **Final Fantasy IV** (II at the time) or **FFVI** (III). My argument was that anything FFIV did FFVI went on to do better - but fifteen years later I find myself on the other side of that debate.

FFIV has since been rereleased for a ton of formats - well-deserved attention - yet talking to younger fans reveals that many sadly see FFIV as a historic relic; only a nostalgia-filled old fogey could appreciate it.

I disagree. Technology has improved much of FF, but FFIV is packed with clever ideas and brilliant execution - and is a vital point in the series' evolution.

One particular piece of FFIV is a legacy that runs through almost every major release since - the *Active Time Battle* system. The brainchild of **Hiroyuki Ito**, ATB allowed actions in turn-based combat to flow continuously, making battles appear real-time.



In FFIV the amount of time between actions is determined by speed statistics and the type of action being undertaken. A high-level spell takes longer to cast than a simple sword swing, for instance.

This simple addition created a level of strategy completely different to previous FFs and most other RPGs - and gave FF an edge over the competition.

Several of FFIV's dungeons feature extras to make them memorable. Some boast damaging floors that require the player to cast the 'Float' spell to journey safely, others featured warps and most included secret passages that hid treasure and helped to create a maze-like atmosphere.

Other dungeons had gimmicks dictated by story events. Most notorious was the Lodestone Caverns, which prevented players from using metal-based equipment. Powehouse Cecil is forced to remove his equipment, leaving monk Yang and mage Tellah to do the heavy lifting instead.



Originally Released:
July 19 1991

Available On:
SNES, WonderSwan Color, GBA, Wii VC, DS, PSP

Key Staff:
Hironobu Sakaguchi, Yoshitaka Amano, Nobuo Uematsu, Hiroyuki Ito, Takashi Tokita, Akihiko Matsui, Ken Narita

Article by: Jonathon Burke

FFIV's party dynamic is constantly changed by the narrative, the rotating cast of characters forcing players to be flexible with their battle strategies. You never know when someone important is going to be removed from your playable party.

This also created a sense of variety, letting the player try out different job classes and party set-ups, giving different stretches of the game their own unique feel.



Without the job system, FFIV has each character locked into one role. This helps to define each character in combat as much as in plot, giving the cast additional depth over earlier FF heroes.

Deepest of all is protagonist Cecil, demonstrated in the game's dramatic opening. A fleet of airships return from war and Cecil, their commander, isn't a teenager battling an evil empire; he *is* the evil empire.

He recollects the brutal attack he led against the city of Mysidia, stealing their crystal and butchering peaceful mages. Cecil doesn't seem like the good guy.

He eventually becomes sick of what his country asks of him and questions his own morality and loyalty to the king. He's stripped of his rank for this - and with this the adventure begins.

After witnessing the horror that his unquestioned loyalty has led him to first-hand, slaughtering the family of a young Rydia, Cecil resolves to stop Baron to seek atonement for his sins.

Cecil is not your atypical RPG hero. He starts as a villain and when he becomes a hero, he fails, unable to prevent Golbez from executing his plans.

Losing everything, our hero finds himself in need of help from the very people he only recently devastated in the king's name.



It's here Cecil undergoes a literal transformation, shunning his Dark Sword to become a Paladin. Cecil stands out thanks to his role as a conflicted hero whose story isn't just about battling evil and saving the land - it's also a story of redemption and forgiveness.

Much of Cecil's development is mirrored in his best friend and foil, Kain. One of the most memorable FF characters, the Dragoon is enamored in his rivalry with Cecil and embroiled in a love triangle, Kain hiding feelings for Cecil's love Rosa.

Kain has a greater sense of self-confidence and less emotional inhibition than Cecil, and is presented as a pillar of strength. Even so, it is he who falls into Golbez and Zemus' hands due to feelings of jealousy.

For all of his stoic strength, he is as conflicted as Cecil. He was easily turned because instead of confronting his internal demons he instead suppresses his turmoil, leaving him vulnerable.

FFIV's character drama unfolds better thanks to Nobuo Uematsu's score which brings an emotional depth to the story. When Edward plays his sad song in remembrance of Anna or the Theme of Love crescendos as Cecil and Rosa embrace, the player is drawn in deeper by the melody.

Imagine how flat FFIV's story would be if Kain's betrayal was accompanied by a generic dungeon theme, or if Rydia would be as sweet without the soft tones of her Celtic-styled theme? Arguably for the first time in the series FFIV's music wasn't just easy on the ears - it helped to tell the story.



This powerful concoction is what makes FFIV stand out and marks it as the first modern FF. It's also arguably the most influential FF title since the original.

It's no wonder the game has been ported and remade so many times. FFIV isn't just another FF game, nor is it just a historical relic; it's Final Fantasy's rite of passage and a tentpole moment in the series' legacy.

Jonathon Burke [aka Wolf Kanno] is a contributor to fan site Eyes on Final Fantasy. [eyesonff.com]

"FFIV is packed with clever ideas and brilliant execution."



FINAL FANTASY IV THE AFTER YEARS™

The fact that Final Fantasy IV was the first title from the non-3D era of the series to receive a direct sequel is, I think, telling.

It was a game ahead of its time, with a world, characters and story far in advance of its peers. It was also vitally important for FF as a series - the game sets the templates that other story-heavy greats - particular VI and VII - would follow.

That made it the perfect game, lore and universe for the developers to revisit after finding confidence for FF sequels through **FFX-2** and **FFVII: Advent Children**.

A FFIV sequel was also ideal for the company to experiment within a rapidly-expanding, lucrative market: episodic-based mobile games. Japan was ahead of the curve here - **The After Years** launched in 2008 - and it wasn't even a trend setter.



Ceodore acts as lead, meeting FFIV's heroes.

The concept was simple - a series of shorter episodes telling the story of FFIV's cast after the events of that game would release individually - but together they'd add up to make one full-game sized feature.

By being mobile, the game could directly reuse a chunk of the assets from the original SNES release, including sprites and music, without looking dated.

Originally Released:
December 6 1992
Available On:
SNES, PS1, GBA, Wii [VC], PSN [PS3, PSP, Vita]
Key Staff:
Takashi Tokita, Toshio Akiyama, Akira Oguro, Ichiro Tezuka, Junya Nakano

Co-developed by **Matrix Software**, the title is split into chapters for each of the FFIV cast, with most of that group receiving their own 'tale' of their adventures 17 years after saving the world.

New to the game is Ceodore, the son of FFIV hero Cecil and love interest Rosa. He's about to follow in his father's footsteps and become a member of The Red Wings - but trouble is afoot.



For a while, The After Years looked like it would be like FFVII: Before Crisis, a mobile-only released confined to Japan-only - but Square Enix's eagerness to support Nintendo's Wii platform saw them take the episodic format and repackage it as a downloadable for that console.

It's here that fans finally got their hands on a Western release - and it's worth playing. It was also later included in the PSP 'Complete Collection' FFIV package.

It's true that the game edges perhaps a little too closely to FFIV, reusing a lot of locations, combat mechanics and even thematic story beats, but The After Years is still a must-play for any fan of FFIV.

It's a nostalgia-driven trip down memory lane. It's no revolution, but nor did it need to be - for many, merely revisiting this world and these characters is enough.



Takashi Tokita The Retro-style King

Credited: FFIII (1990), FFIV, FFVII, FFIV: The After Years, 4 Heroes, Dimensions (2012)

Now: Producer, FF Dimensions



Amongst some of the other heavyweight names associated with Final Fantasy, Takashi Tokita is almost always too easily forgotten. He's been a vital piece in the machine of FF production at Square Enix since **FFIII**, and deserves more recognition.

Like many key to the success and survival of FF in the modern era, Tokita's beginnings were humble - he was involved in the production of FFIII's sound effects, a role he'd also filled on Square's **Rad Racer II**.

He must have impressed somebody greatly with his work in that limited area, as a year later he found himself as the Lead Designer of **FFIV**, working closely alongside another future great, **Hiroiyuki Ito**, who was Battle System Designer.

Tokita took a break from FF to work on projects including 1994's **Live A Live** and the much-loved **Chrono Trigger** in 1995, but returned to **FFVII** as an Event Planner. It's here that Tokita's involvement with main-line FF titles comes to an abrupt and strange stop - though he was placed in vital roles for other Square titles.

He served as Director and provided a good deal of the story for **Parasite Eve** and was a special advisor on its sequel before being put in the Director's seat for **The Bouncer**, an attempt at a new PS2 franchise. Between those two titles Tokita briefly returned to the FF series to direct Chocobo Racing - but he'd soon be making a more full-time return to the series where he cut his teeth.

As someone with experience working on the retro FFs, Tokita was made Producer and head of Design on **Dawn of Souls**, the Game Boy Advance ports of **FFI** and **FFII**. Success there led to him supervising **FFIV Advance**, the port of the game he first held a major role on.

FFIV would follow Tokita around for some time yet, for he then worked on **FFIV DS**, the Nintendo DS sequel, and **FFIV: The After Years**, the Mobile and Wii-based sequels to that title. He'd also go on to supervise the PSP version of the game.

After several ports and remakes, Tokita got his first shot at making a 'new' old-school FF as Director of The Four Warriors of Light, a DS-based game that was all-new but closely resembled old-school FF.

That game didn't set charts alight, but Tokita is now working as Producer on **FF Dimensions**, a mobile-based episodic title which plays like a new SNES FF, complete with a similar graphical style and a version of FFV's job system. Hopefully Tokita will one day make a triumphant return to the core of the series.



FINAL FANTASY V

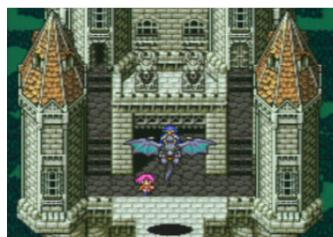
ファイナルファンタジーV™

With console RPGs still getting their bearings in the West, many great games were passed by for an English translation in the SNES era. The list of untranslated greats was enormous, but perhaps the most egregious of all was **Final Fantasy V**.

In the wake of **FFIV**, which had a decidedly character-driven story, Square decided to return to seeds planted back with **FFIII** to build what may be the grandest adventure the FF series has ever seen.

FFV opens with a view of Tycoon Castle accompanied by a somber theme. The camera pans to show a dragon roosting on the ramparts, and a man clad in blue approaching. As the dragon cries, a young girl runs after her father, the king, begging him to stay. He leaves anyway - concerned for the safety of the wind crystal.

He mounts the dragon and rides toward the sky as his concerned daughter waves him farewell. The scene changes; we then see a pirate captain standing aboard a ship, hair blowing in the wind. Suddenly, the wind stops. Elsewhere, an old man standing before a vortex begins to panic, but we cut back to the princess at the castle. Concerned about her father, she sets off to find him.



At the wind shrine the king enters the crystal room a moment too late -- the music reaches its climax and the crystal shatters. In a forest, a man and his chocobo companion are at rest - but a meteor comes crashing down from above toward the mountains to the east. Nodding to his companion, the pair set out.

These scenes set the tone and scope for the most ambitious story undertaking Square had ever tried; a grand adventure spanning multiple worlds.

Despite this, many fans consider FFV to have one of the weakest stories in the series. Perhaps that's because it's told in a light-hearted, carefree way. Indeed, some of the dialogue in FFV is so hokey that a laugh track may not seem entirely out of place.

Originally Released:
December 6 1992

Available On:
SNES, PS1, GBA, Wii [VC], PSN [PS3, PSP, Vita]

Key Staff:
Hironobu Sakaguchi, Yoshitaka Amano, Nobuo Uematsu, Hiroyuki Ito, Yoshinori Kitase, Akihiko Matsui, Ken Narita

Article by: Brianna Tierney

With that said, it's in this area that some of FFV's brilliance begins to shine through. The game shows a brilliant understanding of the idea that you can tell a compelling story without being melodramatic. Much of FFV maintains a wonderful contrast between sincerity and humor. This contrast is precisely why certain events such as Lenna's sacrifice for an ailing dragon or Galuf's death hit the player so hard.

From the game's onset the goal seems simple enough and entirely clear: ensure the protection of the remaining crystals so that they don't share the wind crystal's fate. Things unfortunately don't go even remotely to plan. The player party repeatedly fails in their task.

In the end all of the crystals shatter, the villainous Exdeath is released from his prison and flees to Galuf's homeland, and the curtain falls on the first act.



From here the game picks up a decidedly different flavor and quickly becomes more exciting, with brand new worlds (and dimensions!) to explore and new characters to meet, including Exdeath's lackey Gilgamesh.

His introduction serves as a nice layer of comic relief, and his lovably misguided shenanigans and over-the-top ego have earned him his place as one of the most popular characters in the series to this day.

When FFV comes up in conversation the odds are good that the topic is its gameplay systems - and one in particular. FFV's job system might very well be the real star of this classic.



The brainchild of **Hiroyuki Ito**, the father of the ATB system, the job system is a fairly clever extension of the system started in FFIII. Capacity points were kicked to the curb, and it became possible to designate a secondary ability from those you've earned by leveling other jobs.

This allows the player to create many interesting combinations, from a barehanded powerhouse of a white mage to a dancing knight and beyond.

This level of freedom has led to many fans imposing job restrictions on themselves for an increased challenge, and even to an annual Child's Play charity event called the Final Fantasy Five Four Job Fiesta (organized by Eric "RevenantKioku" Koziol) wherein a computer randomly chooses one job from each crystal for every player and the player must endeavor to finish the game using only those four jobs.

One of the main reasons why this system is able to work so well is that the balance of the game is nearly a work of art in its own right. Unlike FFIII, which had a fair number of bosses that expected you to change your party to certain jobs, FFV's encounters are all designed in such a way that with enough ingenuity it should be possible to persevere through any of them with any spread of jobs.

Each job brings something uniquely valuable to the table, and many of the abilities synergize in unexpected ways.

Being the last FF game directed by Hironobu Sakaguchi, FFV also finds itself representing the end of an era.

Although FF has gone on to produce many classics, it's often difficult to feel like something hasn't been lost over the years, something replaying FFV underlines. For me FFV represents the height of the series in its purest form. I truly believe Square Enix would do well to take a good look back before their next leap forward.

Brianna Tierney [[@aeana](#)] is a Japanese Teacher and a mainstay of the FF and DQ communities on [NeoGAF.com](#).

"FFV represents the height of the series in its purest form"





Originally Released: April 2 1994
Available On: SNES, PS1, GBA, PSN [PS3, PSP, Vita], Wii [VC]
Key Staff: Hironobu Sakaguchi, Hiroyuki Ito, Yoshinori Kitase, Yoshitaka Amano, Ken Narita, Nobuo Uematsu, Tetsuya Nomura, Hideo Minaba
Article by: Erin Jenison

FINAL FANTASY VI

Final Fantasy VI is my childhood. I was raised on this game. It essentially has it all: the largest cast of characters in all of the main series, an emotional story and the time tested brilliant battle system. It's fondly remembered for very good reasons.

While the large cast of characters did cause the game to lack in character back-stories, what each brings to the table makes it a worthwhile trade.



You begin as Terra - Tina in Japan - a brain-washed Magitek Soldier. She's been manipulated into attacking a village, killing many, but early on all but the most cold-hearted will gain sympathy for her.

She's the usual Japanese RPG amnesiac teenager but with more depth, and has been twisted into using her Esper powers for the evil empire led by the Emperor Gestahl, who himself is being manipulated by the psychotic, one-liner-spouting clown Kefka.

From there the epic cast files in - Locke, a thief - or rather, treasure hunter - who's had everything he's loved stolen by the Empire; Edgar, a king seemingly siding with the Empire but actually with the Returners resistance and Sabin, Edgar's brother, a complete muscle-head. Terra affectionately calls him a bear.

Nobuo Uematsu got a chance to weave his music further into the narrative with the unforgettable "Maria and Draco" opera, the crowning achievement of a masterpiece of a soundtrack that features classics like the character-defining 'Terra', the soulful 'Coin Song' and the suitably frantic 'Decisive Battle' for boss encounters.



"It's a game for the ages, a stellar example of Japanese RPGs and FF at their best - and the one that will forever be my personal favorite."

Other classic moments are countless; Kefka poisoning an entire castle, battling Ultros, and making peace with the Espers in the village of Thamasa only for Kefka to show up and wreck havoc, leading to the death of one of the most honorable characters in the series, General Leo.

The story hurtles on, with a treacherous Kefka and Emperor Gestahl obtaining the Warring Triad- the source of all magic in the world.

Kefka kills Gestahl and sets in motion a chain of events that see that the destruction of the world is inevitable - a FF villain finally succeeds in his goals! Is it any wonder many consider him the best FF villain?

Shadow, another of the cast, jumps in and proceeds to try to trap Kefka, now essentially a god, to allow you to escape.

The crew battles through hordes of magical creatures only to be faced with a game-altering choice over a decade before Mass Effect made them cool - jump and save yourselves or wait for Shadow in the hope that he makes it too.

At this point the game shifts in tone; the world is in ruin. Celes, a former general of the Empire and another of your number, has been asleep since the disaster happened. Cid, also ex-Empire, has cared for her - but he is growing exceptionally ill.

Again there's choice, Cid's fate determined by your actions. If you fail him, you're slammed with one of the most emotional scenes in the game. Alone and in complete desperation, Celes can throw herself off a cliff, attempting suicide.

This is one of the scenes that helps to solidify FFVI as my favorite. The sense of lost hope conveyed is incredible - even though Celes miraculously survives the fall. Incredibly, all this is accomplished with just sprites and text.



Celes eventually finds hope, a core theme of the game: a renewed hope for a better world.

FFVI's story embraces a huge range of emotions and tackles impressively mature subject matter for a 1994 title including Celes' attempted suicide.

The beauty of the game is that it also embraces beautiful emotions, too - love, doing anything for your true love, and the terrible pain of the loss of family.

Aside from the most involving story of the series on release, FFVI also bought gameplay elements to the table that would deeply affect subsequent titles.

No longer are skills bought or learned at certain levels; FFVI's system has you learning magic by equipping Espers, a system that has shades of many of the subsequent ability systems.

There's depth here that at the time was revolutionary in the series and the wider RPG genre. Natural evolution of these mechanics would go on to birth FFVII's Materia, FFVIII's GFs and beyond.

FFVI marked a huge sea-change for the series. The last major 2D title and the last numbered FF for a Nintendo machine (for now), FFVI is a vital moment in the progression of the series.



More than that, it's a game for the ages, a stellar example of Japanese RPGs and FF at their best - and the one that will forever be my personal favorite.

Did I mention the track for the final boss clocks in at about seventeen minutes long? If that doesn't scream epic, then I'm not quite sure what does.

Erin Jenison [[@rinimt](#)] is the owner of the fan site 'Final Fantasy and More.' [[ffandmore.com](#)]

One unique aspect of **Final Fantasy VI** and one of its biggest triumphs is its inclusion of two related, yet separate and noticeably different overworlds. This was a big deal back on the SNES. These disparate worlds are generally referred to as the "World of Balance" and the "World of Ruin".

As the less ominous of the two, the game begins in the World of Balance. Like any FF setting it has its fair share of problems which make it a less-than-perfect place to live - but for the most part it's a pretty decent steam-punk sort of planet with a few goddess statues keeping things in order. There are definitely worse places to live.

About halfway through the game, things get bad. Kefka moves the statues, throwing off the planet's balance in the process. That relatively peaceful setting is thrown into chaos. The terrain is altered dramatically, entire landmasses collapse into the Earth, and humanity's numbers are cut down to a fraction of what they once were. The player is catapulted into a post-apocalyptic world where little hope remains. Even the once-blue sky now bears a dark, grim orange-red hue.

While story events may alter specific areas and lock the player out in other FFs, never is it on a worldwide scale like here. Dealing with death and loss isn't a foreign concept either, but no other villain has succeeded to the extent Kefka does. He actually follows through on promises of worldwide destruction. Many were shocked to actually see the villain achieve such a victory, something mostly unheard of. So what Sephiroth killed Aerith? Kefka ruined the whole planet!

The feeling of despair is only compounded by events that follow, the most memorable being Celes' tragic tale of caring for the bed-ridden Cid, potentially leading to a tear-jerking suicide attempt. Scenes like this drastically adjust the pacing of the story, too. While Balance is mostly linear, Ruin gives the player a lot more freedom. The scattered party can be retrieved in almost any order, or even ignored entirely.

Pacing like this is very difficult to pull off, more often than not feeling disjointed. One reason it works so well is that much of rebuilding the party expands on the character stories set up in the World of Balance. Locke's lover Rachel, Gau's father, Cyan's guilt; none of it feels forced or inappropriate. These plot threads were put on hold in the first half, while the main plot is put on hold in the second half.

Even when ignoring the story, the sharp contrast between the two parts is clearly defined by altered areas. Exploring a town in each world really highlights the difference. Seeing all the devastation and how the lives of the NPCs have changed makes for some great world building.

The one year time-skip is also tonally important. Recovery and rebuilding are prominent themes, neither of which would work very well if we were thrown back into the pandemonium immediately. Seeing how the world is coping after a decent period of time is important. Some towns were completely wiped off the Earth, while others actually prospered in the wake of disaster. It's an incredibly progressive piece of video game story design - and FFVI's greatest asset.

The mention of Pandora's Box early in the game only drives this point home. Even when things are at their worst, there will always be that one little ray of hope to believe in. This makes it much more satisfying when the characters do finally attain their well-earned happy ending.

By David Kreinberg, a contributor on RPGSite.net and a 'brolicious' writer on NeoGAF spoof game 'Dudebro II' [grimoireassemblyforge.com/dudebro2]



CELES: No...NO!
You promised you'd stay here
with me!!



Ken Narita

The Classics' Codesmith

Credited: FFIII (1990), FFIV, FFV, FFVI, FFVII, FFVIII, FFX, FFXI, FFXII (2006)

Now: Programmer at Square Enix



For some reason, Ken Narita's name doesn't crop up as much as it should. He was as instrumental to the success of FF as many names we hear daily these days and could be considered one of the company's most valuable employees - but he remains low-profile.

Why is he so important? One only has to look at his resume to get an idea of precisely how important he was. Initially simply credited under Special Thanks for **FFIII**, Narita burst into the series with a major role for **FFIV** - Lead Programmer. **FFV** saw him handle Field Programming, while **FFVI**, **FFVII** and **FFVIII** all saw him contribute in the absolutely vital role of Main Programmer.

For **FFX** Narita stepped back, handing the keyboard for coding to others to simply act as Programming Supervisor. He contributed to MMO **FFXI** in several ways. **FFXII** saw him take one more step into management as the Line Coordinator - but the influence he would've had is still undeniable.

Aside from minor credits in spin-offs and remakes, Narita has been quiet since FFXII. Here's hoping he rears his head soon.

Hideo Minaba

FF's lesser-known artistic genius

Credited: FFV (1992), FFVI, FFT, FFX, FFTA, FFXII, FFXIII-2 (2011)

Now: Co-Founder at Designation, Freelance Artist



A fairly impressive suite of artists have contributed to FF, though some names we hear more than most. One that deserves to be heard more is that of Hideo Minaba, a major artistic influence over some of FF's best entries, but still underrated.

Minaba's first brush with FF came with **FFV**, where he was one of the staff providing the Field Graphics - stuff outside of battle. He found himself stepping up to a much larger role in **FFVI**, acting as Art Director for the massive title.

While most of Square worked on FFVII, Minaba was part of the crack team designated the task of creating a new type of FF with **FF Tactics** as its Art Supervisor, a role he'd reprise in **Tactics Advance**. **FFIX** saw him return to the role of Art Director - and he also provided the main designs for Zidane, Garnet, Kuja and Beatrix. For **FFXII** he partnered with **Isamu Kamikokuryo** as joint Art Director.

After **FFXII** Minaba departed Square Enix to start his own art company, Designation. He still provides freelance art, and is behind some characters and costumes in **FFXIII-2** and **Dissidia**.

FINAL FANTASY VII

ファイナルファンタジーVII

Originally Released:

January 31 1997

Available On:

PS1, PC, PSN (PS3, PSP, Vita)

Key Staff:

Hironobu Sakaguchi, Yoshinori Kitase, Tetsuya Nomura, Nobuo Uematsu, Kazushige Nojima, Yusuke Naora, Ken Narita, Masato Kato

Article by: Erren Van Duine



Let's get it out of the way up top: **Final Fantasy VII** represented a turning point for the franchise. It's also arguably the most popular FF to date. It single-handedly propelled Squaresoft to superstardom - but that success didn't come quickly or easily.

Originally planned as a SNES title set in 1999 New York City, the game eventually landed on PlayStation, the team eager to use the emerging CD-ROM format due to its large storage capacity. With Sony's backing and a 100 million dollar marketing campaign, FFVII went on to be one of the best-selling games of all time, and has since enjoyed multiple sequels and spin-offs.

FFVII represents a technological leap, but does retain one major piece of 2D FF's legacy - its battle system. The game makes use of the time-tested Active Time Battle system, simplifying affairs by limiting parties to a total of three characters which can be switched out at save points or on the overworld.

All-new was Materia, magical orbs that allowed access to spells, summons and other abilities by placing them into slots on weapons and accessories. Materia could be found all over the world including at shops or in drops from defeated enemies.

Another new feature was the Limit Break, a modified version of **FFVI's** desperation attack. Each character has a limit bar next to their normal ATB gauge that fills as a character takes damage. By completely filling it, a character can perform a powerful, unique and cinematic attack.



FFVII once again places a large importance on the narrative and its colorful cast of characters as they adventure through the world. While it lacks **FFV's** job system, it does well to give each character their own identity so players can pick and choose which they'd rather keep close across the different situations that arise during the story. As the game progresses, the player is given much freedom to explore and scripted scenes change slightly depending on who is with you.

Characterization is arguably FFVII's strong point - though not just in its cast, but its world, too. FFVII begins with an unforgettable panning view of a vast industrialized city - a stark contrast to the steampunk town of Narshe that opened **FFVI**. This world is advanced much like our own. Not only do the people use items like cellphones, firearms, and cars, but they also face many real world problems.

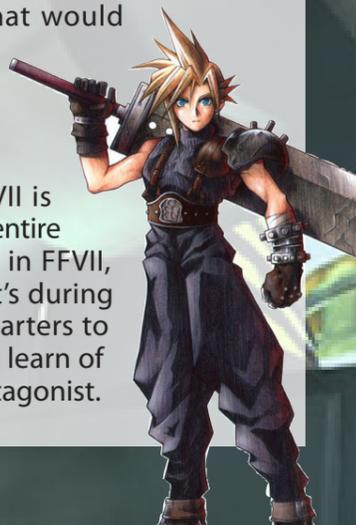
The city of Midgar, ran by the world-controlling Shinra Company, is the center of the world's strife. Electric power is drawn from the very life force of the planet by Shinra - and is damaging it. As the world's perpetual ruler, President Shinra further spreads darkness upon the land in the form of horrific experiments and other ill-conceived deeds.

Enter AVALANCHE. Branded as terrorists, they lead a mission to bring a stop to Shinra's wrong doings. Led by the often rash Barret Wallace, this rag-tag band of recruits hire a man by the name of Cloud Strife who claims to be a former SOLDIER First Class - an elite group within Shinra's own ranks.

The result is a high-octane opening that sees the cast carrying out a terrorist attack. It's brave and bold - FFVII is more than a little bit punk. More missions follow, but don't go to plan, leading Cloud into the path of Aerith, FF's most famous heroine.

Aerith is also being pursued by Shinra. She's the last descendent of the Cetra - ancient people who were attuned to the planet. Shinra believe that only she can lead them to the Promised Land - a land of immense Mako energy that would bestow them with even greater power. Cloud agrees to protect her - and chases after her when she's captured.

The funny thing about FFVII is that all this is enough to be the entire plot of any other game - but in FFVII, this is just the introduction. It's during the assault on Shinra headquarters to rescue Aerith that players first learn of Sephiroth - the game's true antagonist.



Sephiroth, a Shinra super-soldier, also wants the Planet and the Promised Land, considering them his inheritance. His powers were imbued through the cells of Jenova - an alien being that battled the Cetra.



The conclusion to the assault on Shinra opens up the vast world beyond. As you see the horizon for the first time, one can't help but be mesmerized by the scale of it all. Who would have thought that the game takes place in more than just Midgar?

From here adventure unravels quickly with one of FF's most dynamic and exciting stories. With an incredible ensemble cast including the foul-mouthed Cid, upbeat Yuffie, mysterious Vincent and ever-loyal Tifa, the cast is unforgettable. Even the supporting cast, such as Shinra's Turks, are some of FF's best.

For many FFVII represents the beginning or the high-point of a golden age - the most significant era of FF and Square's life to date. While fans continue to argue over which FF is the best one, there is at least one common truth: without FFVII, the series wouldn't be where it is today.

For me, FFVII represents something that is timeless as it continues to be enjoyed across generations. There's just something truly magical about the game that transcends its poor translation and now aged graphics and gameplay systems. It even outlasts major changes in society and gaming itself.

FFVII took a lot of risks with its themes of terrorism and death, even in a fantasy setting - something Square Enix has really struggled with since. This, one of the most naively developed FFs, strangely remains one of the most adult titles in the series - which is impressive and commendable.



Its fascinating take on a world of oppression is shown wonderfully through the struggles of the cast in moments of drama, sacrifice, and even those tongue-in-cheek moments that break up the mood. Simply put, FFVII is a masterpiece. Its emotional grip keeps me coming back to it 15 years on.

It will always be one of my favorite JRPGs, if not the best FF of all time. I will always view it as a step in the right direction, exuding the core values that the series should strive to embody in the future.

By Erren Van Duine [[@ErrenVanDuine](#)], **US Editor of RPG Site and Owner of blog Nova Crystallis.** [[novacrystallis.com](#)] [[rpgsite.net](#)]

"Simply put, FFVII is a masterpiece."



While **Squall** and **Zidane** have it simple, **Cloud's** love life is complicated. The 'love triangle' between **Cloud**, **Aerith** and **Tifa** has been a topic of much debate amongst **Final Fantasy VII** fans - and hides intriguing stories of how it evolved through development.

Life and Death

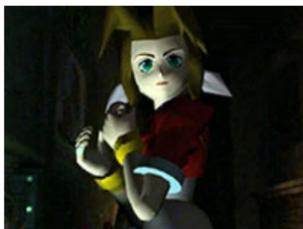
To get a full picture we'll need to dive back into FFVII's development - where, early on, Tifa didn't exist. It's not hard to believe considering that Aerith has objectively all the characteristics of the feminine protagonist of an RPG - pretty, feminine, physically weak, strong with spells and special within the plot.

Aerith was designed alongside Cloud and Barret as one of the original three leads of FFVII. Despite being at the very core of FFVII even early on, **Tetsuya Nomura** has said she was always intended to die, even when she was one of only three planned characters.

"We knew even in the early concept stage that one character would have to die. But we only had three to choose from," he told games magazine EGM. "I mean, Cloud's the main character, so you can't really kill him. And Barret... well, that's maybe too obvious. But we had to pick between Aerith and Barret."

"We debated this for a long time, but in the end decided to sacrifice Aerith ... In the previous FF games, it became almost a signature theme for one character to sacrifice him or herself, and often it was a similar character type from game to game, kind of a brave, last-man-standing, Barret-type character. So everyone expected that."

"I think that death should be something sudden and unexpected, and Aerith's death seemed more natural and realistic. Now, when I reflect on FFVII, the fact that fans were so offended by her sudden death probably means that we were successful with her character. If fans had simply accepted her death, that would have meant she wasn't an effective character."



Motomu Toriyama had a great hand in writing and directing the scenes between Cloud and Aerith, revealed that the death changed how he decided to write her.

"The idea of having Aerith die during the story had a great impact on all the dev staff", Toriyama explained, "Personally I decided to dedicate my efforts to depicting Aerith in as appealing a way as possible, so that she would become an irreplaceable character to the player in preparation for that moment."

Aerith's death wasn't just an arbitrary tug at the heart strings - it was a vital part of FFVII's theme. "To tell you the truth, FFVII's theme was 'life'. We had instructions from Mr.



Sakaguchi saying 'More than depicting life in the theme, you have to depict life and death,' Nomura explained.

"With the death of a character, we wanted to have the player feel pain. So to do so, portraying the death of the heroine Aerith would be the most painful and important/heavy [on the emotions]. So, to portray death properly, it was decided that we would show Aerith's death."

The death was intended to be proper, meaty drama the like of which FF had never seen before. "In the real world things are very different," **Yoshinori Kitase** said in 2003. "People die of disease and accident. Death comes suddenly and there is no notion of good or bad. It leaves not a dramatic feeling but great emptiness."

"When you lose someone you loved very much you feel this big empty space and think, 'If I had known this was coming I would have done things differently.' These are the feelings I wanted to arouse in the players with Aerith's death relatively early in the game. Feelings of reality and not Hollywood."

Creating a story, especially one with many characters, means putting your ideas together with those from the people with whom you are working but - as some creative artists know well - the inventive process is extremely personal.

Nomura's Favorite Daughter

Nomura designed Cloud by idealizing himself. The two share certain personality traits, tastes and even manner of speaking. Nomura built a more tormented, cool and novelized version of himself - and it worked.

Once completed, Aerith didn't satisfy him either for appearance or for her intended role in FFVII's story at the time.

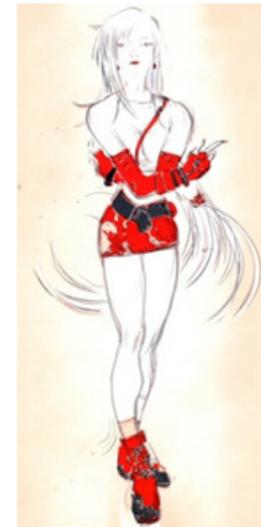
He started working on Tifa based on the type of woman who was, according to him, the ideal for Cloud, just as he later created Rinoa as the perfect partner for Squall.



It's easy to see why Tifa was his favorite: early in his career at Square he produced so many sketches of long-haired, curvy girls that staff teased him about it.

Paired with comments in a Japanese FFVII interview, this led to the belief that Nomura orchestrated Aerith's death to aid his favored character. "On a Sunday evening, I phoned the director Mr. Kitase and suggested 'Let's kill Aerith and bring out Tifa,'" he admitted.

To Aerith fans this was tantamount to murder, and subsequently Nomura has been evasive on the topic. "There are people who believe that I thought of the scenario where Aerith dies, and I've had some rather strong attacks from some," he said. "In a strategy guide interview the core part was left out, and only the joke bit ended up being published. I told them 'hey, that's not right', but it was too late. I suddenly became the villain of the FF staff!"



"On a Sunday evening, I phoned the director Mr. Kitase and suggested 'Let's kill Aerith and bring out Tifa.'"
- Tetsuya Nomura

"It's funny, some magazine ran that story, but only the beginning and ending of it. People think that I wanted to kill off Aerith and replace her with Tifa as the main character! (Laughs) The actual conversation between Mr. Kitase and myself was very, very long."

Though Nomura stresses that Aerith or Tifa is down to player choice, his answer is clear - Tifa. The FFVII 10th Anniversary Ultimania interviews also reveal a stunning fact - Cloud and Tifa alone on the Highwind before the final battle was originally more suggestive.

Following a fade, Cloud and Tifa would exit the ship's Chocobo stable, Tifa checking around to see if anyone had seen them - the obvious implication being that the two spent their last night together. This idea was rejected for being too "extreme".

Design Differences

Aerith's design was influenced more heavily by Kitase, **Hironobu Sakaguchi** and **Yoshitaka Amano**. The most prominent traits were a long braid, a tube dress with fluffy sleeves, bare shoulders, fingerless gloves, a fringe of hair and a staff as a weapon.



Coloring is absent from Amano's Aerith designs apart from blonde hair and the pink dress, but the core of her is still there. The general idea was classical, feminine and delicate but also mysterious.

During early plans for the game Aerith was to have the Geomancer job class. Though the final product has no job system, Aerith's Limit Breaks manifest as her drawing power from the earth, a typical trait of Geomancers. It was also considered that Sephiroth and Aerith would be brother and sister, a connection hinted in their similar hairstyles.

Aerith's design was intended to suggest her deficiency in physical combat while Tifa's suggests the opposite. Amano's take on Tifa featured red as the dominant color. Nomura didn't know if she should wear a skirt or shorts, and decided via a staff survey.

The differences between the pair's appearances perfectly describes the kind of characters they are.

The 'Real' FFVII

A lot of people use this process where Tifa evolved from Aerith over time to suggest that 'in the real game - the original game - Aerith didn't have to die'. This isn't true - the project and plot evolved - and the end result is the real game. The discs you own are the intended story - not the sketches, notes and anecdotes of developers.

Taking the female lead and splitting her in two was for the good of the story. Can you imagine a combination of the two? A sweet, stubborn, strong but fragile, nice, pretty girl, with mysterious powers, sometimes a little insistent but always ready to bring a smile in the group and on the lips of the hero. A Mary Sue, basically. Or Rinoa.

The structure of the first disc hinges on her death, as does Aerith's character arc. She'd have risked becoming monotonous over a longer period - her charm would've become her flaw. She was built to be loved and lost - while Tifa has subtler, more diluted characterisation - she's built to last longer.

Whichever you prefer, FFVII can be proud to boast two heroines who carry the game on their backs at two different times.

By **Stefano Gennari** (@zellfantasy), Owner of Italian fan site **Zell Fantasy**. [zellfantasy.it]

In recent years it has become impossible to mention **Final Fantasy VII** without unleashing a torrent of comments regarding the fabled remake.

Since the launch of the PS3 and especially on the eve of E3 or Tokyo Game Show the same story travels the web and drones on like a broken record. Could a FFVII remake be Square Enix's elephant in the room?

The Birth of a Myth

Each of FF's fourteen episodes are unique and exciting adventures. Though the first five titles are more simplistic in their approach, they still feature innovative gameplay. With **FFVI** things shifted, and the series started focusing with laser precision on thrilling experiences and State of the Art technology.

FFVII still stands as the undisputed fan favorite in a sea of classics for numerous reasons. This adventure was the first on PlayStation, featuring stunning 3D graphics and for the first time released worldwide. For millions it was their entry gate to the world of Japanese RPGs - and that's memorable.

Cloud and his friends also became iconic characters. The charismatic group carried an intense storyline at the crossroads of ecology and economic supremacy, themes that were rarely dealt with in video games at the time. Put simply, this was a special release.

Thus, FFVII deserves its status as a masterpiece. When it was eventually released on the PlayStation Store, it was met with tremendous and immediate success: more than 100,000 downloads during the first fortnight in North America. Even today, it stands among the most downloaded titles on the Store.

This success only demonstrates how popular the game still is, but this is quite paradoxical nevertheless: if the original title is still profiting 15 years later, is a remake really as necessary as some would think?

In a way, it proves that the game still has what it takes for gamers to enjoy it, even if it is just out of nostalgia. More than graphics alone, FFVII's real appeal comes from the unique atmosphere of its world, meaning a graphical upgrade is not required to appreciate it.

When fans are toyed with

Could it be that Square Enix is at fault here, not only because they launched the Compilation of FFVII, renewing interest in FFVII, but also because their communication on the matter is lacking? Square Enix's guilt is in leaving fans waiting for an announcement that was never set to happen.

It began in May 2005, when Sony unveiled the PS3 at E3. In order to showcase and promote their new hardware, Sony asked Square Enix to produce a demonstration. This was the norm - in 1999, Square produced a real-time FFVIII demo using PS2 hardware.

The team remade the opening sequence of FFVII using character models from Advent Children, which was still in production at the time.

It wasn't long before fans started to expect a full-scale title based on that demo. To many, such a video could only mean that an HD remake of the game was in the works.

In the weeks following E3, developers used the Japanese press to deny the rumors. In August 2005, Yoshinori Kitase explained that such a project would be too time-consuming, and Kitase's team was already hard at work on what would become **FFXIII**.

Even CEO Yoichi Wada was forced to speak on the matter when, at the launch party of **FFXII** in March 2006, the first person to buy the game asked when they would remake FFVII. He said it was being considered, nothing more - and those words caused even more speculation from fans.

Frequently asking about a remake, it seems the press don't want to acknowledge Square's admittance that the project isn't underway. Through this, the press help to maintain the illusion that it may be coming.

Every time character designer Tetsuya Nomura confirms he's attending a show or a new game is to be announced, unwarranted hopes and rumors emerge. Again, Nomura himself may be the culprit there.

In June 2007 he told Dorimaga magazine that no remake was in production, but concluded: "I'm an FFVII fan, I also want to do a remake. [...] As long as there are people who want to make it and people who are waiting for it, we don't want to proclaim 'the end'."

Reading this, it is plain that Square Enix is purposely beating around the bush. When they announced a new compilation of products related to FFVII in 2004, they knew it would kindle fans interest in their most popular world and characters.

Who knew it was possible to expand so much upon the original mythology? Using the original FFVII to build this new compilation is a clever trick, but toying with the dreams of fans through it isn't.

Upon finishing Crisis Core, the player can watch a video of FFVII's opening sequence, visually similar to the PS3 tech demo, ending with the words "to be continued in FINAL FANTASY VII".

To some, it was the clue they needed to declare a remake was in the works. It's really just to bridge the new title and the original, but the message given remains ambiguous nevertheless.

"And next? We hope to meet Final Fantasy VII again!" These words could have been written by fans on message boards online, but they actually appeared next to images of the PS3 demo in the FFVII 10th Anniversary Ultimania book, published in 2007 by BentStuff under Square Enix's direct supervision.

Remake if you dare

Is a HD version of FFVII really in development? On several recent occasions developers have confirmed that it isn't.

During the promotion campaign of FFXIII, Square Enix masterminds admitted they were surprised to hear so many questions about the remake - especially from gamers in the West.

In March 2012, Yoichi Wada said: "We're going to explore the possibility - whether or not we're going to do it, if we're going to do it, and the platform." But again, nothing came of it.

During his interviews with the press, Yoshinori Kitase has continuously said that remaking FFVII with the same level of quality as FFXIII would probably take three to four times longer - meaning more than ten years of work. He sometimes went as far as to say it would take ten times longer.

For some, such vague, polite answers are enough to announce "Final Fantasy VII remake in 10 years?" in headlines, blog posts and forums. This pattern is repeated constantly and repeatedly whenever FFVII is mentioned in interviews.

The latest developments in this long story maintain that it isn't happening. In May 2012, Tetsuya Nomura explained the main focus of Square Enix was to produce new episodes of the series, hoping to make them as good as FFVII - something he is obviously trying to achieve with FF Versus XIII.

A month later, Wada admitted that the company had thought about a remake and confessed he heard some Western studios refer to FFVII as the "dream game".

As a result of those comments he expressed concern that making such a project a reality could "kill" the series. According to him, no episode managed to be as good as FFVII - and the purpose of the series is now to try and match its critical and commercial success.

Based on all this information it seems clear tht a remake is out of question - at least for a few years.

Instead of looking at the past and waiting for something that is not bound to happen in the near future, it would be wiser to embrace the latest entries of the Final Fantasy series, a series whose goal is to continually renew itself.

Until then, Square Enix still has a lot to offer, not only with its three Japanese flagships - Final Fantasy, Dragon Quest and Kingdom Hearts - but also with new titles and their impressive slate of Western franchises.

*By Bastien Péan, Owner of French site FFRing [FFRing.com]
Translation: Jérémie Kermarrec of FFWorld [FFWorld.com]*



Like many who regard **Final Fantasy VII** as the greatest entry in the FF series, I've come to reserve a special place in my heart for its iconic cast. My feelings on Sephiroth, its evil antagonist, matches legions of fans who classify him as an all-time-great villain.



Super-human swordsmanship, a gothic, almost vampiric character design and bad-ass Latin-laced fight music all make him a much-loved, effective villain - but there's so much more to him than that.

Most will point to the on-screen assassination of heroine Aerith for propelling him to infamy, a shocking event that shook the gaming world at the time.

As someone who continues to fondly discuss FFVII and its themes at length, I've a different conclusion. While Aerith's murder was cold, it was not his most villainous act. That honor goes to his original plan: to manipulate Cloud to carry out the execution himself.

On several occasions Cloud loses control of his actions, unable to resist Sephiroth's influence. Most notably he hands over the Black Materia, thus dooming the planet.

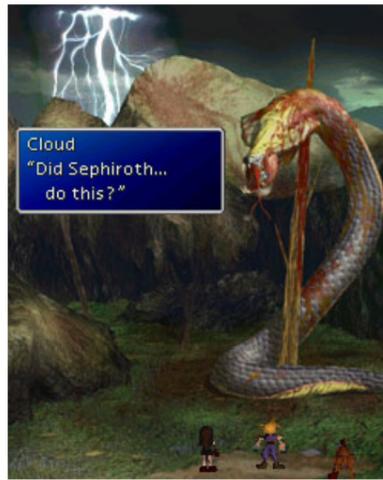


One attempt involves a brutal beat down from Cloud's bare hands that would've resulted in one of the most disturbing moments in the series were it not for the conveniently out-of-focus camera angle and barely discernible polygon models.

Cloud is spared the pain of murdering his own friend and love interest, but Sephiroth's manipulations have another effect, coloring Cloud's relationships with his allies.

The team are left wondering if and when he'll lose it completely. Even Tifa, a childhood friend, withholds the truth about his past in case it leads to his mental undoing - and in doing so worsens matters.

Materializing at whim and leaving a trail of blood in his wake, Sephiroth erred closer to a horror villain than a traditional RPG antagonist. After summoning Meteor he treads more familiar FF villain ground, but benefits from the sense of fear instilled earlier.



What's most evil about Sephiroth is that his desire wasn't to eliminate Cloud, but to break him.

Early on he could've defeated the party, but he instead relishes in tormenting Cloud at every turn, making the party question their trust in him, his aim to regress him into an obedient puppet.

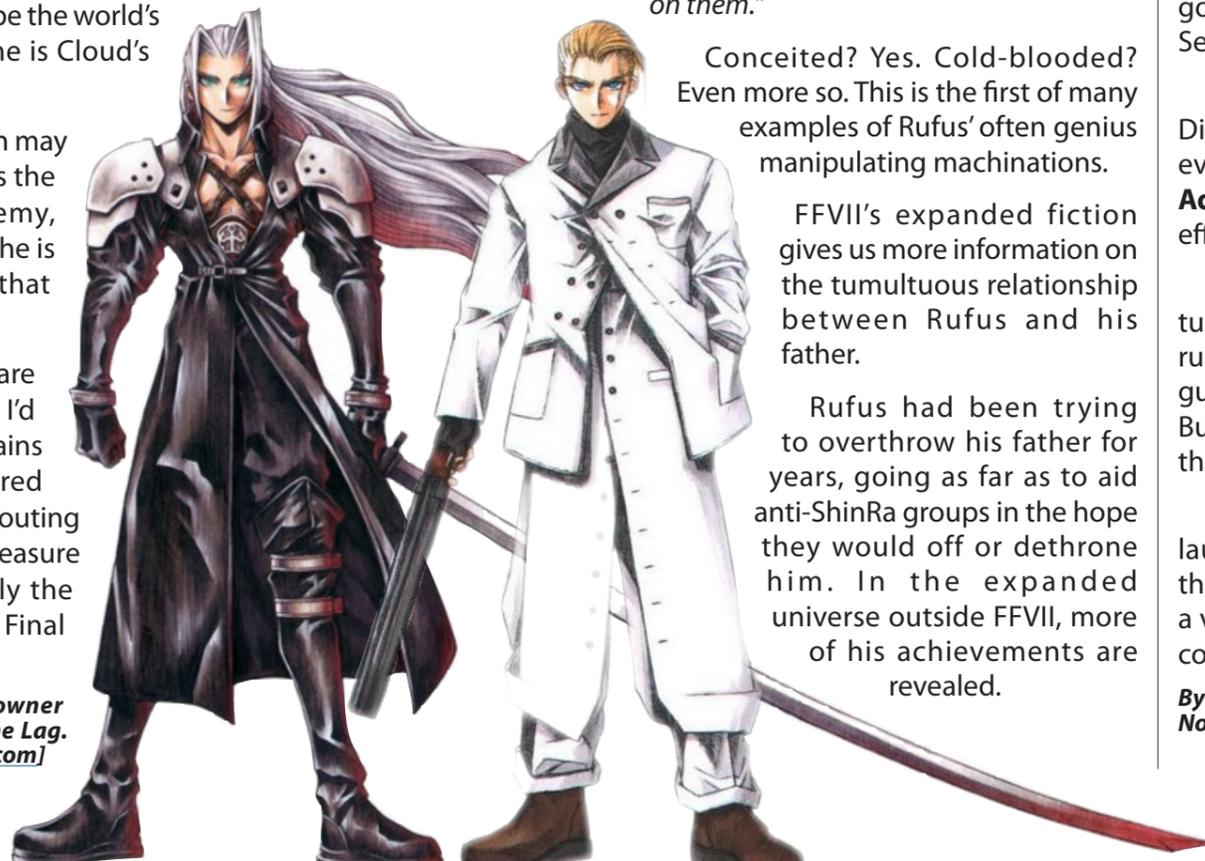
In Advent Children, Sephiroth declares his desire to bring Cloud despair. This isn't just a villainous threat - it's his core motivation. Sephiroth is by all accounts Cloud's dark opposite, both figuratively and literally.

From harming the people closest to him to seizing control of his very soul, Sephiroth's hatred of Cloud cuts deep, resulting in a conflict that defines the game. AVALANCHE, Shin-Ra, the Cetra and Jenova are all window dressing to this deeply personal battle. Sephiroth may be the world's greatest enemy, but he is Cloud's enemy first.

In the end, Sephiroth may have been regarded as the world's greatest enemy, but first and foremost he is Cloud's enemy - and that makes him effective.

Whatever plans Square Enix has left for FFVII, I'd argue that no new villains - be they wispy-haired remnants or poetry-spouting pop-stars - will ever measure up to what is arguably the greatest villain in the Final Fantasy franchise.

By Jorge S. Fernandez, owner of Gaming Blog Blame the Lag. [blamethelag.wordpress.com]



The greatest villain in the Final Fantasy series isn't some all-powerful super-soldier - he's just a normal - but privileged - man.

I'm talking about **Rufus Shinra** - the son of President Shinra, the genius businessman who created the ShinRa company in a single generation. Elitist, prideful and ambitious, he's skilled, able, and in **Final Fantasy VII** shows a ruthless, calculated villainy **Sephiroth** lacks.

One of the most exciting and memorable moments of FFVII is Sephiroth's raged killing spree through ShinRa Headquarters. Yet the trail of blood left by the super-soldier isn't the most cruel and cold thing in this chain of events - it's Rufus' reaction.

His father dead in his Presidential Chair at Sephiroth's hands, Rufus is cold and uncaring. "I'll let you hear my new appointment speech," he boasts, spitting distance from his father's corpse.

"...My old man tried to control the world with money. It seems to have been working. The population thought that Shinra would protect them. Work at Shinra, get your pay. If a terrorist attacks, the Shinra army will help you."



"It looks perfect on the outside. But, I do things differently. I'll control the world with fear. It takes too much to do it like my old man. A little fear will control the minds of the common people. There's no reason to waste money on them."

Conceited? Yes. Cold-blooded? Even more so. This is the first of many examples of Rufus' often genius manipulating machinations.

FFVII's expanded fiction gives us more information on the tumultuous relationship between Rufus and his father.

Rufus had been trying to overthrow his father for years, going as far as to aid anti-ShinRa groups in the hope they would off or dethrone him. In the expanded universe outside FFVII, more of his achievements are revealed.



Risky moves placed him at the head of a corporate embezzlement scandal - the funding of a terrorist organization out to destroy his father's company. Despite this he rises to Vice President and gains the absolute loyalty of the Turks - ShinRa's elite assassin force - before FFVII even begins.

It's quite an accomplishment for a man in his twenties - and one without any special cells inserted into his blood. Even his father knew of his brilliance - which is why he was spared despite his betrayal in **Before Crisis**.

The careful game of corporate chess behind FFVII where a terrified President Shinra fears his son's influence but also fears jettisoning him entirely is one of the most interesting stories in the game.

Most interesting of all Rufus shows something many FF antagonists do not - shades of grey. He's not simply good or evil, and begrudgingly joins the battle against Sephiroth whilst still opposing Cloud's crew.

We last see his office being blasted to smithereens by Diamond Weapon with him in it, but he survives. The events of **On the Way to a Smile: Case of Shinra** and **Advent Children** reveal how he escaped and shows the effect of FFVII's end-game from his perspective.

Infected with Geostigma, Rufus gathers the Turks and turns to Cloud for help, working this time to return the ruined world to its former glory. Here he seems a good guy, completely helpful - and he is honest in his motive... But his careful, manipulative handling of events shows that the same man lies beneath.

Rufus isn't your cardboard cut out, maniacally laughing villain stereotype - and it's easy to imagine that in the unseen corners of his heart he perhaps sees a vision of the world restored - but also under the safe control of the rejuvenated Shinra Company...

By Erren Van Duine [@Nova_Crystallis], Editor of RPG Site and Nova Crystallis. [rpgsite.net / novacrystallis.com]

The reasons behind it can be many, but the creators of a game almost always leave behind unused code. It's the gaming 'cutting room floor,' and **FFVII** is a stellar example - it contains many interesting rooms, scenes and battles not utilized in the final game.

Unlocked via cheat devices or fan-made editors, the sequences offer incredible insight into the game's production and fuel the imagination. We've rounded up some of our favorites for you.

Aerith Lives - and other lines that shouldn't exist

We've all heard the rumors and stories of Aerith surviving - all rubbish, of course - but in places the game teases that such talk may not be completely unfounded.

After her death, the party visits Icicle Village. In a bizarre change of tone from sombre mourning, the crew snowboard down a lengthy slope. Aerith, dead, obviously can't be present - but has dialogue in some of these scenes if cheated into the party. "I'm sick of this," she says. Being dead isn't all it's cracked up to be.



Unlocking Aerith after her death often causes the game to freeze; this event is an exception. Was this part of an earlier design where she could survive, or was this incident once before her death?

It's important to keep in mind that scenes were choreographed by a little less than a dozen people. By looking at the game code and the debug rooms, another hidden part of the game, we can tell who did what.

The Great Glacier was the handiwork of **Kazuhiko Yoshioka**, an event planner who wasn't responsible for Icicle Village or the Northern Crater, two areas notable for being places where Aerith doesn't exist in code at all.

Aerith isn't the only character to have lines where she shouldn't. Yuffie has a reaction to the impaled Midgar Zolom - an incredibly 90s "Geez Louise" - while Cid can react to Cloud accounting the story of Nibelheim.

Neither of the pair can be in the party at these points of the story without cheating.



Are these merely mistakes by event planners, thoroughness in design or remnants of a design phase when characters were recruited in a different order? Speculating on cut content is a complex business.

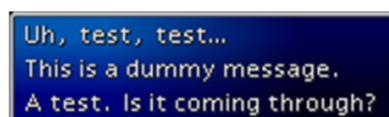
Stepping back in time

Looking at the text hidden in the game's code can be like watching the game being made. The event planners would use placeholder notes when debugging, and this offers insight into their process.

We find for example the line "To the Route Map Screen" for when Jessie shows Cloud the map displaying Midgar's railway system. The Midgar train also has the note "This is the end of Test Play," indicating the point at which no more events had yet been written.

Another string of text inside Aerith's Church reads "Temporary Stopper - October 7" - and likely represents a pause in production in October 1996. Such notes were translated by the localization team in bulk - they didn't worry to check if the lines in the code actually appeared in the game or not - they just translated most of it.

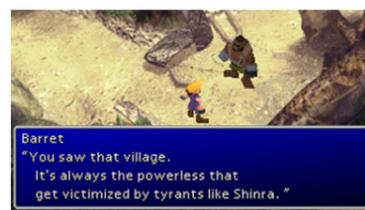
Inside the house of a slum resident in Sector 5, the message on the right can be found. The person responsible for this area was **Jun Akiyama**; and it appears we're reading his voice during his earliest days debugging FFVII. We can see the game in the making.



Barret's plea - and Cloud the Clone

FFVII's unused text doesn't just consist of short snippets of possibly accidental party member lines or the remnants of the debug process - entire scenes have been cut and can be seen if you have the know-how.

In Gongaga, a village partially destroyed by a Mako Reactor explosion, Barret reacts to the devastation and heartfully pleads Cloud continue to aid in the struggle to save the Planet. It's easy to wonder why it was cut.



By teleporting to the Highwind at the right moment during disc 2 you can view a fascinating cut scene where the party discuss what Cloud is while he's not present.

Barret
What the hell was up with Cloud anyway?
Cait Sith

He was a Sephiroth-clone created by Hojo.

Cid
They really make those?

Cait Sith
Well he wasn't made from scratch. They implanted Jenova cells into a normal human being and then infused it with Mako energy.

The game uses the word 'clone' differently from what we're used to - Cloud wasn't created from scratch, but merely injected with Jenova cells. Many players were confused if Cloud was born normal or not - and this cut sequence actually offers clarity to the story.

In the native tongue

While a great deal of hidden material can be unearthed in the English game, FFVII's Western releases and Japan's 'International' release still contain less cut content than the original Japanese release. That original release remains the holy grail of cut FFVII content.

Take the scene in Sector 7 where Tifa approaches Cloud about their past as childhood friends - in an older draft the scene took place outside the bar rather than inside. In the English game the text boxes from the cut Japanese scene are simply empty; the translators were clearly aware this scene was cut from the final game.

Viewed in the Japanese version, the scene inside is identical to the scene outside with one major difference - Cloud says he intends to leave AVALANCHE to look for Sephiroth. Had this remained, it would be the first mention of FFVII's antagonist in the game, and the first hint that he had survived Nibelheim.

Too risqué to release - Honey Bee Inn

The area with the most notable cuts by far is the Honey Bee Inn, an optional area easily missed in a FFVII playthrough. Three unused areas of the inn can be visited in the original Japanese release; later versions are missing almost all this data.

In one scene ShinRa executive Palmer enters and chases a ShinRa manager from the building, disapproving of him being there. This is one of many sequences cut from the inn and its unused rooms, much of it ditched for being too adult in content.

In 1997 it was brave to feature a brothel at all, but much was cut from it. "At first what took place there was more extreme," writer **Kazushige Nojima** admitted.



Aside from a few amusing and sometimes disturbing additional scenes we don't have time or space for, the inn offers further insight into production. The Japanese text displayed there is mostly garbled - and it was discovered that this was because midway through development the game's symbol table, which decides what characters to show, was changed.

This meant that the game would call incorrect symbol ID numbers, resulting in garbage text. Through the debug room of FFVII writer Kazushige Nojima the old symbol table can be found. Using this, the inn's text can at last be translated in detail.

It's all about the numbers

The use of 'ID numbers' is one of the reasons why FFVII and many other games have so much unused content. Maps, items, symbols and just about everything exists in numbered lists, and deleting one item could lead to disaster. Had Jun Akiyama's unused 'dummy message' been deleted, it could have led to the game calling and displaying the wrong text elsewhere.

Such changes even effect audio. Each PS1 release of FFVII has the files for **Motomu Toriyama's** discarded debug room, called 'BLACKBGA', though it can only be visited in the original Japanese release. Visiting BLACKBGA offers a surprise - a version of Aerith's theme with different instrumental choices which sound like a strangled cat.

This reveals that at one point after this room was abandoned the sound database was expanded. As with the Honey Bee Inn's cut rooms, the Japanese text here is erroneous. Even some models in the room are invisible thanks to changes to the game's data.

In this article we've only scratched the surface; there's a wealth of insight and information to be found on FFVII's production by diving into the data left behind.

If you'd like to read more detailed information on this and other cut content or even help us to uncover more cool stuff, be sure to pay a visit to TheLifestream.net.

By Shademp, Contributor to The Lifestream. [TheLifestream.net] With Translation Help from Glitterberi [glitterberri.com]

The **Compilation of Final Fantasy VII** represented a turning point within Square Enix. As a brave new step into the world of trans-media universes, it would be the first time a series of extra projects including games, novels and other visual media would form a continuous storyline based on an established work.

Before Crisis: Final Fantasy VII was a mobile game prequel that took place six years before the beginning of **FFVII** proper. It tells the story of the Turks, the elite assassination group with the world-controlling Shinra Company, and their battle against terrorist organization AVALANCHE.

This anti-Shinra group is different from the ones players have come to know in the **FFVII**. Often more underhanded, it is eventually revealed that they are secretly being funded by President Shinra's son, Rufus.



Before Crisis spans across 25 downloadable episodes, and includes cameos from **FFVII** staples such as Cloud, Tifa, Aerith, Sephiroth, and of course the original Turks. Unfortunately the game remains grounded in Japan - an English version was announced in 2006 but appears to have been quietly cancelled.

Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII was the second **FFVII** prequel title, this time for the PlayStation Portable. Taking place seven years before the events of **FFVII**, **Crisis Core** is the story of Zack Fair - the same SOLDIER whom Cloud Strife assumed he was in the earlier parts of **FFVII**.



It introduces new characters including original Buster Sword owner Angeal Hewley and Genesis Rhapsodos - a SOLDIER defector and antagonist in the same vein as Sephiroth.

This pseudo action RPG takes players through Zack's journey and training as a SOLDIER, his eventual meeting with Cloud and their escape from the Shinra Mansion before his death. This tragic tale tells a story that is already known in **FFVII**'s flashbacks - but it's so well executed that its impact is felt just as strongly as if it were new.

Following the footsteps of **The Spirits Within**, Square Enix decided to try their hand at yet another feature film. Originally a selection of various clips, director **Tetsuya Nomura** decided to go ahead with a full length movie. In the film, Cloud seeks forgiveness for his failures in **FFVII**, and eventually is forced to fight against three Sephiroth's remnants - Kadaj, Loz, and Yazoo.

Their mission is to recover the head of Jenova, who has gone missing thanks to the newly reformed Shinra Company. **Advent Children** went on to be a critical and commercial hit, and eventually spawned a Complete version that included 30 minutes of extra footage for its blu-ray release.



A sequel to **Advent Children** came about in the form of **Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII**. Taking place one year after the events of the film and three years after **FFVII**, **Dirge** is a third person shooter focused on the story of former Turks member Vincent Valentine.



Producer **Yoshinori Kitase** decided to make the game into a shooter because it's one of his favorite genres. The story itself tells of Vincent's battle against Deepground - a dark Shinra secret that has ties to his own past.

30 years before the start of **FFVII**, Vincent was experimented on, and the game delves into the details of his relationship with Lucrecia Crescent and Professor Hojo and his failure to stop the birth of Sephiroth as a threat to the world. Although Vincent is the only playable character, Cloud, Yuffie and others do make appearances from time to time.

Square Enix released a second mobile entry following **Dirge of Cerberus** called **Dirge of Cerberus Lost Episode: Final Fantasy VII**. It was a phone game that retold Vincent's journey to Nibelheim and his battle against Deepground.

Several original video animation projects were also developed including **Last Order: Final Fantasy VII** and **On the Way to a Smile: Episode Denzel**. The former was created by **Studio Madhouse**, the same animation company responsible for series such as **Trigun** and **Death Note**.



"The compilation expands [FFVII's] world to be an even more immersing and brilliant place."

Last Order is an alternate telling of the Nibelheim incident and Zack and Cloud's subsequent capture and escape, although with the advent of **Crisis Core** has since been ejected from the **FFVII** world's 'canon' by events depicted in an actual Square Enix developed game.



On the Way to a Smile: Denzel's Episode was included as a bonus with **Advent Children Complete**, and dove into the story of Denzel, a key character in **Advent Children**.

Rounding out the **Compilation** are two novels written by series writer **Kazushige Nojima**. **On the Way to a Smile** focuses on various characters between the end of **FFVII** and beginning of **Advent Children**. It was originally released in episodes in various publications, but was eventually compiled into one singular book. Each episode is known as a 'Case' and includes stories from the perspectives of Denzel, Tifa, Barret, Yuffie, Red XIII, Sephiroth, Aerith, and even Rufus Shinra.

The second novel, **Lateral Biography Turks: The Kids are Alright** occurs shortly before **Advent Children** and chronicles a new character by the name of Evan Townshend - a private detective living in the Midgar outer town of Edge. Throughout the story, Evan interacts with the Turks and other Shinra employees, eventually leading to a confrontation with Sephiroth remnant Kadaj. All these novels sadly remain Japanese-only.

FFVII remains the pinnacle of the series for many, and the compilation expands its world to be an even more immersing and brilliant place. All has been quiet on the compilation for years - but many fans hope, rightly, that this story isn't over.

By Erren Van Duine [@ErrenVanDuine], US Editor of RPG Site and Owner of blog Nova Crystallis. [novacrystallis.com] [rpgsite.net]

Tetsuya Nomura

The New Age of FF Art

Credited: FFIV (1991) - FFXIII-2 (2012)

Now: Character Designer & Director, FF Versus XIII



Yoshitaka Amano defined the early years of Final Fantasy with his artwork, but as much of the series is defined by the work of Tetsuya Nomura. With a distinctive art style sometimes jibed for being too heavy on the belts and zippers, Nomura's 'look' has become a quintessential part of modern FF.

Nomura started his time with FF as a debugger on **FFIV**. He worked on monster and battle graphics design for **FFV**, rising quickly to be the graphic director by the time **FFVI** rolled around.

In **FFVII** he got his break as the lead character designer, also contributing to the story concept and working as battle visual director - and in **FFVIII** he retained those roles. Like many, he took on less encompassing jobs as time went on, focusing on being only the character designer for **FFX** and its sequel.

He'd become so synonymous with the series that when **Dissidia: Final Fantasy** came about he was picked to illustrate the characters from every FF - not just the ones he'd designed.

Nomura's first major work would follow him - as years on he'd spearhead efforts to expand FFVII's universe. He directed **Advent Children** and acted as creative producer on **Crisis Core**, also contributing designs to **Before Crisis** and **Dirge of Cerberus**.

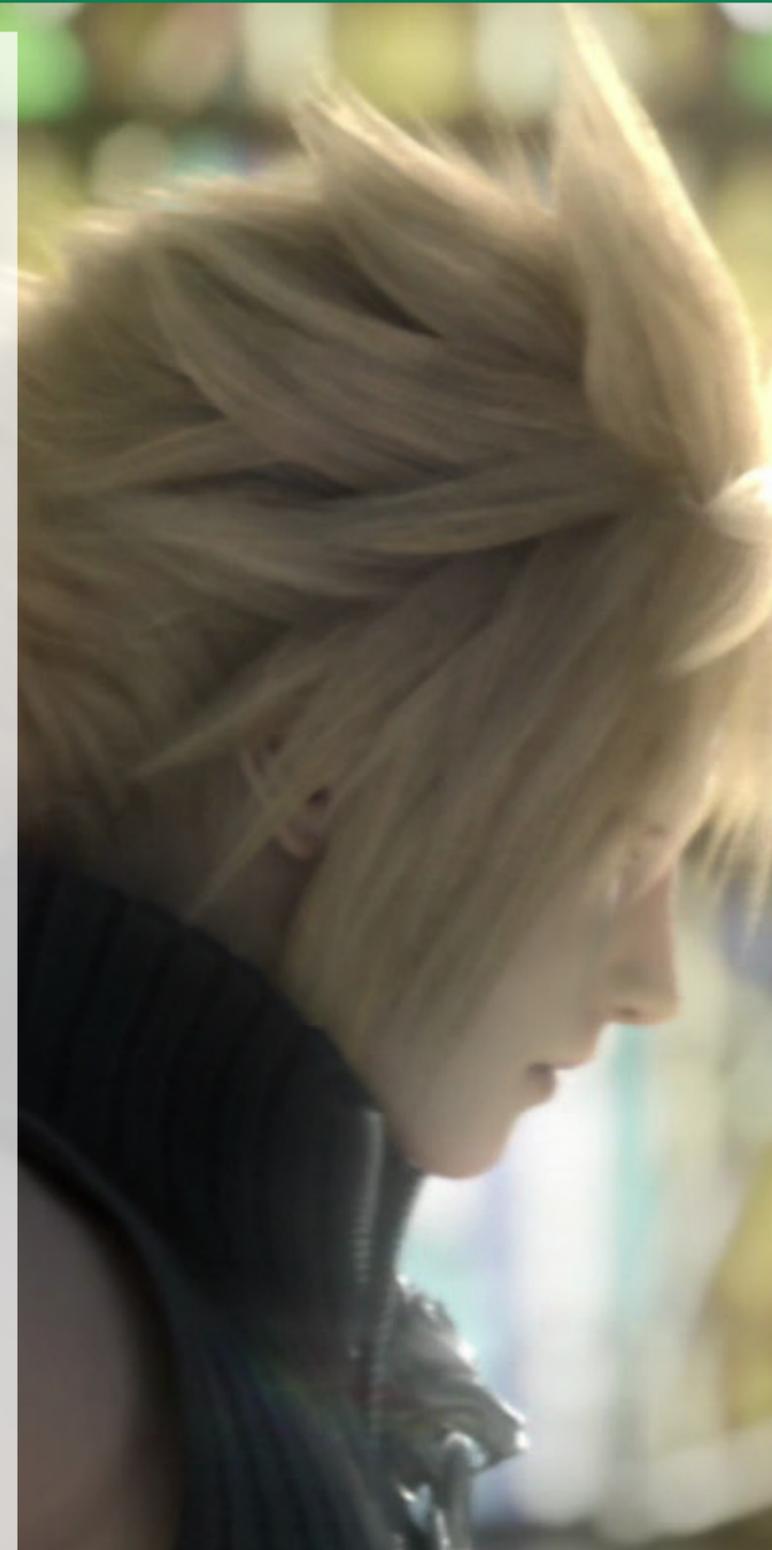
Nomura also directed the original **Kingdom Hearts** and is still in charge of that series' future. He also designed the casts of the **Parasite Eve** series and classic DS RPG **The World Ends With You**.

Nomura most recently contributed to **FFXIII** and **XIII-2**, designing the main characters of XIII. Lightning's design was what Nomura came up with when asked to envision a female version of Cloud, arguably his most famous design.

For XIII-2 he only provided the designs for the faces of characters - others designed clothing. He also contributed to **FF Type-0**, serving as creative producer and character designer.

Notoriously press-shy and secretive, Nomura rarely speaks out despite his major role within **Square Enix**, preferring to take a back seat when promotion begins. He's currently working on **FF Versus XIII**, a project years in the making.

Little is known about Versus - likely in part due to Nomura's closed nature. He's serving as the title's director and character designer as well as contributing to its story, themes and design concepts. Many expect it to be his magnum opus.



When **Advent Children** was first announced, the reaction was mixed. The fact that it was a sequel to FFVII and would remove the ambiguity from the game's ending was divisive in itself - but the fact it was a movie, not a game, shocked.

AC was a safer bet than **The Spirits Within**. Heading straight-to-video and using characters and a world already loved, it was almost a guaranteed success. What FFVII fan wouldn't want to see Cloud and friends trying to avert the resurrection of Sephiroth?

Truth be told, AC is actually a bit of a messy movie. Those who hadn't played FFVII found themselves lost, left to enjoy incredible looking fight sequences but largely clueless in story terms. Throwing around terms like Reunion and Jenova without much explanation isn't all that wise.

Even the staff realized that, which led to **Advent Children Complete**. A 20-minute-longer version of the movie, it filled many holes and made it actually understandable for someone less familiar with FFVII. The end result is a movie that you'd no longer be reluctant to show your non-FF-playing friends.

The plot doesn't do much to drastically change the FFVII universe - three new characters attempt to bring Sephiroth back from the dead, and the FFVII party team up with Rufus Shinra and The Turks in order to stop it. From here we get almost two hours of fan service, from the FFVII battle and boss battle themes cropping up to appearances of Aerith and Zack in the afterlife.

Battle sequences play out impressively, with characters using signature moves in a more real setting. Best of all, it looks cool as hell. The sequence where FFVII's party arrive to help is difficult to forget, as is the climactic battle between against Sephiroth.

AC was fan service, but it also served an important role - how these cinematic battles looked in a film inspired much of FFXIII's dynamic-looking battle system, and the success of the movie saw that the FFVII 'Compilation' would continue with further games and other expansions.

I was one of the people who wanted FFVII's ending left well alone - but AC - particularly the 'Complete' version - converted me. It's a fun expansion on the game - and seeing these characters look so real is amazingly exciting.

Alex Donaldson [[@APZonerunner](#)] is the Co-owner of **RPG Site** & **UFFSite** [[rpgsite.net](#)] [[uffsite.net](#)]

Originally Released:

September 14 2005

Available On:

DVD, UMD, Blu-Ray, Streaming

Key Staff:

Tetsuya Nomura, Yoshinori Kitase,
Nobuo Uematsu, Kazushige Nojima,
Shinji Hashimoto, Yasuharu Yoshizawa, Keiichi Kojima,

Article by: Alex Donaldson





FINAL FANTASY VIII

ファイナルファンタジーVIII

Originally Released:
February 11 1999

Available On:
PS1, PC, PSN (PS3, PSP, Vita)

Key Staff:
Yoshinori Kitase, Tetsuya Nomura, Nobuo Uematsu, Kazushige Nojima, Yusuke Naora, Shinji Hashimoto

Article by: Sharjeel Hanif



After **FFVII's** massive success Square had much to prove. The company had taken the JRPG genre from niche to worldwide phenomenon - and fans now had strict expectations of what Final Fantasy should be.

Part of that was an expectation for a cinematic flair that necessitated multi-million dollar development endeavors - but Square didn't flinch. They wanted the next title to cement FF's status as the king of its genre - and so **Final Fantasy VIII** was born.

The easy way out would've been to rehash FFVII's style and design - but as FF has always done, FFVIII threw much of its predecessor's design out of the window. Brave new elements were introduced, some highly innovative, some awkwardly jarring and several incredibly managing to be both at the same time.

FFVIII has a reputation as a controversial entry due to its wholesale experimentation on FFVII's formula - but the game has found fans and is a testament to the quality that is still unique to the Playstation-era titles. FFVIII is actually a big part of why I love gaming.

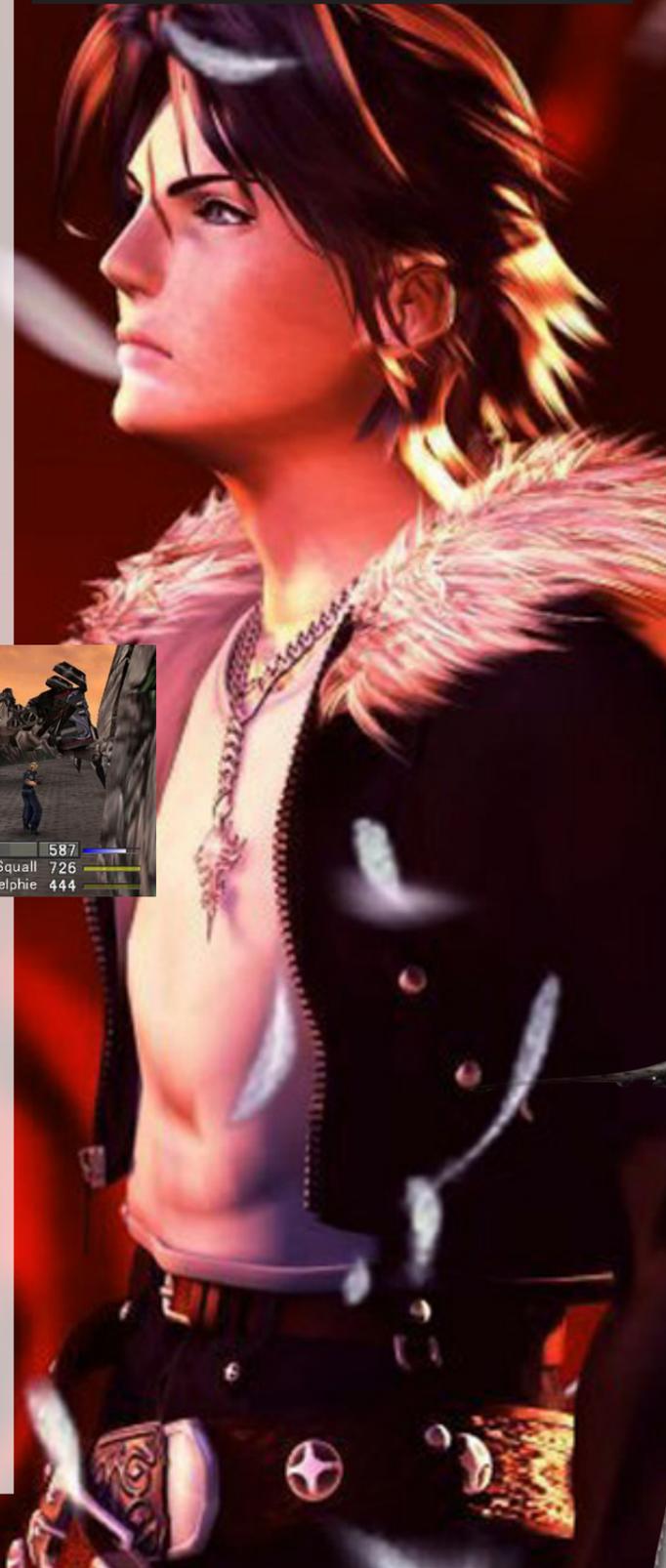


We're introduced to a world of military academies, warring nations and resistance movements, set against the backdrop of a conflict older than much of the cast. Much of that history is hidden, left for players to discover through exploration and by making keen observations.

FFVIII's world is the most 'realistic' the series has attempted. While there's still incredible airships and magic-wielding mercenaries, players find themselves in locations such as a tiny seaside town and a sprawling, Earth-like city.



Before airships, the main method of transportation is the train. They've featured before, of course, but FFVIII's world features a believable rail network connecting its important locations. It's plausible.



The cast is even working for a wage, gil wired to them at regular intervals. Private transport comes in the form of cars - and you even have to pay for gas! When the game opens in its school setting, players find characters posting on school message boards, gossiping. It seems a strangely down-to-earth FF.



Except it isn't. It's crazy. A powerful sorceress runs wild, players enhance their battle performance with amnesia-inducing ethereal beasts and one early optional boss is a Tyrannosaurus Rex. Yep.

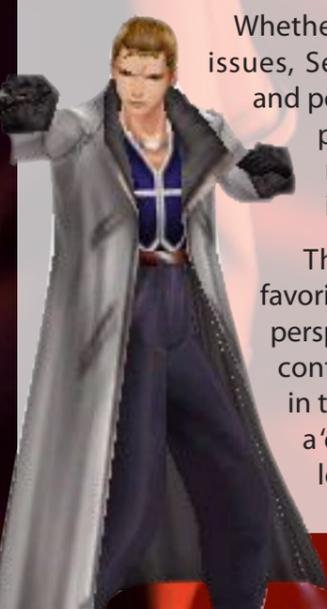
Then there's the Moombas, an oft-forgotten cutesy mascot when compared to their Moogle and Chocobo brethren. They help the heroes escape prison.

This strange crossroads of the fantastical and the familiar is one of FFVIII's strongest elements - it's the familiar, but twisted, turned on its head.

On a higher level, there's political intrigue and an international struggle reminiscent of FFVII, but on a more intimate level this is a story of relationships, self-fulfillment, and personal discoveries.

In this the game's setting is a triumph. The archetypal high-school world of bullies, teenage romances, nervous shy types and teenage angst provides a window into this world with which we're all familiar.

I'll go ahead say that the triangle between Squall, Rinoa and Seifer is more interesting than Cloud, Tifa and Aerith, too. Seifer is a great anti-hero and rival.



Whether dealing with Rinoa's daddy issues, Seifer's feelings on authority and power or Quistis' doubts on her professional abilities, there's much more to the story than is explicitly told.

The inclusion of Laguna, my favorite FF hero, offers a more adult perspective. On multiple occasions control shifts off Squall and back in time, handing the player off to a 'dream world' with a new party led by the Galbadian soldier.

With each dream portraying an important event in his life, sometimes decades apart, it's up to the player to piece together the string of events. This device keeps Laguna's narrative engaging and interesting all the way through.



Laguna's narrative is the crux of the game, featuring several of FF's most memorable moments. Eventually his story folds back into Squall's, making FFVIII a multi-generational epic.

That tale is backed up with a score that is more cohesive than anything before it and contains some of FF's most memorable, from the chill-inducing *Liberi Fatali* to the calming tunes of *Fisherman's Horizon*. The score's diversity is absolutely stunning.

All that said, it is true that some battle design choices are baffling, making for a sometimes-muddled experience.

For better or worse, the poorly explained and often frustrating junction system allows seemingly unlimited customization. Clever players could even break the game entirely.

If battles sometimes disappoint, I offer Triple Triad. Introduced within minutes of play, the card game completely redefined the significance the inclusion of mini games in FF and RPG titles.

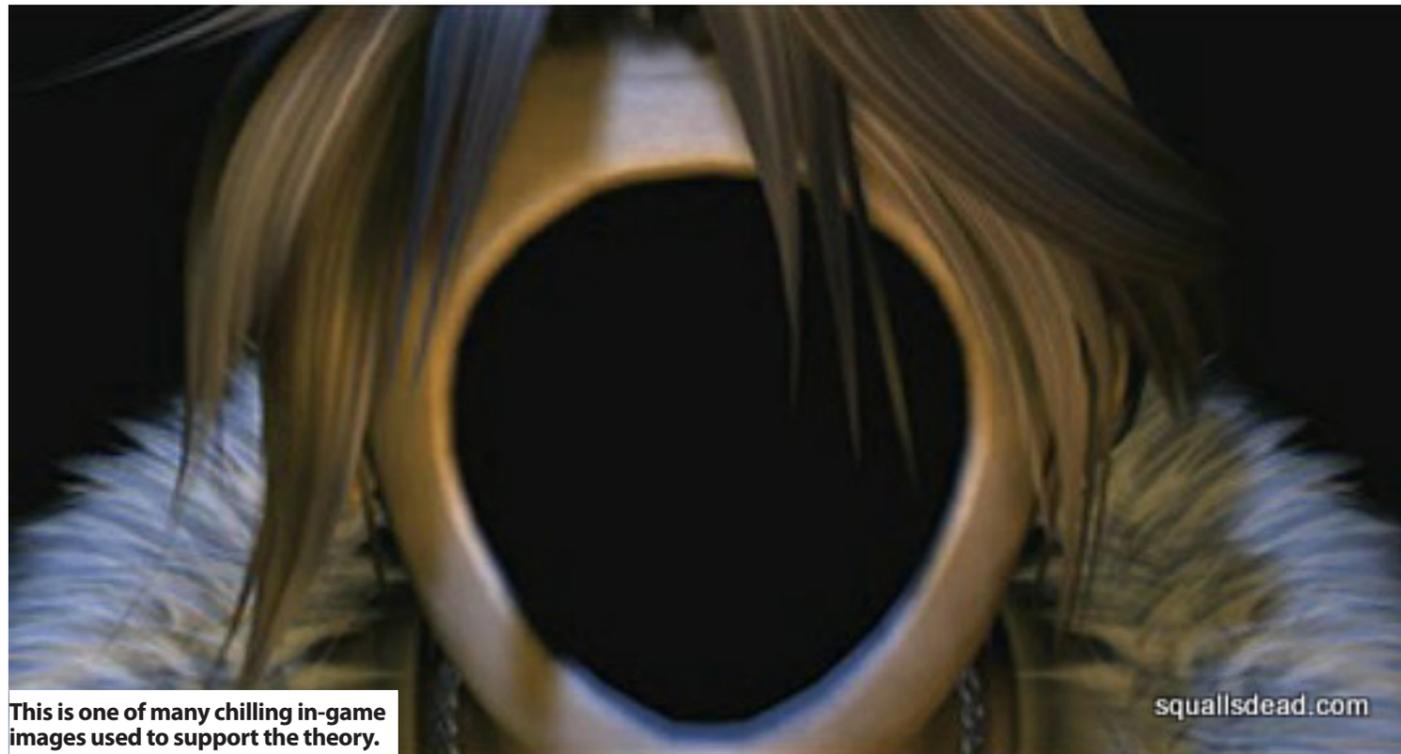


This was a full game in and of itself. One could spend countless hours collecting and dueling, and cards also offered benefits to the fighting party. Why there isn't a HD, online version of Triple Triad is beyond me.

So much can be said about FFVIII - too much, regrettably, to spread across these pages. Returning to Balamb over a decade later still feels as natural as it did when I was a kid.

I'm instantly absorbed - it's as if I myself am striving to become a member of the elite SeeD. At least now that I'm older and wiser, I know to get to the cafeteria early before they run out of hot dogs!

Sharjeel Hanif is a contributor to the fan site Final Fantasy Network. [finalfantasy.net]



This is one of many chilling in-game images used to support the theory.

squallsdead.com

Past the first disc, **Final Fantasy VIII's** narrative takes some incredible twists, turns and leaps of logic that have long left some scratching their heads.

The strange story beats are obvious - the revelation that the cast all grew up together seems implausible. Better still, the Sorceress they were sent to kill turns out to have been the woman that raised them all.

Vague negative side effects of GFs are referred to early, but suddenly amnesia as a side effect is common knowledge. Rinoa goes from fawning over Seifer to forgetting him for Squall. Lion-like creatures called Moombas help the squad escape from prison.

Cid and Edea are married and Garden is controlled by an alien-like creature who, once killed, is never mentioned again in the story. Huh.

The folks at Squall's Dead table a unique and interesting theory to explain: **What if it's all a dream?**

At the close of disc one the inexperienced SeeD squad is tasked with assassinating the Sorceress Edea on the very night she rises to take control of Galbadia. The odds are arguably stacked against them.

He cuts past Seifer to get to Edea, but he's no match for her. The final moments of the disc see him impaled with a massive shard of ice, a fatal wound - larger and messier than the wound that killed **FFVII's** Aerith.

But when he wakes, there's no wound - there's not even a scar, and Squall's face proves he can scar. From here logic established in disc one is stretched regularly.

What if Squall died then and there from that attack? Killed mercilessly by the Sorceress, he then lives a dream to put his soul to rest. In that dream, Squall gets all he wants. Everything slots together - it's perfect.

The ending is packed with warped, strange imagery that aids the theory. Squall calls out to Rinoa, who struggles to hear him. When she turns, her face is blackened and blurred as if his mind and memory is fading. Music warps, static bursts out - and the chilling image of a faceless, empty Squall flashes on screen.



The archway where Squall was wounded appears prominently in the sequence, merging with the ballroom where Squall and Rinoa met.

The sequence becomes frantic, a mangled mix of scenes, music and locations. There's the sound of a sword impact - his eyes going wide before his body fades into a bright white background.

He's absent from the decidedly happier second half of the ending movie until its final moments - with Rinoa, about to kiss. He finally gets the girl. Is this the afterlife?

True or not, the theory is definitely worth reading and thinking about - it's some of the most intense thinking about one of the most uniquely twisted stories in the series. **[SquallsDead.com]**

Squall's Dead by Rahul Choudhury & Diedra Rater. Original idea by NeoGAF.com's duckroll. Reproduced with permission.

Kazushige Nojima

Scenario Scribe

Credited: FFXVII (1997), FFXVIII, FFX, Advent Children, FFXIII, FF Versus XIII (TBA)

Now: Freelance Video Game Writer



With Final Fantasy rapidly being recognized as a bastion of video game storytelling in the SNES era, Square were ready to step things up for **FFVII** - and bought in new writers to help.

One such addition was **Kazushige Nojima**, whose first brush with FF came as the co-writer of **FFVII** alongside Yoshinori Kitase. Nojima went on to write **FFVIII**, **FFX** and **FFX-2** - also contributing the lyrics to several pieces on the soundtracks of those games.

He also co-wrote **Kingdom Hearts**, making for quite a resume before departing Square Enix in 2003 to found his own company, Stellavista Ltd.

As a freelancer, Nojima contributed story to titles including Super Smash Bros Brawl and Glory of Heracles but also wrote **Advent Children** and **Crisis Core** as a freelancer.

He remains involved with FF and has most recently contributed the world concept for the Fabula Nova Crystallis universe - but is working more deeply on FF Versus XIII as its key writer.

Yusuke Naora

The Risk-Taking Artist

Credited: FFXVI (1994), FFXVII, FFXVIII, FFX, FFX-2, Advent Children, FFXIII-2, Type 0 (2011)

Now: Art Director at Square Enix



Yusuke Naora's role in the history of FF will probably forever be slightly underestimated. Naora's art was always pushing the envelope, even as early as **FFVI**, his first work on the series.

"What he did honestly looked like nothing else available for the SNES at that time", Yoshinori Kitase said of his work on **FFVI**. "I didn't get it at all." Kitase may not have understood, but clearly his work impressed - Naora filled acted as a field graphic designer on **Chrono Trigger** and then was given the art director gig on **FFVII**.

He went on to reprise that role in **FFVIII**, **FFX** and **Dirge of Cerberus**. He also worked on **Advent Children**, becoming one of the go-to artists for the world of **FFVII** as Square Enix expanded that game's lore into a series of its own.

Naora was still working on FF even with his most recent entries - he provided some character and costume designs for **FFXIII-2**, but was mostly focused on a return to the art director role in the much-hyped **FF Type-0** for PSP. He's still at Square Enix, and is likely still working on FF projects.



Final Fantasy IX is particularly special to me. This is the game that led me into the Final Fantasy community in the first place - it's the reason I'm here.

Past personal significance, it's also a special game in the context of the series. In many ways it is a farewell to series creator **Hironobu Sakaguchi**, who'd step back from the series after this point - and a tip of the hat to every game that came before it.

Packed to the rafters with references small and large to the events, characters and worlds of past games, FFIIX is in many ways a turning point, too - everything that comes after it is quite different.

Directed by series veteran **Hiroiyuki Ito**, it's a fitting tribute to the incredible games preceding it but also carves out a brilliant, bright identity all of its own.

I'll admit that it's true that the combat is far too slow and the equipment-based ability system is far from the series' best, but FFIIX shines past and through these flaws easily. Being one of the best-looking PlayStation games and one of the better-aging entries in the series visually helps, but that is a far cry from what makes FFIIX special.



Toshiyuki Itahana, Hideo Minaba and **Shukou Murase** team up to provide art that pulls away from the semi-realistic looking visuals offered up by Tetsuya Nomura for the previous two games, coming up with something more exaggerated and full of character.

The deformed, disproportionate style they settled on is one that isn't just cute and referential to the sprites of the SNES era - it's also one that oozes charm, perfectly conveying the whimsical energy and attitude that FFIIX carries as its lifeblood.

Originally Released: July 7 2000
Available On: PS1, PSN [PS3, PSP, Vita]
Key Staff:
 Hironobu Sakaguchi, Hiroiyuki Ito,
 Nobuo Uematsu, Toshiyuki Itahana,
 Shinji Hashimoto, Hideo Minaba
Article by: Alex Donaldson

That charm extends to the cast; lead Zidane is a smooth talker, a womanizer - but one that hides a heart of gold and surprising depth as the game wears on.



His love story with Princess Garnet Til Alexandros - Dagger for short - feels more natural and organic than Squall and Rinoa one game previous. Every character's goals and heart rests in caricatured stereotypes - but they're well executed with enough twists and turns to remain interesting.

"FFIX may depict the rise and fall of Kingdoms and a plot to destroy all of existence, but Vivi's story is what the game is really thematically about."

Captain Steiner's neurotic outbursts go from irritating to funny to endearing, Freya's tragic story saddens and Eiko's tale of innocence stolen by a life alone is strangely unsettling. Even Amarant and the strange Quina, the weakest members of the eight-strong cast, are likeable and interesting.



of existence, but Vivi's story is what the game is really thematically about. All thematic roads lead to him.

Vivi is a fan favorite, beloved by many - and it's easy to see why. His plucky attitude in the face of his impending demise not only defines FFIIX, but underlines a core theme of much of the FF series.

The real star of the show is Vivi, a Black Mage with a heart of gold and deeply philosophical questions about the meaning of life.

FFIX may depict the rise and fall of Kingdoms and a plot to destroy all

"If somebody asked me why Final Fantasy is so loved, I'd point to FFIIX for the answer."



The sluggish combat is still enjoyable, also packed with nods to old FF classes and abilities, and Tetra Master is, whatever some say, a valid successor to Triple Triad. FFIIX is a really fun game to play.

Top off the game with some of the most classic moments in the entire series and it's no surprise this one is so often a winner with fans.



Who can forget Bahamut versus Alexander and Steiner & Beatrix's last stand during the assault on Alexandria? Odin's destruction of Cleyr is still the most bad ass thing the Norse god has done.

Uematsu's medieval-inspired score - the last he contributed to the series alone - is excellent, pitch-perfect for the world - and arguably a contender for his finest work.

That controversial final boss may seem a strange choice, but it thematically links to Vivi's all-important story line whilst nodding to to **FFIII's** Finale. Consider this, too: in summoning Necron who begins to destroy the all creation, Kuja's the second most successful FF villain behind **FFVI's** world-destroying clown Kefka.

It's a bright and colorful game - not just visually, but right through to its heart and soul. It's purer and more whimsical than anything since the SNES and anything since, and quite possibly is the last time that the main series will ever tread such ground.

While the dystopia of **FFVII's** Midgar fascinates me and the horrors of living under Kefka's regime intrigues me, FFIIX depicts a world that, despite being at war, I'd want to live in.

To me this game embodies what the series should be all about: drama, beauty, fantasy, whimsy - and fun.

If somebody asked me what Final Fantasy is all about and why it's so loved, I'd point to FFIIX for the answer. That, I suppose, is the greatest recommendation of all.

Alex Donaldson is the Co-owner of the UFF Network including RPGSite.net & UFFSite.net.



Final Fantasy IX is one of my favourite games. Featuring one of the strongest collective casts of the entire series centralised around a thief with a heart of gold rescuing a princess, it's a story that is almost classic yet still feels fresh, even when replaying in 2012.

Mixed in amongst all this is one character that always stood out, a difficult task in a game that has captured my heart in its entirety, a woman who despite being more of a background element, remains to be one of the strongest characters in more ways than one: Alexandria's General Beatrix.

She's as much an anti-hero as she is an unsung hero - portrayed for a large chunk of the game as a super-powerful enemy who can reduce your party HP to 1 in an instant.

She's there to hinder your efforts to stop the machinations of reigning monarch Queen Brahne, who herself is being manipulated by main antagonist Kuja.

As the head of Alexandria's all-female army, she is of course sworn to protect the monarchy. She stands against Zidane and his allies twice, believing the group to have genuinely kidnapped the Princess.

It's only after the queen launches a brutal, genocide attack on the settlement of Cleyra and later kidnaps and imprisons her own daughter that Beatrix begins to question her role.



Beatrix as a character is interesting as she has her own side story buried deep beneath the main plot, struggling between her sense of duty and what she knows is right.

While it is unclear whether she had questioned the queen's actions before the attack and kidnapping, Beatrix eventually does help the party - though does not turn on the queen entirely, instead hoping to bring her to her senses.

In a way she keeps her oath honourably as she works to preserve the monarchy and the interests of the Kingdom, if in an unconventional way. There's connective DNA here to other characters, of course - FFXVII's Turks are never 'evil' - they're just doing their job, and her turn from the Queen's wishes mirror FFXIV's Cecil.

Most significant of all is the similarity to FFXVI's Leo. Both are generals, both are temporary playable characters, both have the 'Shock' ability and both beg forgiveness from another whose allies they slaughtered.

At first glance she appears cold. "I once killed a hundred knights single-handedly... to me, you two are nothing more than insects," she flippantly tells the party before battle. It's when she joins your cause that her true personality becomes clear.

"Beatrix stands out as one of the better female characters not only of FFIx, but of the series in general."

She's proud, fiercely loyal and a formidable warrior - but she's also human. A comedy of errors where a love letter by Eiko ends up in Beatrix's hands leads her to believe it's from Captain Steiner, her long-time rival.

It's with this relationship barely blossoming that Alexandria falls in one of the most memorable sequences in all of FF. Here the two Knights stand back to back, surrounded, against impossible odds - and Beatrix really stands tall. As Steiner prepares to profess his love, ready for death, she quiets him - swearing his confession can wait for another day.

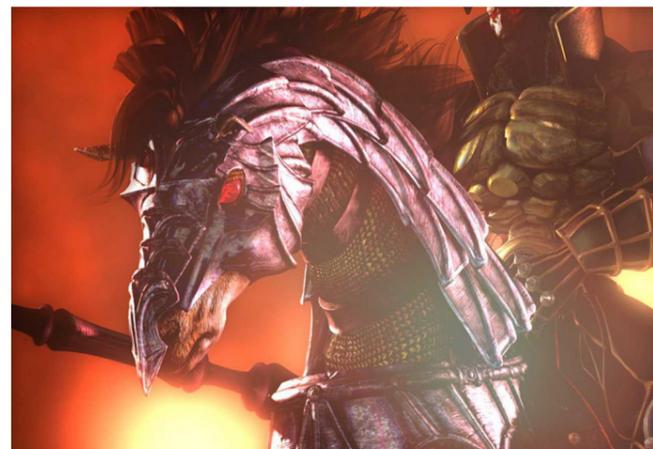
For a time the game lets you believe the pair dead - and it's a devastating thought. They're two characters the game's script initially pushes you to hate - but at that moment, all but the most heartless player will love them.



Even the idea of ending their story just as it is really blossoming just seems too cruel; thankfully this is not the case. They too get their happy ending, raising Beatrix's sword skyward together in the closing moments of the game - seems only just.

Final Fantasy IX is not a game that is short of female figures, and in a way each represents a different kind of woman. For me personally, Beatrix stands out as one of the better female characters not only of FFIx, but of the series in general. Hers is a story worth knowing.

By Harriet Jones [@HC_Jones], a freelance writer and contributor to the Unlimited Hyperbole podcast. [joemartinwords.com/podcast/]



Final Fantasy IX is a pretty great game. That's likely been covered over the last few pages - it's a glorious nod to every single one of the seven entries that preceded it as well as something original, charming and exciting in its own right.

My favorite part of the game isn't its brilliant cast, clever story or smaller nudges and winks to old-school FF fans, though - it's the genius way the game makes use of some of the series' most iconic visuals - Eidolons, Summons, Espers - whatever your personal word of choice is.

Summons have been a staple of the series since FFXIII, and over time they've become more embroiled in the story of the games. FFXIV's Rydia lived in a town of summoners, recalled in Madain Sari, but the creatures themselves barely factored into the story. The same is true of FFXVI's Espers.

FFXVIII was the largest step since Rydia to tie these ethereal creatures directly to the story, making them a vital part of two major plot points. Firstly, the SeeD gain their extraordinary abilities through bonds forged with 'Guardian Forces', but later in the game this bond is also responsible for amnesia vital to the game's twisted story.

FFIX is cleverer about how they're used. It rightly notes that these are hugely powerful monsters, some of them actual gods in the mythology they are pulled from. As such, summons in the game are hugely powerful and sought-after by those seeking power.

Queen Brahne forcibly extracts eidolons from her summoner-descendent daughter. The creatures are then used in a brutal conquest of the surrounding lands. Odin is used to destroy an entire nation with a single blow in an incredible CG cutscene, while Atomos sucks defending soldiers from Lindblum to prevent ground resistance.

The best sequences come thanks to Bahamut, who becomes the head of Brahne's final conquest. Captured and turned on her, the beast she summoned is her end. Eidolons dominate the story here - in an attempt to save her mother, Garnet rushes to where a legendary summon is sleeps and despairs when it's Leviathan, a creature useless for battling Bahamut.

Bahamut meets his match in the holy Alexander, stored deep in Alexandria castle. This sequence is arguably the greatest, most exciting half an hour in all of FF.

This also remains FFIx's legacy through the series; FFX and FFXIII would both make summons a far more important part of the story - but to me, they're yet to match some of this classic's amazing scenes. Alexander vs. Bahamut? Never, ever forget.

John Davison is an English Teacher, Translator and RPG enthusiast based in Tokyo, Japan.

Originally intended to be a celebratory throw-back, **FFIX** is packed with references to other FF games. Here's a few of our favorites:

Final Fantasy

- Garland is named after FF's seminal villain and is said to have attempted to take over the world once before, but was met with failure.
- Gurgu Volcano appears in FFX as Mount Gulug, sharing the same music as the original and a very similar layout.
- Garnet wears traditional White Mage robes during the game's opening.
- FFI's four fiends of the elements - Maliris, Tiamat, Kraken and Lich - are fought in Memoria.
- Certain key items refer to the Book of Matoya - a nod to FFI's cave-dwelling mage.
- Garnet's real name is Sarah - the name of FF's Princess. Garnet's birth mother is named Jane, like FF's Queen.

Final Fantasy II

- Garland's castle Pandemonium is named after the lair of FFII's Emperor and features a remixed version of its theme for its background music.
- The story Ramuh has Garnet recite to regain her powers describes in detail an event from FFII where Josef sacrifices himself.

Final Fantasy III

- Une's Mirror and Doga's Artifact can be bought at the Auction House. Une's mirror is engraved with a quote of hers: "The body may perish, but the spirit lives on."
- The airship 'Invincible' is named after FFIII's ultimate airship.

Final Fantasy IV

- The Dwarves of Conde Petie greet with a cry of 'Lali-ho' - a slightly different translation of "Rali-ho", what FFIV's race of underground dwarves would yell as a greeting.
- Freya can obtain a weapon named Kain's Lance - after FFIV's troubled Dragoon Knight.
- Jesters Zorn and Thorn use Palom and Porom's 'Twincast' ability in battle.

Final Fantasy V

- FFV antagonist Exdeath's ultimate attack 'Grand Cross' is used by FFX's final boss.
- Bartz' trusty Chocobo Boko appears on a Tetra Master card.
- Part of the music in the play 'I Want to be Your Canary' is based off FFV's game over music.

Final Fantasy VI

- The trance ability all characters have in FFX alludes to Terra's esper trance mode.
- General Beatrix shares her 'Shock' ability with another FF general - the noble Leo.
- Kuja's Desert Palace contains three statues - 'Promise of the Evil God', 'Truth of the Devil' and 'Illusion of the Goddess' - referencing FFVI's Warring Triad statues.
- Many of FFX's character arcs resemble FFVI characters - Beatrix and Celes are similar, while Garland and Kuja's relationship is very similar to Gesthal and Kefka - including how the usurper throws his supposed boss off a cliff.

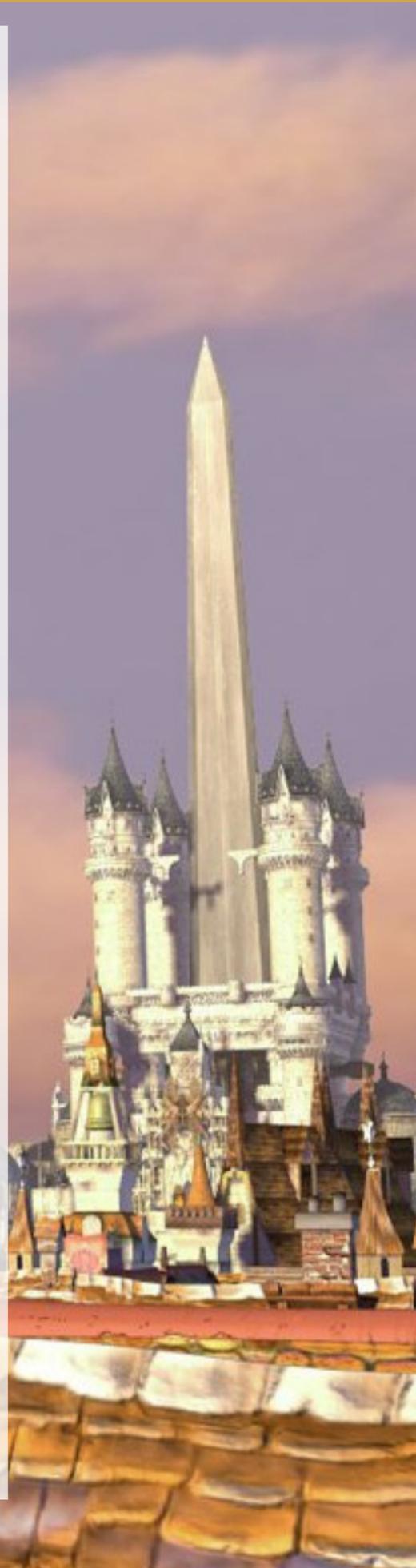
Final Fantasy VII

- When trapped in the Evil Forest, the Prima Vista Orchestra plays "Rufus' Welcoming March" from FFVII to entertain.
- A 'flower girl' at the ruins of Alexandria's Church ponders Pluto Knight VII - noting that he's handsome, but bemoaning his lack of personality.
- Steiner and Beatrix can both use Cloud's Climhazzard ability.

Final Fantasy VIII

- The play in FFX's ending features the line "No cloud, no squall shall hinder us!"
- Amarant's No Mercy attack is named after Seifer's Limit Break.

FFIX has plenty more references - even to smaller FF spin-offs. Why not replay this classic and see what other references you can spot?



Hiroiyuki Ito

Active Time Architect

Credited: FFI (1987) - FFX, FFT, FFXII (2006)

Now: Producer/Director/Designer at Square Enix



If one system designer has had a larger impact on Final Fantasy than any other, it's **Hiroiyuki Ito**. He began humbly, contributing to **FFI** and **FFII** as a debugger before working on the sound effects of **FFIII**. He was quickly catapulted to the role of Battle System Designer for **FFIV** - and would there change the series - and the RPG genre - forever.

A fan of Formula One, Ito birthed the idea of the *Active Time Battle* system when considering how F1 cars all raced at differing speeds. The end result was the gradually filling action bar for each character in battle that has appeared in most FF titles and countless other major RPGs since.

For **FFV** Ito worked as a game designer, tweaking the ATB system, creating the AP system and expanding FFIII's job system. He'd also create *Gilgamesh*, a hapless enemy who would become a series staple.

FFVI saw Ito stepping up to the role of director when Hironobu Sakaguchi became too busy. All of FFVI's major gameplay systems were either designed or overseen by Ito. He beefed up interactivity in story beats such as the infamous opera sequence.

Ito provided the original concept for **FFVII's** Materia system, but was moved off production to aid **Yasumi Matsuno** on **FF Tactics**. He returned for **FFVIII**, helping Battle System Design and concepting the Triple Triad card game, but again was pulled aside to head up a new spin-off, titled '**FF Gaiden**'.

FF Gaiden later became **FFIX** with Ito directing. He made that game his own, working as director, game designer, battle system director and scenario editor, shaping the game massively. After delivering FFX successfully, Ito was set to work with Matsuno again co-directing **FFXII**.

When Matsuno departed, Ito directed FFXII with **Hiroshi Minagawa**, remaining a designer and battle system director at the same time. FFXII's real-time action is owed in equal measure to FFXI and the NFL, whose rules and playbook helped to inspire Ito's Gambit system. FFX and XII - two of Ito's directorial projects - are the two highest rated FF titles on MetaCritic.

Ito is a designer at heart, but one who understands the importance of plot, working hard to balance his love of gameplay systems and story evenly - quite different from the story-heavy approach others take.

Baking clever gameplay design into story sequences is practically his calling card, from FFVI's Opera to **Chrono Trigger's** trial and FFX's sword fighting sequence. He's currently working on a large-scale unannounced project speculated to be **FFXV**.

When asked in February 2012 who he felt could make FF as respected as it was in the 90s once more, FF creator **Hironobu Sakaguchi** didn't hesitate, giving a decisive two word answer: Hiroiyuki Ito.



The first entry in the series for PlayStation 2, **Final Fantasy X** was as revolutionary as **FFVII**, offering unparalleled graphics, new gameplay directions, a breathtaking story and a feeling of engrossment that few games can match.

FFX follows summoner Yuna on her pilgrimage to defeat the monster known as Sin. Players see through the eyes of Tidus, a stranger to the land of Spira. It's a journey of exploration for him and a beautiful story filled with joy, tears and determination.

FF's well known for its storytelling, but FFX still caught me off-guard. It's carefully written and contains so many intriguing themes and wisdoms of life, all executed brilliantly. I was younger when I first played it and, to be honest, its story was deeply effecting in my life. Religion and determinism are key themes, but they are just the tip of a very big iceberg.

FFX's primary lessons are that the boundaries of love go beyond race and religion, things shouldn't be taken for granted, that small moments of happiness should be cherished - for they never last - and that one should always have forgiveness for others. Most of all, FFX underlines the importance of trusting others.

Thanks to the increased horsepower of PS2 and the massive DVD format, FFX could boast breathtaking graphics, audio and over 45 minutes of CG cutscenes over its rather brilliant story. The game was rammed with beautiful cities and dungeons, all so well executed that you felt you really were a part of Spira.

From feeling the cold and through it the determination of the Ronso on the slopes of Mt. Gagazet to experiencing the euphoric excitement during Luca's Blitzball tournament, the rich atmosphere pulled you right into the game.

FFX marked more than an incremental upgrade to its visuals, though, and was notably the first FF to feature voice acting. Character's faces were much more detailed and allowed for improved facial expressions and lip movements, achieved through motion capture and skeletal animation technology.

According to script writer **Kazushige Nojima**, the script was altered several times to better match the voice actors' personalities. To him, the inclusion of voice acting allowed him to express emotion in his story more powerfully than before.



The soundtrack was similarly improved, with more space on the DVD for music and more impressive synthesized instruments available. Nobuo Uematsu returned to compose the majority, but was also joined by Junya Nakano and Masashi Hamauzu.

The score was a challenge as the trio had to take voice acting into account and lower the music's volume where needed. The soundtrack tried many new directions to match the game's atmosphere ranging from Japanese folk music to heavy metal.



The end result of this concoction was revolutionary, and the bar of quality set by FFX remained and became a staple of the series. When I was playing the game I sometimes just had to stop to take in the fantastic environments and music. The whole setup of the game inspired me, and the same is true of countless other people and artists out there.

FF's usually steadfast gameplay design was also shook up for the title. Gone was the world map, replaced by a more linear, story-focused progression. Luckily lush environments, charming cutscenes and fun minigames ensured exploration wasn't missed.

Also gone was traditional levelling, replaced by the Sphere Grid. Characters earned AP after battles and could then buy upgrades on the grid. Each character followed a set path sticking more or less to traditional FF roles but these roles could be broken from with relative ease.



I love to grind AP as much as possible before expanding, making the game more difficult in the process. I'd only spend points when defeated. Afterwards, I'd be able to crush the boss that'd been difficult more easily than catching butterflies in Macalania Woods - no kidding.

The ATB system was dropped, replaced by CTB - the Conditional Turn-based Battle. Players could plot strategy without the worry of time, and see when each character in battle, even enemies, were due their next turn. This was at a base level more simple and speedy, but led to much deeper strategy overall. Each character also has an Overdrive bar - equivalent to Limit Breaks.



Eidolons were now treated as separate characters with their own HP and devastating skill set, replacing the party when summoned by Yuna. Coupled with a suite of awesome mini-games, FFX's gameplay was as packed with memorable moments as its story sequences. It's a game rich in brilliant content.

FFX is so well loved for very good reasons. Fans reacted with joy when the PS3 and Vita version were announced - and I like many hope this version will feature some improvements - but if it doesn't, the game will still be worth replaying, even all these years on - it's a classic.

It's often forgotten behind revolutionaries like **FFIV**, **VI** and **VII**, but FFX is a vital chapter in the series - and a seminal moment. Every single fan should play it.

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Originally Released: July 19 2001
Available On: PS2, PS3/Vita [Upcoming]
Key Staff:
 Motomu Toriyama, Yoshinori Kitase, Tetsuya Nomura, Kazushige Nojima, Daisuke Watanabe, Yusuke Naora, Shintaro Takai, Nobuo Uematsu, Masashi Hamauzu, Junya Nakano, Takayoshi Nakazato, Toshiro Tsuchida
Article by: Nick Van Heer



There's no shortage of allusions to religion and the mythologies of our world in the Final Fantasy series.

Many enemies are based on or pulled straight from legends, series staple eidolons including creatures and gods from Norse and Greek mythology, Hinduism and more. This mix of real world mythologies and religious icons has created a blend that is unique to FF, but its various worlds never used religion as a core plot element – until **Final Fantasy X**.

FFX features a faith based on the teachings of Yevon, a world-spanning religion whose faithful include all bar one race, the outcast and 'heretic' Al Bhed.

The religion operates as Spira's governing body, headed by the Grand Maester, similar in function to Catholicism's Pope.

The Grand Maester is a spiritual leader to the people of Spira, guiding them on how to live their lives according to the teachings of Yevon. Supporting the Grand Maester are three other Maesters, acting as individual leaders for the three Yevon-following races: Human, Ronso and Guado.

The Maesters and Grand Maester are supported by a number of priests and acolytes serving throughout Spira in various functions, but it is the responsibility of these four to lead the followers of Yevon.

While the full extent of Yevon's teachings aren't explored during FFX, the core function of the faith is vital to the game. It explains the existence of Sin, a gigantic whale-like creature that continually devastates Spira. Yevon claims to offer the means to defeat it.

Yevon's teachings are most prominent in the temples throughout Spira. Summoners, tasked with the destruction of Sin, pray at these temples in order to gain the aid of aeons and prove themselves worthy of the Final Aeon, the only means to defeat Sin.

With the plot following Yuna's pilgrimage as a summoner, it is little wonder that religion is so prominent in FFX.

The party interact with priests at every temple, and have several dealings with the Maesters and Grand Maester throughout the game.

While the focus of the first half of the game is on Yuna's pilgrimage, there is a gradual and subtle shift toward examining Yevon and the hidden motives behind the religion as the game progresses.



Wakka is central to demonstrating this to the player; his character progresses from being blindly faithful to Yevon to being a traitor and heathen with trauma and confusion in between.

While the other party members are quick to accept that the teachings of Yevon – and the teachers themselves – are not all as they seem, Wakka continually struggles with the prospect.

Reaching Zanarkand proves to be the turning point for the party as they discover the truth. The real meanings behind the teachings of Yevon were deliberately hidden, Spira's people suppressed with falsehoods.



Wakka's faith is repeatedly shaken - but remains steadfast for much of the game.

Even Wakka is able to admit that they were fooled and the party then decides to cast off the shackles of tradition and seek a true end for Sin.

Their defiance has them excommunicated, but by this point two Maesters – Wen Kinoc and Kelk Ronso – are dead, leaving the remaining Maester - Seymour Guado and Grand Maester Yo Mika as unsent.

The solidarity of Yevon's teachings is obviously shaky when supported by four dead men, the religion's foundations crumbling as its leaders fall.

On the surface the scandal with Yevon's teachings might seem like a simple critique of organized religion, however it is far more powerful when viewed as a critique of blind faith of any kind – not just in a religious sense.

Wakka once again personifies this idea: his hatred and distrust of both Al Bhed and machina stem from unquestioned beliefs and superstitions.

Even after Al Bhed Rikku enters the party, Wakka remains staunch in his ways, which leaves him far more susceptible to the lies of Yevon and its Maesters.

Operation Mi'ihen is another example of misplaced faith. The Crusaders and their Al Bhed comrades put absolute faith in the power of their machina, but it of course isn't enough to overcome Sin, resulting in death and destruction.

Both Crusader and Al Bhed forces are left utterly annihilated - and it is ultimately all thanks to their misplaced faith.

The teachings of Yevon, in addition to being an in-game faith, draw influence from a number of real world religions. The structure, as already noted, is similar to Catholicism.

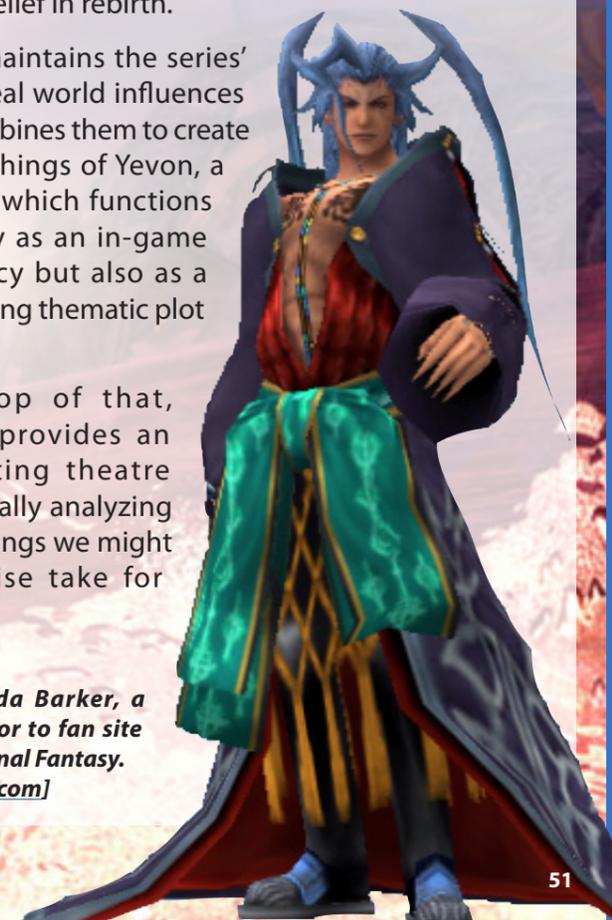
The very concept of a summoner's pilgrimage to temples is not unique, with examples found in Christianity, Islam and Judaism, among others. Pilgrims travel to holy places in order to become closer to their god; Yuna and the other summoners travel to gain the strength of the aeons.

There are also constant references to circles, a concept Seymour fixates on. He wishes to end Spira's cycle of sorrow and death. These, coupled with Sin's continual reincarnation, are clear allegories to the Hindu belief in rebirth.

FFX maintains the series' use of real world influences and combines them to create the teachings of Yevon, a religion which functions not only as an in-game theocracy but also as a compelling thematic plot device.

On top of that, it also provides an interesting theatre for critically analyzing some things we might otherwise take for granted.

By Dakota Barker, a contributor to fan site Eyes on Final Fantasy. [eyesonff.com]





Final Fantasy X-2 has been much maligned since its release in 2003. Despite decent scores from critics, the fan community has largely turned its back on the series' first direct sequel, a return to the world of Spira after Sin was defeated. Was it just a bit too 'Charlie's Angels'? Or was it a glorious return to one of FF's most inspired worlds?

One point that cannot be contested is that FFX-2 has one of the best battle systems the series has to offer. There's frantic turn based action mixed in with the best representation of the job system I've encountered so far.

Being able to change to almost any job in the game as long as it's on your garment grid makes for a lot of fun, but mastering one takes a lot of dedication. Given the fast paced nature of the storyline, and fewer party characters, it was an inspired and necessary decision to speed up battles from **FFX's** slower paced combat.

The range of jobs was amazing too – inspired both by modern and traditional Japanese culture, it was perfect for the Japanophile in all of us. Granted, the costumes were a little on the racy side, but suited Japanese cosplay culture to a tee.

The gameplay is usually accepted as great, but the story often gets trashed by fans. All the main protagonists are girls? The main plot has a singer and her lost love as its impetus? And, uh... politics? I know - it sounds rough.

But these are all things that make FFX-2 great! Lenne and Shuyin's tragic love story is utterly moving, mirroring Yuna's own perfectly. Seeing Yuna overcome her sorrow to take charge and fight Shuyin's despair, giving a concert on top of the airship, is one of the most powerful moments in the entire series.



The political strife between New Yevon and the Youth League paints an interesting portrait of post-Sin life in Spira, and proves that not only apocalyptic scale monsters can tear a nation apart.



And perhaps as a young woman, I found the three heroines of FFX-2 inspiring. Three strong, confident women finding their way in a new world. And for all those Paine haters – you clearly didn't find all the Crimson Spheres. The Den of Woe is an incredible, and harrowing, experience. It's challenging, but not soul crushing so like the Dark Aeons!

And let's not forget FFX-2's supporting cast! Although I often found myself losing patience with Brother, and that weird little fellow by the Moonflow, Leblanc and her band of sphere hunters provided me with bounds of entertainment. Nooj, Baralai and Gippal present a practical background - leaders attempting to rebuild and revamp the traditionalist landscape that has preceded them.

Best of all, getting to see so many beloved characters again helps FFX-2 to feel a bit like returning home after time away - catching up with old friends.

Unlike other games in the series FFX-2 is quite transparent in giving you a percentage of completion as well as a new game plus option. Getting to 100% was possibly the most fun I've had playing an FF game.



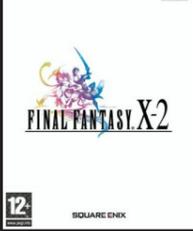
From the downright strange quests like finding a husband for the Calm Lands trader to sphere break (in my eyes the best mini game in the entire series), getting 100% was an absolute joy. And that secret ending? For any fan of FFX, a necessary and heartwarming reward.

More than anything else, FFX-2 was an excuse to go and explore Spira again. And this time, you could get into every nook and cranny of it, virtually whenever you wanted, with an almost open-world feel to your travels.

After FFX's deeply structured journey for Yuna's quest, FFX-2's episodic format allows you to see Spira on your own terms, and discover it as new again. Really, that's all I could have wanted.

Robyn Hardman [[@twobeatsoff](#)] is the founder and editor of alternative music zine *Two Beats Off* who also occasionally writes about her love of video games. [[TwoBeatsOff.co.uk](#)]

Originally Released: March 13 2003
Available On: PS2
Key Staff: Motomu Toriyama, Yoshinori Kitase, Tetsuya Nomura, Shintaro Takai, Kazushige Nojima, Daisuke Watanabe, Noriko Matsueda, Takahito Eguchi
Article by: Robyn Hardman




Originally Released: May 16 2002
Available On: PS2, PC, 360
Key Staff:
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 Kumi Tanioka, Nobuo Uematsu
Article by: Andrew Copeland



After reaching the ten-game milestone with **FFX**, **Hironobu Sakaguchi** wanted the eleventh Final Fantasy to be bold and forward-thinking. After seeing Western-made MMOs such as **Everquest**, he made what at the time must've seemed an insane suggestion: an FF MMO.

Despite launching 10 years ago, **Final Fantasy XI** impressively still boasts several features that many modern MMOs have failed to replicate - proof of the team's ambition. Cross-platform play is one such feature - PS2, Xbox 360 and PC players can play together seamlessly.

Servers are global, not divided by region, while an impressive 'Auto Translate' feature allows players to send basic messages to each other regardless of language.

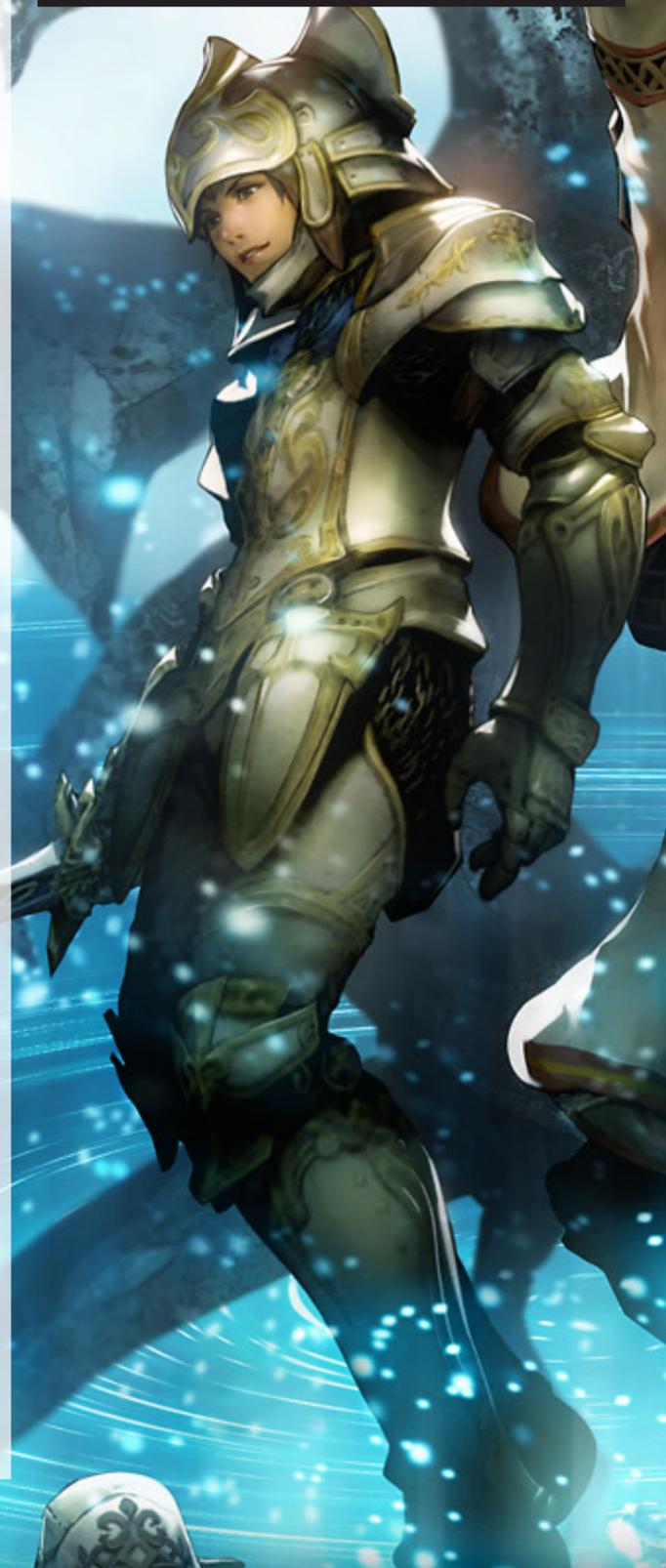
FFXI encourages playing with everyone and anyone regardless of platform, region or language - and for that it deserves commendation.

The game didn't arrive in the West until a full year after its Japanese launch, but came bundled with its first expansion. Traditional FF fans were in for a culture shock once the epic CG intro had passed - it was all MMO, with players creating a character by selecting a race, job and home nation.

The races hit the stereotypes you'd expect - the humes are essentially Human while the Elvaan are elves. The pint-sized Tarutaru fill the cute quota, while the male-only Galka are the opposite, big and bulky. Finally there's the cat-like Mithra.

More familiar to FF fans were the six basic jobs the game opened with. While others became accessible later, the basic jobs of Warrior, Monk, Thief, White Mage, Black Mage, and Red Mage should sound familiar.

At level 30 players gain an advanced job - also in familiar FF roles. At launch the game had Paladin, Dark Knight, Beastmaster, Bard, and Ranger as options, but numerous additional jobs were added with expansion packs.



FFXI's job system is one of its strongest features; While most MMOs limit players to one job or class per character, FFXI offers access to all jobs on a single character through the sub-job system. This lets lower-level abilities from another job be used, allowing for an impressive level of customization.



Vana'diel has several city locations, though the most important are the three states adventurers can call home - The Republic of Bastok, The Kingdom of San d'Oria and The Federation of Windurst.

"It's clear that the risky switch to MMO paid off"

Your home nation was important, for FFXI was notorious for throwing you in at the deep end. There was no clear path to follow like in many modern MMOs - you're uncerimoniously dropped into your home city and left to find your own way.

FFXI's famously steep learning curve was more tolerable in 2003 than it is today; People enjoyed the challenge of figuring out what to do next. Today's hand-holding is welcome in a sense, but some of the sense of accomplishment felt then is absent.

The usual heavy FF focus on story remains, though, the tale of Vana'diel is quite an engrossing one. The tale of a decades-long battle between the forces of light and darkness, FFXI rivals its single player relations.

FFXI has built a healthy community of fans and players, too - a vital thing for an MMO to have. Over the years fans have launched and curated wikis, podcasts, message boards and more - working together to deliver a better experience to fellow players.

Square Enix also join in, interacting with fans and fan sites far more frequently than with single player titles. The result is a

far more cohesive community; Offline FF fans could learn a lot from FFXI's community spirit.

Like most MMOs, the majority of the game before reaching the level cap and end game content is focused on leveling your character. Several improvements have been made to the EXP curve over the years, tweaks making leveling less of a chore.

The largest change to this was with the series of Abyssea add-ons, were players could net large EXP gains as part of a large party called an alliance. Players testified to going from level 30 to 75 in a day - something that would've previously taken weeks.

Later changes helped place the emphasis on content over grinding and decreased the need for large alliances. Many groups of players would begin to take on Abyssea with only a handful of their friends.

In 2010 the level cap rose to 99, making many older quests less challenging, leading to older content to be revamped to be more accessible while also providing a new challenge to experienced players.



Dynamis was the first system to be changed, allowing players to tackle it once a day instead of the reservation system, which required scheduling.

Over the last year the majority of version updates have consisted of additions to Voidwatch - a quest based around defeating beings from other dimensions. The game is still seeing new systems and refinements on a regular basis.

FFXI is still going strong in its tenth year - a massive achievement - and the game is set to receive an all-new fifth expansion pack at some point in 2013.

Officially the most profitable FF ever, it's clear that the risky switch to MMO paid off - not just in monetary ways, but in what this bold title adds to FF's already impressive legacy.

Andrew Copeland [[@rofldrg](#)] curates the FFXI and FFXIV sections of **Gamer Escape**. [[gamerescape.com](#)]

Rise of the Zilart



Debut: April 2003
Notable Additions:

- Elshimo Island
- Dagoon, Ninja and Summoner Jobs



Rise of the Zilart allowed players to travel to Elshimo Island - home of thick jungles, the Temple of Uggalepih, and Norg, the base of operations for the Tenshodo, a pirate group led by Gilgamesh.

Another location was Kuzotz, which consisted of large deserts and the Quicksand Caves.

RotZ also introduced some of the game's first endgame activities for the level 75 cap- Tu'Lia (known to players as 'Sky') and Dynamis- a realm where players fought against armies inside of the cities in order to acquire Artifact Armor and items needed for Relic Weapons.

Chains of Promathia

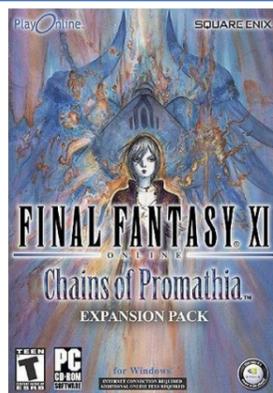
Chains of Promathia introduced the Tavnazian Archipelago, including dungeons, field areas and a new city as well as The Tavnazian Safehold, which served as a home for survivors of the devastating battle that takes place in the game's opening cinematic.

Its storyline placed characters into level capped areas, which forced players to purchase low level equipment in order to be well geared. CoP's quests were difficult, but the end reward and new endgame content in the form of Limbus was well worth the effort.

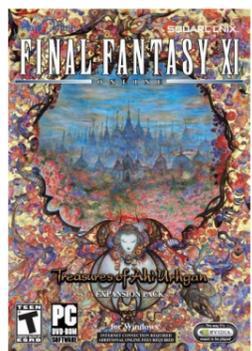


Debut: September 2004
Notable Additions:

- Tavnazian Archipelago
- Tavanazian Safehold



Treasures of Aht Urghan



Debut: April 2006
Notable Additions:

- The Near East
- Three new Jobs

Treasures of Aht Urghan added an entirely new continent - the Near East. Players could participate in new mission types including Assault, Salvage and Einherjar, allowing battle in groups to work towards high level equipment and to reach boss Odin.

Players choosing to stay in the town could also participate in a mode titled Besieged, defending the city from any one of the three new beastmen races in a large scale battle alongside other players and NPCs.

Wings of the Goddess

Wings of the Goddess took players back in time to experience the events of The Crystal War. Several areas from the game's initial launch were reworked to show off the effects of the war. Players could access those areas by visiting the Vavernous Maw - a portal in the form of FF regular Atomos.

Players could aid the Campaign operations of a city of their choosing as well as participate in large battles against the Beastmen in order to hold their nation's outposts. Several new jobs were also made available.



Debut: November 2007
Notable Additions:

- Time Travel
- Dancer and Scholar Jobs



PlayOnline

For a company as ambitious as Square FFXI's birth would never be as simple as just making an MMO. They wanted to create an online platform that could be used for several mediums. Games with some type of internet connectivity were a large part of that.

That birthed **PlayOnline**, a system birthed with the intention of being a music player, messaging service and digital download hub for Square games and Manga. Only the messaging service made it into the final product, giving users access to chat rooms, friend lists and their own PlayOnline email address - useful for FFXI players arranging groups but retaining privacy in their personal emails.

FFXI would be Square's first MMORPG, powered by PlayOnline - but for a time it wasn't going to be the first FF to have internet connectivity. FFX was originally intended to pack in PlayOnline features, allowing players to access real-time chats with other players about the game as well as other materials such as guides and FAQs. Plans changed, and by release those features were removed from the game.

Other PlayOnline releases did eventually hit, including Dirge of Cerberus, Front Mission Online and a Japanese localized release of Everquest II - but only FFXI and one other title made it to the Western service.

Despite the failure to make PlayOnline an online hub for all Square software to connect to, it still exists as the portal through which FFXI is accessed and even has an Xbox 360 port through which that version of FFXI launches. The software is also used to deliver blog updates and information to players of FFXI, including promotions for other, offline Square Enix titles.



In North America not many titles were a part of PlayOnline - outside of FFXI, its flagship software, only one title was ever comparable with the service in the West. That title was **Tetra Master Online** - a peer-versus-peer multiplayer version of the popular card game featured in FFXI.

A subscription for Tetra Master cost only \$1.00 a month and would allow the player to go online to battle against others. However, the title didn't retain much popularity and by the end of 2010 the game was shut down.

FFXI Add-On Downloads

With the storyline of **Wings of the Goddess** not quite finished, FFXI's team wanted to try a new type of content. They weren't ready for a new expansion yet, so instead they decided to add new lengthy quest lines involving areas and characters already present in the game.

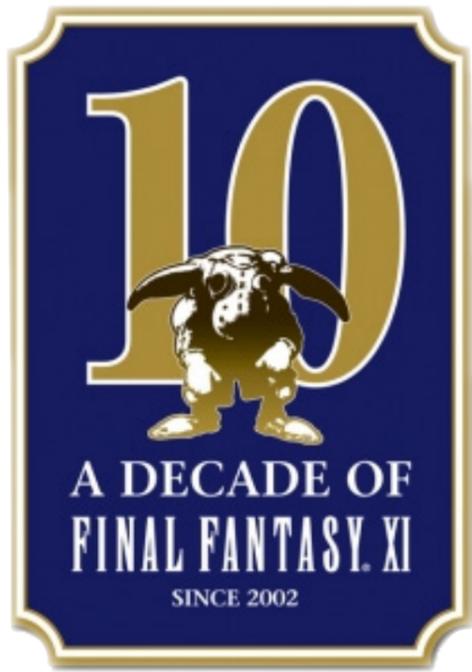
These were purchased through the PlayOnline viewer and downloaded with the version updates that accompanied them instead of having to buy a physical disc.

Scenario Add-Ons:

- A Crystalline Prophecy (March 2009)
- A Moogle Kupo d'Etat (July 2009)
- A Shantotto Ascension (October 2009)

Battle Add-Ons

- Vision of Abyseea (June 2010)
- Scars of Abyseea (August 2010)
- Heroes of Abyseea (November 2010)



Perhaps one of the most telling and impressive signs of **Final Fantasy XI's** success is that it has spawned its own official fan expo - VanaFest. Taking place yearly - more recently only in Japan - the event gives fans and players of FFXI an opportunity not only to gather and meet each other but also meet those behind the games and hear the latest developments for the game from within the development team.

2012's celebrations were a little bit different and special - because this was the year in which FFXI marked a decade since its original PS2 release in Japan. Taking place at Pacifico Yokohama in Japan from June 23rd-24th, the massive event featured developer panels, hands-on with the new "Heroines' Holdfast" battlefield and several concerts featuring FFXI music performed by composers **Naoshi Mizuta** and **Kumi Tanioka**. **Nobuo Uematsu's** rock concept band 'Earthbound Papas' also performed at the event, playing pieces of music from the entire series.

New expansion **Seekers of Adoulin** was announced and debuted with a trailer. Panels at the event then focused largely on expansion reveals as well as a small demonstration of a new PC user interface under construction. Many of the events were live streamed online.

Near the close of the event, FFXI Producer and FF veteran **Hiromichi Tanaka** came on stage to deliver some big news: he was leaving FFXI and the company. **Akihiko Matsui**, battle director of FFXIV, is to take his place.

Tanaka, pictured above with well-wishes from fans, joined small gaming company GungHo Online Entertainment as a freelancer after departing Square Enix. His influence there continues to be felt through VanaFest, the much-loved world of Vana'diel, FFXI's team and most importantly of all through the game's players - that's quite the legacy.



FFXI composer Kumi Tanioka plays live at VanaFest 2012

MMO Player? Win the best specialist mouse going!

Thanks to the folks at awesome gaming peripheral maker **Mad Catz**, we've got a little something for FFXI and FFXIV fans - two of their **M.M.O. 7** mice that you can win here today. These beauties come with a suite of features to aid MMO players - hotkeys, adjustable grips, programmable commands, backlighting, and an ergonomic design all supporting an incredible 6400dpi mouse.



Just answer this question: **When was Final Fantasy XI's first release?**

Email your answer to ff25comp@uffsite.net before January 15th!
Winners will be notified via email. Full Terms & Conditions @ uffsite.net/ff25/comp

In August 2008, **Final Fantasy XI** faced one of its largest challenges - a full-blown controversy. In-game, the linkshell 'Beyond the Limitation' had gathered together to take on one of the newest bosses of FFXI - Pandemonium Warden (Pictured).

Pandemonium Warden has several different forms that must be defeated during a confrontation. Originally there were nineteen forms - a number later almost halved to ten.

Talking to Japanese gaming magazine Famitsu, *Mizuki Ito* and *Daisuke Sase* spoke of their original battle design for the monster. Sase anticipated that between 36 and 54 players would be needed to take the boss down, and placed the spawn point close to town so that players could change jobs and gear mid-fight - good design.

When Beyond the Limitation spawned Pandemonium Warden, they began to fight it. They fought it more and more and more. After **eighteen hours** they gave up. Pandemonium Warden hadn't been defeated. Eighteen hours.

FFXI fan site Pet Food Alpha ran a story titled 'How Long is too Long?' and spoke directly to players involved. "People were passing out and getting physically ill," one said. "We decided to end it before we risked turning into a horrible news story about how video games ruin people's lives."

News of this fight hit gaming sites, causing an outcry. Square Enix had no choice but to make changes not only to Pandemonium Warden but to many of the game's major bosses, making it so they could be defeated within two hours. If players were unable to defeat them within two hours, they would despawn. After these changes, Pandemonium Warden was edited to be defeatable, and is even easier to beat in the current game.

Lesson learned, then.



FFXI and the Long Arm of the Law

Pandemonium Warden wasn't **Final Fantasy XI's** only brush with controversy - the game actually prompted a change in law in the US state of Illinois.

In 2008, one Illinois resident decided he'd had his fill of Vana'diel - it was time to cancel. There was only one problem - he couldn't figure out how. FFXI's website didn't feature an option to unsubscribe from the \$13 a month subscription fee. The player's parents got involved, but they too were stumped - FFXI's website didn't even list a phone number for customer support.

Eventually contact details were found on the statement of the credit card that had been charged for the game's subscription. Even then it wasn't easy, with the parents allegedly on hold for a massive 45 minutes before somebody at Square Enix took their call.

Complaints about this chain of events led to a change in Illinois law which now means that any provider of an Internet Gaming Service in that state - from FFXI to Xbox Live - must offer a method of unsubscribing online without use of telephone or post. FFXI customer support and billing is much better now, too.

VanaFest 2012 was the main place for FFXI fans to celebrate the game's 10th anniversary - and Square Enix confirmed the future of the game there by announcing a new boxed expansion, **Seekers of Adoulin**.

Adding Ulbuka, a new continent to the west, new zones, the city of Adoulin and two new jobs in the form of Geomancer and Rune Fencer, SoA will be the 5th FFXI expansion.

In Adoulin players will have access to new guilds: Information, Exploration, Security, Amusement, Transportation, and the Workshop Guilds. Each serves a different purpose in the exploration of the great wilderness of Ulbuka. Ulbuka is home to strange caves, monster lairs, places to receive "mysterious power" and hidden statue segments which are used in a new instanced dungeon system!

Exploration and pioneering of the new continent is a large part of the expansion, with players able to destroy obstacles like rocks and trees as well as be able to gather new materials from the environment. Players can also construct outposts which can be used as a destination for teleportation as well as a shop.

This new system allows you customization of the details of a dungeon by building a statue. Each statue piece helps to determine specific characteristics of the dungeon - the head dictates size, the body enemy strength and drop rates and the feet mission criteria, which, if met, yields a bonus.

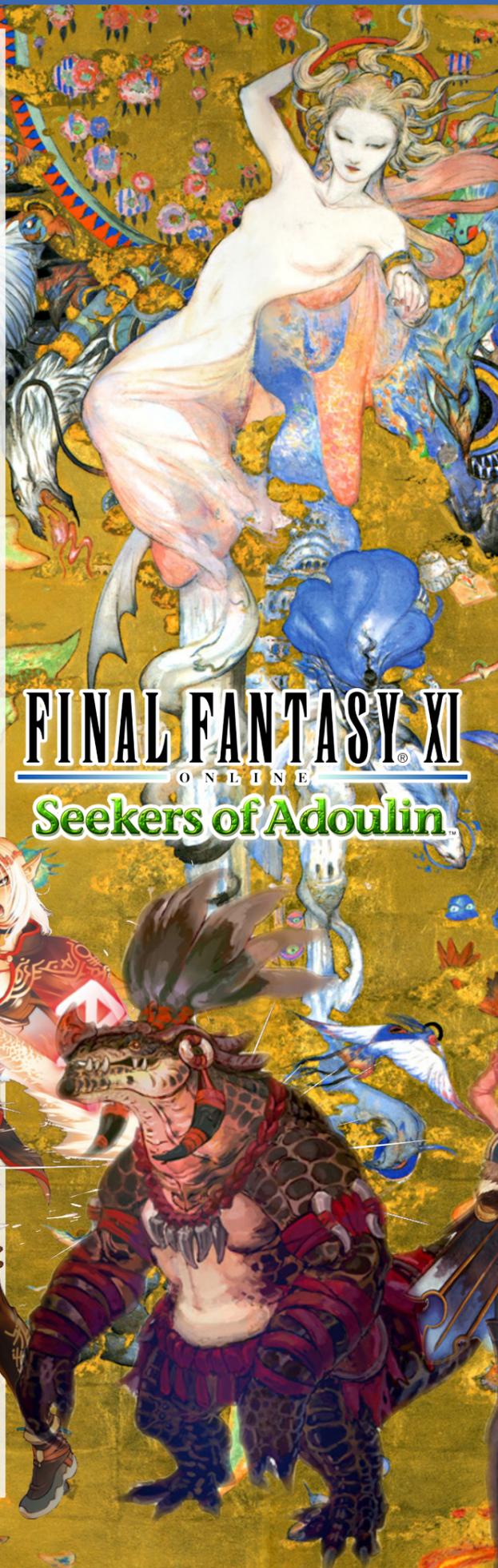
Best of all, even with the levels of customization item drops will stay consistent with each area. If players create an easy dungeon, they still have a chance to acquire the same items that players in a difficult dungeon would.

The last new system revealed for Seekers of Adoulin at VanaFest is titled "Back on the Ranch" - a unique addition which gives each player their own private island.

There, players can raise animals to procure materials and fish and mine. The island also allows players to garden in a natural environment - meaning worrying about plants drying up is less of a problem.

The island and its activities are meant to be stress free for experienced players.

Final Fantasy XI: Seekers of Adoulin is due to release for PC, PS2 and Xbox 360 in March 2013.



Shortly after VanaFest 2012 we had a chance to chat to some of FFXI's staff about plans for the future of the game and its new expansion, Seekers of Adoulin. Here's what they had to say.

Why was there such a long period of time between expansions? When did development begin?

While we were planning the release of Wings of the Goddess, we realized that there wouldn't be enough room in the future to create the amount of additional maps needed for a full disc expansion.

With that in mind, we decided to do what we could by using existing areas for add-on scenarios and the addition of a few areas for the Abysssea battle area add-ons.

During that time, we continued researching and revamping the system to allow us to increase the number of maps that we could implement, something that was previously impossible.

With the revamp completed it became possible for us to increase the map capacity around the middle of 2011 and then we started planning for Seekers of Adoulin.

In North America Seekers of Adoulin will not be available for the PS2. Can you tell us about the process of making this decision?

In evaluating the North American release of the expansion across all platforms, we needed to consider multiple factors, including the number of players exclusively on the system, and the costs associated with publishing or developing a stand-alone download.

Regrettably, these two factors greatly determined our final decision to support the PC and Xbox platforms exclusively. However, we remain committed to supporting FINAL FANTASY XI on the PlayStation 2 platform for the foreseeable future.

How will players first arrive in Adoulin?

For Seekers of Adoulin, we didn't create a map for an ocean route, so we're planning to make the main mode of transportation a teleport-like warp.

We are planning to make this extremely convenient, and as players progress further with pioneering, the number of areas that they'll be able to warp to will increase. We can't say too much, but yes, there will be a quest requirement similar to the one to use the boat to travel to Aht Urhgan.

Players will have private islands where they can farm and do other activities. Can you talk about how these work?

As there will be rental houses for players within the town of Adoulin, the islands will not be too similar to Mog Houses. Imagine the island as a specialized area for procuring materials.

From a system perspective it is difficult to invite other players to your island, but that's not to say that we have completely given up on it.

Since you won't be able to alter the layout of this area like you can inside of a Mog House, it won't really be possible to decorate it. However, there will be visual variations that can be made, such as farmland expansions, in order to increase the amount of materials that you can procure.



One of the expansion's new classes - the Geomancer.

How many types of Runes and Luopons will there be? Will they be a consumable item or a spell or ability?

Runes will be activated through the use of abilities. As mentioned at VanaFest, there are both offensive and defensive types of runes.

Offensive runes will mainly be used against enemies dealing elemental damage and such, while defensive runes will mainly be used on yourself and party members to reduce elemental damage.

Rune fencers will also be able to utilize enhancing magic, so like paladins they will also utilize and consume MP.

At VanaFest you said that you're looking into changing some of the game code to deal certain issues. Are there any things that the coding will make possible that you can tell us about?

We're not actually changing the code itself but expanding on the character-related data.

This update will enable the addition of new jobs, as well as the expansion of various other facets of the game, but we have not yet fully planned out exactly what we will be doing with this. To start out we will first be expanding job-related aspects, such as new jobs and recast timers.

It's been mentioned that plug-ins might be supported with the new PC user interface. Can you tell us more about this?

Using a tool we're internally calling "Schemer," we will be making it possible to freely customize and arrange existing functions with the graphics of your liking. We are currently looking into the overall approval process.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of Final Fantasy XI. What are some of your favorite memories since the project began? Is there anything you would have done differently?

Mizuki Ito: Well, one of the most memorable things for me recently is the announcement of Hiromichi Tanaka's retirement. While I was saddened by that fact that he is retiring, I feel very proud and fortunate to be a developer at the same company with a person who retired while being loved by many of the fans.

Yoji Fujito: When I think about memorable things in the history of the game, I would have to say the earthquake on March 11, 2011 and how its influence reached FFXI had a major impact on me.

There hasn't been an example in the past where service had to be halted for a long time and when I think about the fact that there were players who were affected by the disaster, I feel that this was a major event for both us and players alike.

Interview via Gamer Escape. [gamerescape.com]
Original text by Andrew Copeland [@roflrdg]



Originally Released: March 6 2006
Available On: PS2
Key Staff:
 Yasumi Matsuno, Hiroyuki Ito, Hiroshi Minagawa, Daisuke Watanabe, Isamu Kamikokuryo, Akihiko Yoshida, Hitoshi Sakimoto
Article by: Jacob Taylor



This is what makes FFXII stand out - expansive areas add an extra level of atmosphere that truly make it seem as if you are travelling a world. It's a grand adventure with immersive NPCs, hidden references and secrets aplenty. It is near impossible to discover everything about the game in one playthrough - possibly two.

The new Gambit system, inspired by plays in American Football, allowed players to reprogram party AI to customize their actions, while character growth is handled via the License Board. Similar to FFX's Sphere Grid, the board allows more full and complex customization - for better or worse.

"This game isn't just any old adventure - it's a journey."

With so many intricate styles of gameplay available, FFXII is arguably the game in the series with the largest amount of replay value.

Like Tactics before it, FFXII's plot is woven deeply around political drama and intrigue. While seventeen-year old Vaan is officially FFXII's lead, many argue that fallen princess Ashe truly takes the spotlight as this game's lead character.

Other characters leave a significant mark, such as witty sky pirate Balthier, his runaway partner Fran, Vaan's close friend Penelo and disgraced knight Basch. Even the smaller members of the cast stand out, all unique and interesting.

After losing her Prince and husband, Ashe is determined to



restore her home country of Dalmasca to its former glory. Her tale is one of a struggle both internal and external - she dreams of liberating her kingdom, but is plagued with plots of revenge against the empire that stole it from her.



A phantom of her dead husband haunts her, whilst otherworldly gods attempt to use her as a pawn in a plot much bigger than anyone can foresee.

It's Vaan's innocence and free-spiritedness that leaves Ashe simply longing for freedom once more, setting the tone for the entire game. Freedom is the nucleus of FFXII and is the essence of what bonds the cast together throughout their travels. While the story drags in places, the impact it leaves is extraordinary.



The main antagonist, Vayne, is a behind-the-scenes sort of baddie, much like Kuja was throughout the first half of FFX. It's the sub-villains that are truly memorable here, from the tragic past of Judge Gabranth to the power-hungry and insane Doctor Cid.

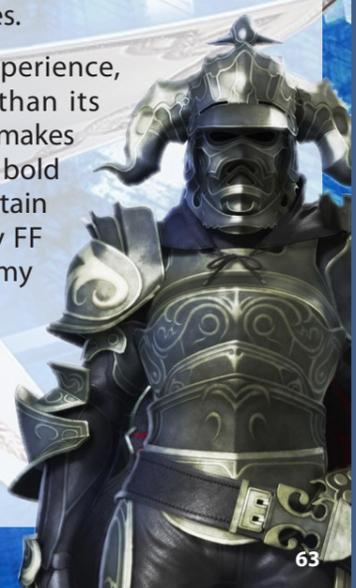
They contain what many previous antagonists in the series lacked: personal depth. Like FFT, not all the antagonists in this game are truly evil. Many of the villains fall in a gray area; they are simply on the opposing side of the protagonists at the time.

In the West, FFXII can't be discussed without mention of the English translation. The script adopts a sort of semi-Shakespearean style, masterminded by translator and voice recording producer **Alexander O. Smith**. Both dialogue and voice acting have received universal praise. FFXII easily has the best, smoothest English translation, voice acting and production in the series.

FFXII offers an unexpected experience, definitely of a different mold than its forebears; but that is exactly what makes it great. It's proof that FF can take bold steps in new directions and still retain its signautre feeling. While every FF is excellent, FFXII will always be my personal favourite.

This game isn't just any old adventure - it's a journey.

Jacob Taylor [[@wee187](#)] is a Moderator for [FFTogether.com](#) and an ambassador for [TheSpeedGamers.com](#).





The concept of Japan getting 'International' re-releases of Final Fantasy titles has become commonplace. **FFVII** and **FFX** both got international releases with small additions, but **FFXII** is the king of such releases with its **International Zodiac Job System** release. This revamped version of FFXII features a job system and special License Board for each class as well as new, stronger weapons and items including the incredibly rare, legendary *Seitengrate Bow* - a weapon even more powerful than FFXII's infamous *Zodiac Spear*.

Unlike other international releases no cutscenes or story elements were added, though the game features the English voice acting, as with **FFX International** and the **Kingdom Hearts Final Mix** releases. A new Trial Mode was added, offering players the chance to import their save and fight through 100 rounds of non-stop battles. This mode included many of the hardest bosses and marks in the game, and also allowed players the dubious honor of fighting all of the Judge Magisters simultaneously in the final stage. This mode - and that particular fight - are considered by many to be one of the most difficult in the entire FF series.

Other quirky additions were welcome too, including a 'Speed Up' button, which let players literally speed up gameplay to get around more quickly or zip through simpler battles with a press of L1. The difficulty was rebalanced and treasure chests were redistributed to encourage exploration. Certain spells were now limited to being found in chests, where every spell could be bought in vanilla FFXII.

There's no two ways about it: these changes are all excellent, and make the already superb FFXII a better game. It's a shame that it never came overseas to the West, though this is the norm for 'International' releases. This isn't some simple cash-in - it was redesigned with love and care, raising the bar of both fun and immersion. It's the definitive version of FFXII - hopefully non-Japanese fans one day get a legitimate release.

Jacob Taylor [[@wee187](#)] is a Moderator for [FFTogether.com](#) and an ambassador for [TheSpeedGamers.com](#).

Yasumi Matsuno

Tactical Genius

Credited: FF Tactics (1997). FF Tactics Advance, FFXII (2006)

Now: Director of 'Crimson Shroud', Freelance



Yasumi Matsuno is widely known as the mastermind of the **Final Fantasy Tactics** sub-series, joining **Square** from **Quest** after being head-hunted by FF creator **Hironobu Sakaguchi**, who was a great fan of his work on the complex, isometric **Ogre Battle** series of strategy RPGs.

After joining Square Matsuno was put in charge of development of a strategy RPG that was similar in style to *Ogre Battle*. Given access to **Hiroiyuki Ito** and **Hideo Minaba** by Sakaguchi - two of his most valuable staffers - the trio would go on to develop that game into **Final Fantasy Tactics**, a blend of FF and *Ogre Battle*.

FFT laid out Matsuno's manifesto, featuring a plot of complex political intrigue in the land of Ivalice and a heavily tactical battle system. Sakimoto even packed in references to rock band Queen, a theme in his work.

Next was **Vagrant Story**, another title with story depth and presentation most unlike traditional FF. It'd later be placed in the FF canon by being retroactively set in Ivalice, though Matsuno says it isn't part of his vision of Ivalice. He then supervised development of **PlayOnline**, the system that would later power **FFXI**.

In 2001 Sakaguchi paired together Matsuno and Hiroiyuki Ito once again to direct **FFXII**. Set again in Ivalice, it carried many themes from FFT without being a direct sequel. Matsuno would sadly never see his vision come to fruition; he bowed out of FFXII's development with the game unfinished, citing health problems. Details of the events that led to his departure are still unclear. The final game credits him as a Supervisor and for the Story and Concept. Sakaguchi declined to play FFXII past the introduction due to Matsuno's departure.

Matsuno briefly worked with Square Enix on the PSP remake of **Tactics Ogre**, but then moved on entirely. His next move may give a clue as to why he decided to leave **Square Enix** - after joining **Level-5 Games**, he said he wanted to make smaller games that he would have complete control over in content and development.

At Level-5 he worked on **Crimson Shroud**, a fantasy RPG that is part of '**Guild 01**,' a 3DS compilation of four small-scale games from four different developers. Since its Japanese release Matsuno has parted ways with Level-5 as well, though has teased that he is already at work on his next top secret project.

An enemy in FFXII, Yazmat (Yiazmat in the US), is named for him with an abbreviated version of his name. Matsuno is alluded to in dialogue for the Yazmat quest as a wise leader and mentor, while Yazmat's in-game profile reads "Farewell to a Legend." [[@YasumiMatsuno](#)]

FINAL FANTASY XIII



Originally Released: December 17 2009

Available On: PS3, Xbox 360

Key Staff:

Motomu Toriyama, Yoshinori Kitase, Isamu Kamikokuryo, Toshiyuki Matsuda, Tetsuya Nomura, Masashi Hamauzu, Daisuke Watanabe

Article by: Tomasz Rozejowski



After a lengthy three year development period, **Final Fantasy XIII** was hugely anticipated. With its world carved in two, one side a futuristic floating paradise and the other a huge, wildlife-filled landscape, it was intended to offer the best of all of FF.

It's a world dominated by gods, the fal'Cie, and the cast of adventurers the game bands together are turned into l'Cie - servants of the gods who have a specific purpose known as a 'Focus.' Completing your task grants a rather grim eternal life in crystal form, while failing sees you turn into a monster.

It's arguably one of FF's most macabre set ups for the basic hero - but FFXIII lead Lightning is more than capable of handling it. She's strong, if a little stoic, an ex-soldier who can most certainly handle herself - though like all good FF heroes, she struggles with her own emotions somewhat.

The rest of FFXIII's cast revolve around Lightning, each offering something new and different from her. Lightning lives for her sister, who she essentially raised, while Sazh is a parent in a more literal sense, and is out to save Dajh, his son. Wannabe tough-guy Snow suffers from a hero complex and an unending sense of duty to the woman he loves - who also happens to be Lightning's sister, Serah.

Particularly interesting is Hope, a young man who blames the actions of Snow's resistance group for the death of his mother. He joins with revenge in mind, but undergoes a significant journey, developing a brotherly relationship with Lightning.

The final members of the cast are less familiar, and deliberately so - they hail from Pulse, and so grew up in a completely different world to the others. One strong, one sweet, Fang and Vanille have arguably suffered most of all - though their pasts remain shrouded in mystery for much of the game.

With the party gathered, everything goes a little bit FFXVII - the crew face off against the military forces of PSICOM and the Holy Government of Sanctum, kicking back at them as AVALANCHE did Shinra. The cast spend much of the game on the run, giving it a fairly constant sense of urgency.

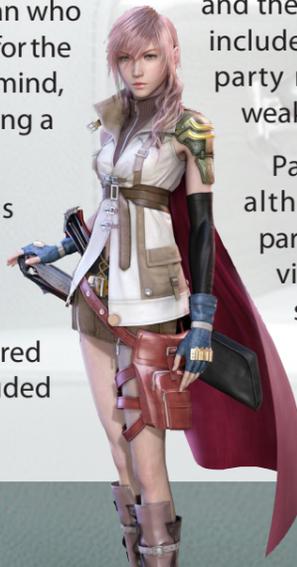


Story is all well and good, but where FFXIII excels for me is in its battle system. I'll admit I actually wasn't very keen on it at first - but it grew on me massively. Built on the foundations of the classic Active Time Battle system, FFXIII adds its own flavor to the formula by introducing the concept of automatic battling.

These auto abilities essentially allow the player to press one button to win and easily blast through some battles - but depth is hidden beneath the surface. The player party consists of three members - one leader, who is controlled exclusively, and two AI teammates. Both AI and leader can change classes or roles and with it combat abilities by equipping what are known as 'Paradigms.'

Each paradigm closely resembles classic FF jobs, and the team can be completely customized to include any combination of the six roles. Each party member has their own strengths and weaknesses in any given role.

Paradigms can be swapped in real time, although setting different load-outs of paradigms can only be done before battle. It's vitally important to adjust your paradigm set up before any big fight. Boss battles, while not entirely encumbering, require a bit of thinking and good timing in order to achieve victory.



The trick of the battle system is to make use of all of the roles at precisely the right moments. Pulling off buffs and debuffs before switching to an offensive class, for instance, is key. While you manage all this, auto battle takes care of commands.

The system can be furthered by the Chain Gauge, which builds up as an enemy attacks. Once the meter is full the enemy will become 'staggered,' allowing the player to deal incredible damage. Combat remains fast paced throughout the entire game, although still requires a great amount of strategy in switching paradigms for success.

As mentioned before, FFXIII restricts you by only allowing you to control one character. Unlike previous FF games, however, if the party leader dies then the game immediately comes to an end. This can get somewhat frustrating when the AI fails to react how you'd hope - again a reason to think carefully before entering battle.

Summons return once again, this time in the form of "transformer" type mechanical beasts. Each character gets their own Eidolon that must be defeated before it joins the party. Odin, Alexander, Shiva, and Bahamut make appearances as well as newcomers Brunhilde and Hecatoncheir. Although not necessary to complete the game, summons are still a fun addition to an already exciting battle system.

FFXIII also impresses visually with breathtaking graphics and wonderful artistic design courtesy of **Isamu Kamikokuryo**. This is a believable world, furthered by significant amounts of some of the best CGI to grace a game.

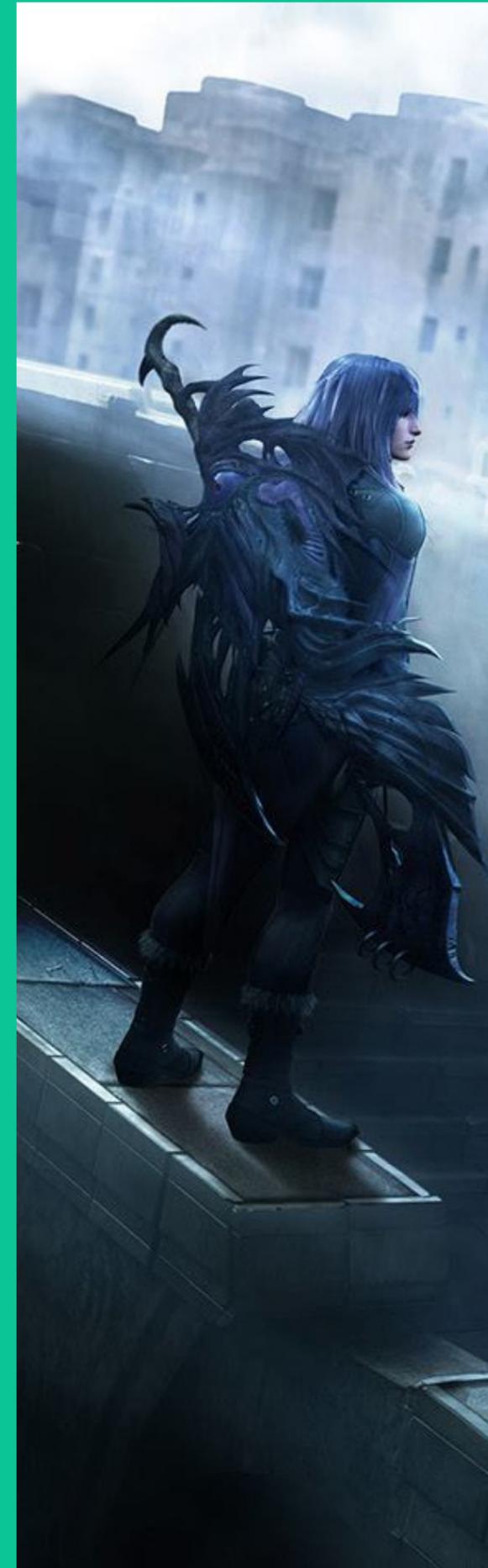


Nobuo Uematsu's rather large shoes are filled more than adequately by the incredibly talented **Masashi Hamauzu**. Several tunes stand out such as **Blinded by Light** or **Sunleth Waterscape**.

It's perhaps too early to pass full judgement on FFXIII, but it's certainly an interesting, unique and exciting step in the series' history. Is it the best entry in the series? The answer you'll get from me, and I feel most fans is no - but it's still a great game.

Its beautiful graphics, fast-paced battle system, and fantastic music make it more than worthwhile and worthy of the FF name. There's room for improvement - but this most certainly isn't a bad starting point for a new era.

Tomasz Rozejowski [[@Zelu1984_FFM](#)] is a global moderator for Final Fantasy Merchandise. [[FinalFantasyMerchandise.com](#)]



The fact that Square Enix has decided to produce not one but two sequels to **FFXIII** is already a rather controversial subject. I'm not afraid of introducing more controversy when I table the following theory: **FFXIII-2's** Noel Kreiss and Caius Ballad are probably the best characters in the entire series. I know that's hard to digest, but hear me out - let me explain.

Like many of FFXIII's characters, the pair are expanded fusions of previous FF characters. Noel takes all the relatable characteristics of Tidus and the excellent character narrative of Zidane. He's a happy yet interesting and emotionally balanced character despite having a rather tragic birth and past. The fact that he's so likeable only makes his story all the more tragic.

The reason Zidane is so superior to Cloud to me is because Zidane actually has a multitude of emotions and Noel does this better than any other FF character in history. In this sense, he's Zidane 2.0, if you will.

Noel's journey is incredibly nuanced compared to the characters in the original FFXIII. He turns from an easy-to-like, happy-go-lucky hero into a tortured, wise and heroic character who you genuinely care about - largely thanks to how much of his emotions he's displayed throughout the game.

Caius is similar fusion of great previous characters, particularly that of Sephiroth, Jecht and also Cloud. Caius is the eternal guardian of a girl who is fated to die endlessly. Watching someone you've sworn to protect bite it repeatedly is surely going to send you insane.

What makes Caius such a good villain is that he actually has some form of emotional connection to Noel too. This rivalry sort of mirrors Kain and Cecil. Noel, Caius and Yeul were the last humans in existence and as such they all have a certain connection - they all share the same tragic history. Like with Noel, that tragedy helps to make him an interesting and relatable villain. There are times where you feel sorry for Caius. He was, after all, just a nice, well-meaning guy sent insane by eternal failure and sorrow.

Both characters are natural extensions of fan favorites, but to be honest aren't treated with the respect they deserve. The funny thing about FF in later titles is that the focus is set far more firmly on character study than on saving the world and while that is certainly still a big theme of the series the new characters tend to step into a brand new quality of their own.

For me, Noel and Caius surpass almost every character in the series because they are human. They both have endured unbelievable sadness while also demonstrating great joy - and this quality is makes them relatable, lovable and well written.

Adam Hurd [@HurdANoise] is a writer and blogger for price comparison site Grimm Games [grimmgames.com]

Yoshinori Kitase

Padadigm Shifter

Credited: FF Adventure [SaGa] (1991), FFV - FFXIII, FFX, X-2, XIII, XIII-2 (2012)

Now: Co-Producer, FF Versus XIII



One Japanese website reports that Yoshinori Kitase decided he wanted to become a film director aged 12 after seeing the original **Star Wars**. Working on cartoons and commercials for TV after obtaining his degree in cinema proved lacking, and Kitase like many, found himself landing in the rapidly growing video game industry at a little company called **Square** - even though he had no coding knowledge.

Kitase's cinema background was a good fit for the story driven Final Fantasy series. He first provided the scenario for **FF Adventure**, the first SaGa game. He then moved on to the role of Event Planner for **FFV**.

FFVI would be the game that would cause Kitase to begin his ascent to being one of the most important people behind the FF series today. There he was the director alongside **Hiroyuki Ito** as well as the event planner. He'd reprise the directorial role for the massively successful **FFVII**, leveling up to scenario planner - putting him now in charge of the overall plot rather than individual scenes. Kitase took on the same role for **FFVIII**.

In **FFX** Kitase's rapid ascent of the series hierarchy continued. There he'd fill the role of producer, a role reprised in **FFX-2** and a plethora of spin-offs related to his past work including FFVII's **Advent Children**, **Before Crisis** and **Dirge of Cerberus**. **Crisis Core** saw him more deeply involved credited as an event planner and executive producer. His credits past that are impressive, including acting as a producer on the first two **Kingdom Hearts** and **Dissidia** titles and co-director of **Chrono Trigger**.

Placed in the role of Producer for **FFXIII**, Kitase first led the team in conceptualizing the game - something done on the PS2. When it became clear the game was more likely to arrive for the next generation of hardware, the team created the **FFVII PS3 technical demo** - and then began work in earnest on FFXIII.

Kitase philosophizes that his games should work to expand the definition of 'Fantasy' - jumping from sci-fi in FFVII and VIII to a distinctly traditional Asian style for FFX - deliberately keeping things fresh. He believes in audience expansion, too - he played a large role in the decision to bring FFXIII to more players via Xbox 360. FF creator **Hironobu Sakaguchi** described himself as having handed the series over into Kitase's care in particular, while Kitase himself has suggested that he views his partnership with **Motomu Toriyama** as vital.

Kitase recently finished **FFXIII-2** and is now working on **Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII** alongside co-producing Tetsuya Nomura's **FF Versus XIII**. In 2009, Kitase pledged to continue working on his vision of the series. Kitase is a self-professed fan of first person shooters - and has said an FF FPS could one day happen.



For a numbered FF title to get a sequel isn't that strange now - but two sequels came as a shock to some when Square Enix announced **Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII**, a direct sequel to **FFXIII-2**.

As the name suggests, you play as Lightning - something fans have been clamoring for since her 5 minute debut in XIII-2. Given the events of previous games, Lightning is now tasked with saving pretty much everyone in a new, dramatic adventure through an open world.

Similar to the experience found in FFX-2, Lightning will have the ability to change into a variety of costumes which in turn give her different abilities based on what she's wearing. There's said to be over 20 different costumes available.



The battle system is a modified version of systems from the previous two games, featuring new real time elements such as direct control of Lightning's movement and a real-time block system. Character customization will be key to the game - as Lightning is the only playable character, there'll be a variety of ways to play her in order to offer diverse gameplay.

Writer and Director **Motomu Toriyama** says he's chosen to link the game's core concepts to Lightning's name; Lightning is associated with electricity, of course, but also is associated with inspiration and epiphanies, a theme of the game. Lightning herself has changed; she's said to be stronger than ever, ready to face her final battle and the end of her legend.

The game's world is vastly different to the one we've come to know in the previous two outings. It's supposedly more diverse, including RPG staples such as dungeons, towns, shops and sweeping landscapes. The name of the world is Novus Partus, and is seen several hundred years after the ending of FFXIII-2.

A doomsday clock is ticking down in the corner of the screen - and comparisons to **The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask** are apt.



Players are tasked with changing and shifting time itself to adjust events and buy yourself more time, pushing the world back from the brink of destruction. Any actions taken, even those such as time-based moves in combat, using transportation, or even facing a game over will train the time that remains. If you get a game over, players can choose to rewind their mistakes at the expense of the timer.

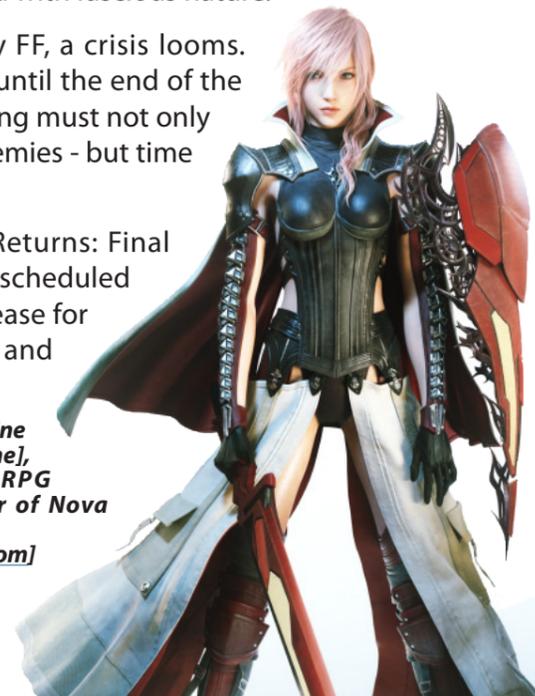
A large monorail serves to carry Lightning from place to place, with the bulk of the game taking place on four distinct islands. Enemies look different, too, taking on a more medieval and organic look over FFXIII's often mechanical looking enemies. Unlike FFXIII-2, there'll be a large numbers of all-new enemies.

The world is in a sense a character itself - where FFXIII was 'Story Driven,' the team say this game is 'World Driven.' The world will constantly change, be it through weather, day/night cycles, the ecology, residents or other things entirely. The four islands represent a peaceful world with luscious nature.

As with any FF, a crisis looms. With 13 days until the end of the world, Lightning must not only defeat her enemies - but time itself.

Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII is scheduled for a 2013 release for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.

By **Erren Van Duine** [[@ErrenVanDuine](#)], US Editor of **RPG Site** and Owner of **Nova Crystallis**. [[novacrystallis.com](#)] [[rpgsite.net](#)]



Motomu Toriyama

Interactive Movie Scripter

Credited: FFVII (1997), FFX, FFX-2, FFXIII Series (2009-12)

Now: Writer/Director at Square Enix



Motomu Toriyama's first work on FF marked him as a face to watch - he was the Event Planner responsible for cross-dressing Cloud and the story sequences early on in **FFVII's** Midgar.

After being rejected for the role of director on Bahamut Lagoon, his hard work on FFVII was noticed. **Yoshinori Kitase** hand-picked him to be the Event Director on **FFX** based on his work on FFVII.

He stepped up to Director on **FFX-2**, and also contributed to **FFXII: Revenant Wings** and the two WiiWare **FF:CC** games.

The success of **FFX** marked the Kitase and Toriyama team as a winning combination. The pair were placed in charge of **FFXIII** and its sequels, with Toriyama as Director and Scenario Director.

Toriyama has said he believes his greatest strength is in creating story-driven games, and explained that the early parts of FFXIII were designed to emulate a movie. He believes the most important part of a FF game is its characters.

Isamu Kamikokuryo

Architect of Cocoon

Credited: FFX (2001), FFXII, Revenant Wings, FFXIII Series (2009-12)

Now: Art Director, Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII



While Tetsuya Nomura is widely associated with the design of the most recent FF titles, Isamu Kamikokuryo has been instrumental in creating the look of the worlds of the recent games.

On joining Square in 2001, Kamikokuryo was given an opportunity to work on their flagship series right away. He acted as an art designer on **FFX**, providing artwork for the in-game gadgets, such as the AI Bhed technology.

He then served as the background art director for the impressive world of **FFXII** and acted as the art supervisor on its handheld sequel, **Revenant Wings**.

Kamikokuryo would become linked to **Yoshinori Kitase** and **Motomu Toriyama** after this - working as art director on **The 3rd Birthday**, **FFXIII**, **FFXIII-2** and the upcoming third entry in the series, **Lightning Returns: FFXIII**.

Kamikokuryo's world design is considered by many to be the best of FFXIII. He's a self-professed **Elder Scrolls** fan.



Originally Released: Sept 22 2010
Available On: PC
Key Staff:
 Hiromichi Tanaka, Nobuaki Komoto,
 Yaeko Sato, Nobuo Uematsu
Article by: Andrew Copeland



Known to the well informed as "Project Rapture" prior to its announcement, **Final Fantasy XIV** was unveiled at Sony's E3 2009 press conference.

The trailer was met at first with confusion - **FFXIII** hadn't even been released at that point - then cheers - and finally even more confusion as the word 'Online' materialized beneath the game's orange-tinted title.

That mixed reaction was one FFXIV would see frequently - as when the title launched it was far from what was imagined and hoped for.

The pressure on FFXIV was high. Square Enix wanted it to be as profitable as **FFXI**, the most profitable FF ever, while fans expected an evolution of FFXI's ideas.

A number of circumstances meant that dreams were shattered for both fans and Square Enix alike when the game launched. It simply wasn't very good, was certainly inferior to FFXI, and was critically mauled.

Square Enix valiantly fought the fires ravaging FFXIV for months, but eventually threw their hands up and admitted that without drastic reform the game couldn't be saved.

They took the drastic measure of suspending subscriptions and shuffling the game's staff, most notably removing FFXI veteran **Hiromichi Tanaka**, replacing with him with **Naoki Yoshida**.

There are too many factors to pinpoint everything that went wrong with FFXIV, but some things are obvious. Square Enix admitted that they failed to listen to player feedback during the Alpha and Beta tests, thus not fixing issues identified by fans.

This particular issue was part of a greater problem - the lack of communication Square Enix had with the FFXIV community.

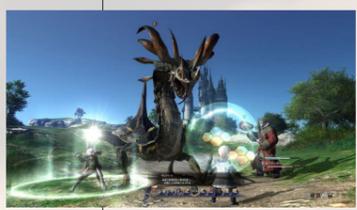
In one fiasco the game's producer took to twitter to complain about misinformation on Western sites, but players argued back that many Japanese information drops never received an official translation.



This reduced good will towards the game, but what was released was deeply flawed anyway. It's not clear if the development process went wrong or if FFXIV merely needed more time, but it wasn't fit for release.

Realizing this, Square Enix decided to relaunch FFXIV completely, giving the green-light to **Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn** - reshuffling the game's staff and placing Yoshida in charge.

A Realm Reborn almost entirely remakes FFXIV, and will be available free to FFXIV owners - a costly gesture.



FFXIV's strong concepts look as though they'll finally get the execution they deserve in A Realm Reborn, and Square Enix's graceful handling of the situation should be noted.

Even community communication has improved - Yoshida now writes regular letters discussing things under consideration for the game with a genuine personal touch. Official forums were launched and players could hear about ideas to change and fix the game from the developers via community staff.

It seems that this particularly dark cloud over FF's history may have a shining silver lining after all.

Andrew Copeland [[@rofldrg](#)] curates the FFXI and FFXIV sections of **Gamer Escape**. [[gamerescape.com](#)]



If there's one team to keep an eye on for the future of FF, it's the minds behind **FFXIV: A Realm Reborn**.

Two years ago the game was rushed to launch and met with humiliating failure - but where most other publishers would have closed the door on such a disaster, Square Enix have bravely decided to stick by the game, relaunching it.

Led by talented Producer and Director Naoki Yoshida - a name relatively unnoticed until recently - the company is pushing on, the team enduring sleepless nights in order to fix the game and bring back the trust lost amongst fans and critics alike.

It seemed an impossible task, but the path laid out, changes promised and progress made thus far on the title is impressive and bodes well. The name 'A Realm Reborn' is more than just marketing speak - it defines this, a complete rebirth of FFXIV.

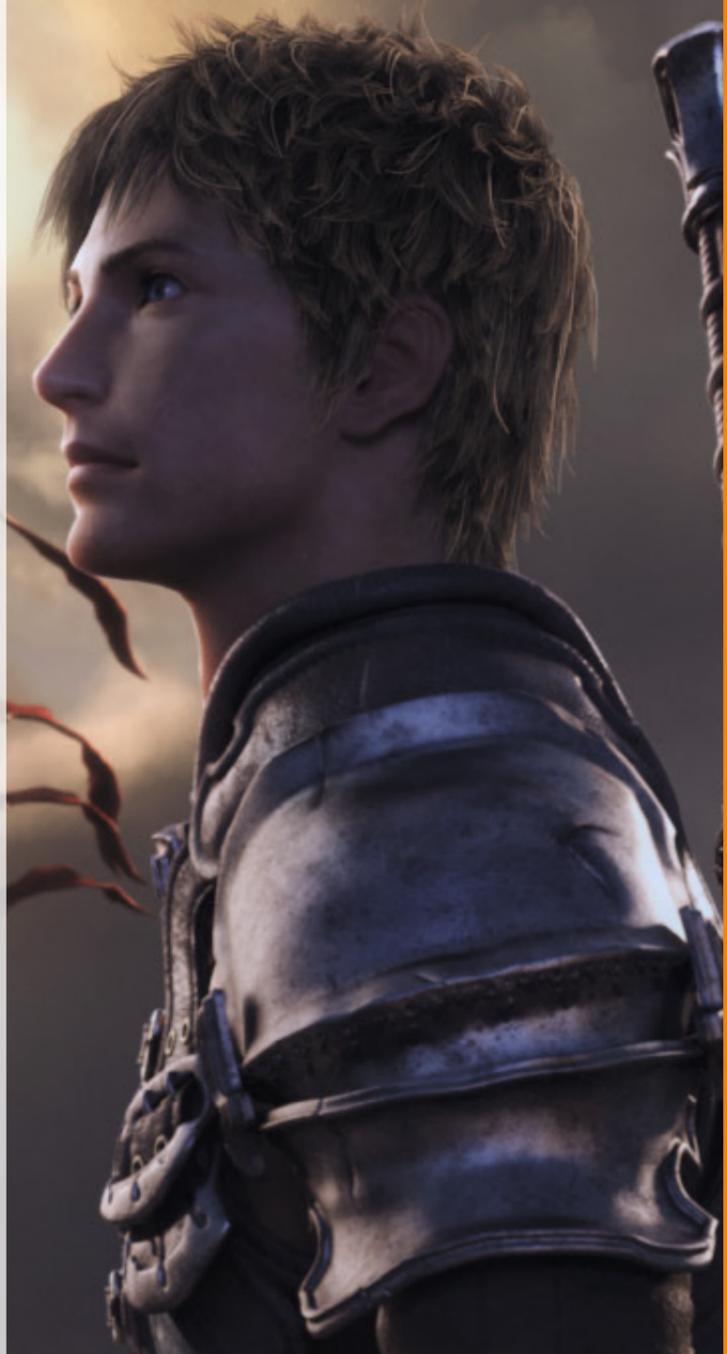
When it launches on PC and PlayStation 3 next year it will support a deluge of features including a brand new graphics engine, a new game client, a more recognizably FF-like story and world, an all-new user interface, character options and much more.

Most impressive is how open Yoshida and his team have been. On announcing the project they released a 'roadmap' detailing their plans, and since then they have largely delivered on promised dates and changes.

For those who persevered and stuck with the broken FFXIV the proof is in the pudding - Yoshida saw that game improve massively even before the full rebuild.

With a beta test scheduled for early 2013, the team hopes to bring something both new and familiar to FF - an MMO worthy of being FFXI's successor and a title truly worthy of the franchise's 25th anniversary.

By Erren Van Duine [[@ErrenVanDuine](#)], US Editor of **RPG Site** and Owner of **Nova Crystallis** [[rpgsite.net](#)] [[novacrystallis.com](#)]



The less said about **Final Fantasy XIV** the better, right? The big-budget MMO launched to a scathing critical and commercial response - so much so that Square Enix CEO Yoichi Wada described it as having "damaged" the Final Fantasy name.

After a staff reshuffle the unenviable duties of fixing the game with a comprehensive 'Version 2.0' patch fell to **Naoki Yoshida**, a young and ambitious Producer and Director at Square Enix. We caught up with Yoshida to talk about his plans for FFXIV - and left impressed.

You've been very open with the fans since taking over. How do you feel that this has helped FFXIV?

When I came onto the project back in December of 2010 there were a lot of problems with it. The players felt the same thing. Basically, but communicating with the players, and saying, "Okay, we think this is wrong with the game," the players tend to agree with us.



Getting on the same level, and showing that what the players are thinking is exactly what we're thinking. By expressing that, and keeping that crystal clear to the players, then they begin to trust us. By saying we're on the same page, and we promise we're going to fix it, that they'll hopefully believe us and continue playing.

Because of the rocky launch there's a lot of people who said at that time, "What was Square Enix thinking when they decided to do this?" and they lost that trust that they were supposed to deliver a certain product and weren't able to. We gave them this promise, and we didn't follow through on this promise, so there is that damage that we received from that.

But to repair that damage, to repair the damage of a broken promise, we have to show them by keeping new promises. We made these promises in our announcements, and then we follow-up by keeping those promises to slowly rebuild that trust.

The biggest part of that is continuing communication. I love to communicate with the players, and I know they love communicating with me, and we want to continue that.

We get the impression off you that this is almost a matter of pride - about restoring a tarnished name. Is the aim here to make this as successful revenue-wise as XI was, or is it more about removing this 'scar' from the Final Fantasy name?

After all, I am a businessman - I'm part of the Square Enix group - so I do understand this project has cost us a lot of time and money, but that being said I think that the most important thing to us is ensuring that the customers feel once again that the Final Fantasy franchise is amazing, and making sure that they understand - well, feel - that Final Fantasy is a great game.

To do that with XIV is going to relate to the future of FF titles as well. So it's very important to make sure that our current players feel that Final Fantasy is amazing again, and that's going to sort of make - the numbers - the number of sales revenue and customers - will follow in future titles.

Of course, I have a responsibility to make sure this business will work, so once 2.0 comes out I want to look at more business opportunities for this and make sure that the business will make sense from the profit point of view as well. But, to do that, recovering the trust from the players is the most important thing - then the business will follow.

What will you be doing to attract PS3 customers once the game comes out? 2013 is a long time from its 2009 announcement, and we're getting closer to a PlayStation 4...

Graphic-wise, usually MMOs won't put a strain on the graphical capabilities of a system. It's more about getting the base onto the system. We're not very worried about this next technology coming out being able to display what we have now.

The biggest thing comes down to, that yes, maybe in the near future, a new system will be released, but when it is, the market will be small. The market on the PS3 is still going to be large at that time.

By releasing on the PS3, even if a new system is close, you're going to get that big market of people who already have the PS3. By releasing on the PS4 instead, you're going to lose those numbers, because only a small amount of people have it.

Also, we've made people wait so long, so we want to offer this at a low cost. By offering it to the PS3, we're able to keep those costs down to ensure that the maximum number of players that want to play it can play the game. That's what's important.

It doesn't mean we're sitting around doing nothing. We have our plans, and there will be a time when we can talk about those as well. It's not like we're ignoring the stuff that's coming in the future.



Can you explain what you're doing with the story component of FFXIV? When the game launched, it just seemed like those elements were missing—how do you plan on making the story more engaging for players?

It's definitely one of the things that we're looking to change, one of the big things being, filling in the gaps that exist right now between each quest.

By filling in quests that players will be able to play before they get to the next point, it will help them learn more about the world, learn more about the NPC characters, more about side stories to lead them up to that next part that is currently empty. We hope to have that in by post-2.0.

"The most important thing to us is ensuring that the customers feel once again that the Final Fantasy franchise is amazing."

The main scenario quests have very high quality cutscenes, which take a lot of manpower to produce. We felt that currently, we need to bring players a lot of content in other ways as well. If we concentrated on that, then too much focus would be taken away from other things.

Right now, we're concentrating on making more side story quests, as well as the 7th Umbral era content—all of this new story that is happening in the lead up to the world change in 2.0.

Seeing that story that's leading up to those changes—we believe that right now, that's our main focus.

We want players to play this event as something they'll only be able to experience now. Once that is finished, we'll go back to those old quests and fill them out, making sure they become more important.

Your predecessor was quite open in talking about having a game plan from launch with an eye to the future - the PS3 launch, expansions to the game, things like that. Do you have any specific plans for in mind for after Version 2.0 hits?

Recently, I don't think a lot of people - or at least less people than before - are turning on their PC or playing games on a big TV - especially after work.

You can be very tired, especially in Japan, where everyone loves working! We don't have as much time to play games when we come back home.

So, I really want to widen the options - not only playing from the traditional console or PC, but also for example through smart phones.

So, players can see what is going on in the realm of Eorza, or raise their Chocobo, or trade items in the game while elsewhere.

That idea is something I think I really want to look into once 2.0 comes out.

That's another reason why when we made this restructure of the server system we designed it so devices from other areas could connect into the servers - that's something we have in made. Once the game is ready, we'll look into those different options.



How will grinding vs. quests work for leveling? Will players find more reward from taking on quests as opposed to just grinding?

We will be moving away from a grind-oriented leveling system to a quest/content-driven leveling system.

No longer will randomly defeating public monsters be the most efficient way to level your character.



About how large is the team working on 2.0 and has it affected Square Enix internally? Could you describe a bit about day to day workings and various staff roles?

Currently, the in-house team consists of almost 300 members. We also have outsourced a fair amount of work to third-party companies, so all-in-all, the team is fairly large.

Continuing operation and development of the current version alongside 2.0 development has resulted in a very unique team make-up. On one side, we have a small team of programmers and art designers working on assets ordered by the 1.0 game design/scenario team who implement their quests directly into the game via lua script.

For 2.0 development, we have separate teams for quest/scenario writing, game design, UI design, level design, and programming.

The programming team is further divided into smaller units working on the servers, user interface, in-game content, the client system, graphics, and more. Finally, we cannot forget our artists, whose workload is determined by assignments received from the teams listed above.

As director, I personally make it a point to check the details of each group's work, and prioritize the implementation of new features.

Yaeko Sato (FFXI, FFXII) will continue her role as lead writer. I, personally, will also be involved in working on the plot. In addition, we have introduced a talented new Scenario Director, but you'll have to wait a little longer for more information regarding him at the moment. Him!? I've already said too much...

Interview extracts from RPG Site [RPGSite.net] Original text by Alex Donaldson [@APZonerunner] & Erren Van Duine [@ErrenVanDuine], With Special Thanks to FFXIV localization lead Koji Fox

Hiromichi Tanaka

Massively Multiplayer Maestro

Credited: FFI (1987) - FFIII, FFXI, FFXIV (2010)

Now: Advisor, GungHo Online Entertainment



Hiromichi Tanaka is far more instrumental in the birth and history of Final Fantasy than is often written. Tanaka was part of the driving force behind the core game design of the first three FF games. He'd also be given Special Thanks in the credits for **FFIV**, and contribute valuable advice to other FF titles.

His contributions to the system design of those first titles would deeply influence the FF series and the RPG genre in general.

Taking a break from FF, Tanaka contributed to titles such as **Secret of Mana** and **Xenogears** - but in 2002 made a triumphant return to the series as the Producer of **FFXI**, the series' online debut - and the most profitable FF ever. He then returned to **FFIII** to direct the Nintendo DS remake.

Tanaka's final project would be **FFXIV**, where he remained the Producer until December 2010. In June 2012 he departed the company and later landed at GungHo, a small MMO company. His impact on the FF series is immeasurably large.

Naoki Yoshida

The Next Generation

Credited: FFXIV (2010)

Now: Producer & Director, FFXIV



When Tanaka stepped away from **FFXIV**, whoever stepped up to replace him had to have guts. Not only are Tanaka's big shoes to fill, but FFXIV's launch wasn't exactly successful.

Cue the entrance of the little-known Naoki Yoshida, a young and charismatic producer willing to shoulder the weight of carrying FF's MMO efforts to profitability once more.

After time at **Hudson** Yoshida found himself at **Square Enix** working on **Dragon Quest**, eventually coming to contribute to **Dragon Quest X**, the series' MMO debut. Experience there made him a perfect fit for repairing the broken FFXIV.

With a refreshingly open, honest approach to fan relations and a passionate belief that FFXIV can be rescued, Yoshida's dedication is impressive. Yoshida is likely somebody who will have a great impact on FF in the future.



For many, Midgar is the greatest example of FF's artistic flair.

Final Fantasy began as the simple tale of a group of adventurers who went on a journey to uncover and defeat forces who threatened the balance of the world.

Usually, these ignorant youths had no knowledge of what laid outside of their village and had to understand the nature of this threat through a sort of initiatory journey. In the first episodes, the world was simple, and seemed only to exist to facilitate the game's plot.

As technology advanced, FF's developers began crafting their game worlds with more care so that each of its elements became more consistent and exhaustive. In time, the masterminds behind FF would understand that improving the graphics would be useless if it wasn't also the perfect opportunity to improve the real core of the games: story and art direction.

First breakthroughs

FFVI was the first to bring some fresh air to the series. It was a fantasy reimagination of the Industrial Revolution, a world of steam and metal, with Victorian colors and romantic music. Even the narrative was innovative, with a strong emphasis on the characters' personal quests.

Its ambitious art direction for a 2D SNES title was a dramatic departure from the stereotypical fantasy

worlds of the previous games, so much that even some of its top developers were concerned about this new direction. **Yusuke Naora**, who had just arrived at Square at the time, envisioned the unique film noir city of Zozo but failed to impress director **Yoshinori Kitase**, who thought it was too different to other Japanese RPGs.

"What he did honestly looked like nothing else available for the SNES at that time", Kitase later confessed, "I didn't get it at all." Without such bold moves, the next episode would probably never have been as we know it today.

Always ahead of his time, **Hironobu Sakaguchi** originally wanted to set **FFVII** in modern day New York. Although the setting eventually moved to a modern fantasy world with the sprawling city Midgar at its centre, this initial decision led the art team to imagine a dark city of towering buildings and artificial lights.

For the first time a FF game had a true 'art director' in Yusuke Naora. That role was much needed: with the move to PlayStation, developers were now able to create highly detailed backgrounds with a real sense of perspective. Midgar and the other landmarks of Gaia were sometimes displayed through spectacular vistas and low or high-angle shots, as well as with gloomy or unnatural lighting.

"I tried to simulate the feeling of light in darkness rather than trying to pick a specific color," Naora explained. The mood of FFVII, as a result, was much more captivating than any other FF before. Composer **Nobuo Uematsu** also endorsed the move to a more atmospheric game, creating a darker, less melodic soundtrack.

Developers also took great care in the making of the mythology behind FFVII. Most of the story was the result of major past events that were strategically revealed along the way - events extensive enough that Square would later build entire games around them.

Contrary to early FF games, the main characters were fully aware of geopolitics, thus giving the players crucial pieces of information, and towns were not isolated from one another. **FFVIII** would soon follow this trend with the addition of roads and railways connecting cities. These elements brought more continuity to the stories and game worlds, but there were still more steps to take.

A new interest in culture and history

In the main series, **FFIX** was the first to display a genuine interest in history and culture. Any curious player could learn details about past wars and celebrated figures by reading the engravings on statues and monuments.



Although unnecessary to the understanding of the core story, these details would provide a sense of richness and completeness. This, coupled with more detailed and animated backgrounds, made the world of FFIIX the liveliest yet.

Sakaguchi theorized it was thanks to the team behind the game having mastered the hardware; they could focus on using the tools to enrich the backstory.

The most passionate fans could even try to piece together fragments of the game's cosmogony; or they could discover it, with precise dates and explanations, in the Japanese 'Ultimania' guide. These guidebooks would soon become precious sources of development materials in order to learn more about the game worlds.

FFX, the first PS2 installment of the series, darted through the door opened by FFIIX. Throwing away the old school world map of the previous games, the developers hoped to strengthen the continuity of the story and worldview even further.

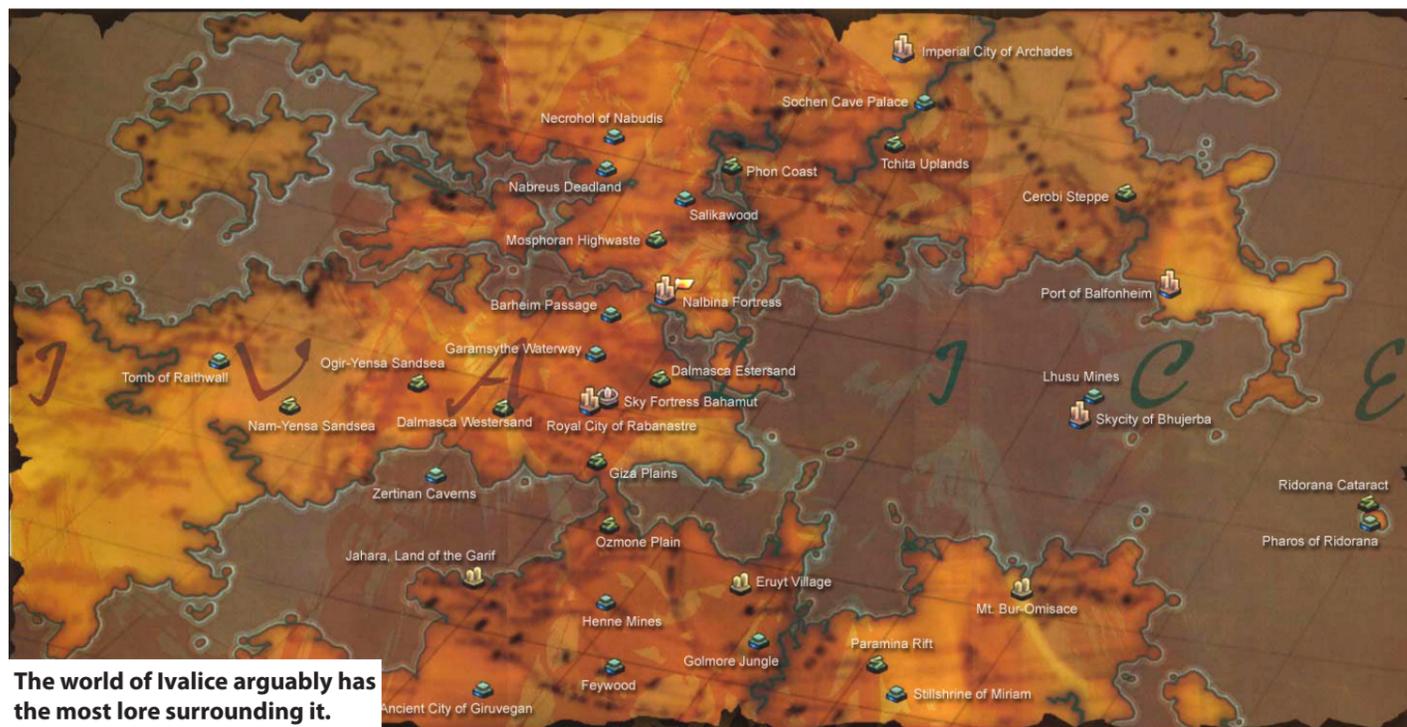


Every aspect of the world of Spira was carefully thought through: its visuals, history, cultures, religions, even languages, were created so that the player would feel like they were discovering a believable world. The first people Tidus encounters after his thousand-year journey are Al Bheds, who don't speak the same language as him. Thus he, and the player, feel like strangers in an unknown and frightening world.

Later, while following Yuna's pilgrimage to Zanarkand, the player can meet different tribes and witness a vast number of places where wonderful natural phenomena occur, such as the frozen Macalania Lake or the ethereal Farplane. Although linear, the world of Spira is as beautiful as it is evocative. Players were not only invited to take an interest in gameplay, but also in historical events, religious beliefs and cultural differences. Or they could simply marvel at the soothing beauty of a fantasy world inspired by Southeastern Asia, but scarred by past wars with the giant entity Sin.

The difficulty is in presenting this detailed world to the player in a clever way - a real headache for writers. FFX's salvation came from the lead: as Tidus travels to what he believes is a distant future, he's a complete foreigner, believed to be struck with amnesia. As such, all the other characters he encounters must explain to him the customs of their world. In time, his fresh vision turns out to be the reason why his companions end up rebelling against the religious authority of Yevon.

Having created such a huge world, the team behind FFX decided to break the series' first law, and began work on a direct sequel. **FFX-2** was born from the desire of not letting years of planning go to waste after just one title. Although the world was very similar between the two titles, the general mood of FFX-2 was a dramatic departure from the religious context of the original.



The world of Ivalice arguably has the most lore surrounding it.

The era of documentation

FFXII went a step ahead in terms of refinement, with one of the most detailed and polished settings in the series. Originally directed by **Yasumi Matsuno**, this episode was the first of the main series to take place in an already-existing world: Ivalice, the setting of FF Tactics and Vagrant Story, the two previous games developed by Matsuno's team.

Even so, FFXII is not closely linked to either of these titles; they take place in distant eras, linked only by subtle details and references, a real treasure hunt for the most dedicated players. Among other examples, when encountering a character named Mustadio in Tactics, the player can learn about a time when "airships numerous beyond counting filled the skies" - the setting of FFXII. Some familiar region names also link the games, telling that they may happen in similar places. With some patience and dedication, it is even possible to retrace the entire chronology of Ivalice.

Although FF Tactics was released shortly after FFXVII, Matsuno decided to present the world of Ivalice through copious amounts of texts and not state-of-the-art graphics. Almost ten years later, FFXII expands upon this legacy, offering an enormous 3D world coupled with dozens of texts filling the "Primer" in the main menu.

Try as you might, at some point it becomes essential to rely on written lore to go in-depth with the history and culture of the game world. But in FFXII, the real interest comes from the fact that these are all subjective

texts - rumors, journals, legends and such - written or told by travellers, researchers, botanists, writers, even commoners, and some admit their lack of knowledge.

In every game by Matsuno, history is told by people and characters - like historian Arazlam Durai in Tactics - and the real history is often concealed by higher forces. This is where fantasy meets realism.

With FFXII came the need for an exhaustive art direction, so much that designer **Isamu Kamikokuryo** later confessed: "It feels like having created a world."

For the first time in an offline Final Fantasy game, the player was able to examine the whole world with a fully movable camera, and every part of the game was crafted with a stunning sense of detail: from the well-stocked shops of Bhujerba to the vast coastal landscapes of Phon, Ivalice feels as genuine as it is diverse.

This sense of realism comes from real-life inspirations. Designers travelled to Istanbul for research during pre-production of the game. The result of this trip can be seen in Rabanastre: the bustling bazaar and undercity, the elegant Mediterranean architecture and even the royal palace, which was inspired by Hagia Sophia.

"But if we just took that and made the game", Kamikokuryo also said, "we wouldn't be able to satisfy everyone. So, we're still keeping true to creating something that's original and a fantasy world while referring to something that exists." Those inspirations were the basis for the creation of an entirely original world.

This new direction did cause major issues to rise during the development of the game. Crafting a wide and detailed world with full 3D graphics requires a lot of time and as a result the development period of FFXII was *twice* as long as the previous titles. The developers were faced with the problem of the fragile balance between contents, quality and profitability. An issue that would become even more tangible with the next title...

When the world dictates the game

With FFX, the team led by Yoshinori Kitase put a strong emphasis on the believability of their world. With **FFXIII**, they went a step ahead and placed the mythology at the core of the game, meaning that every aspect of it was influenced by the basic concept of the story.

For the first time in the series, the making of the game and story were preceded by the writing of a myth entitled Fabula Nova Crystallis - 'the new tale of the crystal' in Latin. Penned in 2004 by FFXVII, VIII and X scenario writer **Kazushige Nojima**, the myth tells the story of the primordial gods of the visible world who desperately seek the gate to the invisible world in order to stop chaos from eating away at all creation.

In FFXIII, two gods named Pulse and Lindzei envision two opposing ways of finding this gate. The former fashions an enormous wild land where fal'Cie - lower gods - would perpetually stay on the search, while the latter creates an artificial moon, Cocoon, where he would prepare the sacrifice of millions of human souls in an attempt to throw the gate wide open. This created a strong divide between the worlds of Pulse and Cocoon, and director **Motomu Toriyama** made this divide the very basis of the game's design.



Cocoon is an isolated world, closed off inside a sphere. There, the numerous fal'Cies fulfil every need of the humans, allowing their number to grow rapidly. Every aspect of society is controlled by the Sanctum, the religious authority, and any 'intruder' is promptly deported to the outside world. Being branded as

intruders, the group of heroes is forced to flee, but follows the path the Sanctum set before them. Although they are not aware of it initially, they are actually their tools for a greater plan. Everywhere they go, they're pursued by their fate. Thus, the experience inside Cocoon is linear and the player has few moments to breathe.

Gran Pulse is the contrary, a wild land where fal'Cies are not concerned with humanity. The second part of the game takes place here, and the player is welcome to explore and spend lots of time improving their fighting skills through side missions before the final battle.



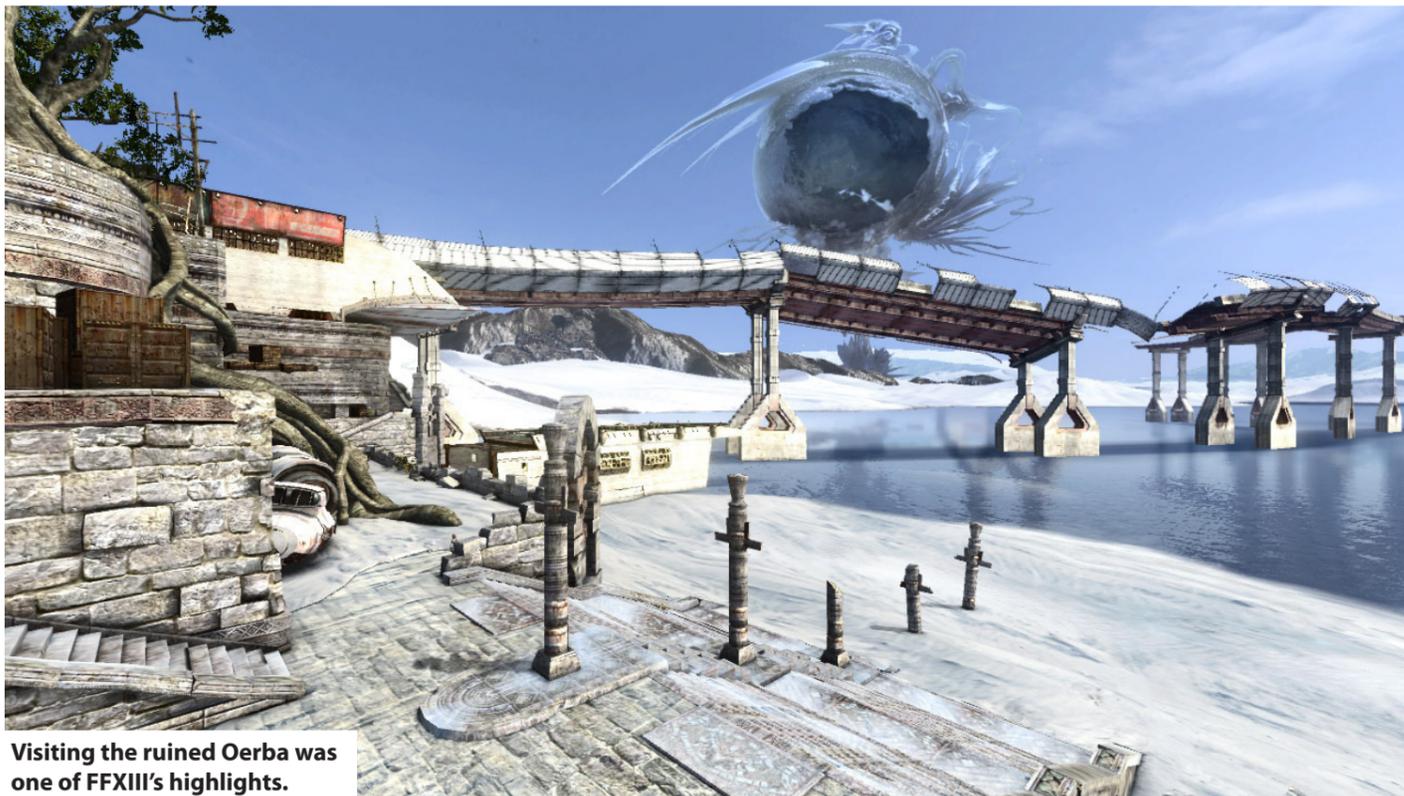
Gran Pulse is almost an open world, and players can wander off the beaten path and be killed by ferocious monsters easily. This is where the previously unsure FFXIII gains heart and steady footing. The striking contrast between the 20-hour linear chase and the open world is at the very core of the story and lore.

In order to achieve this design goal, the developers voluntarily sacrificed some player freedom to expose the game world. In compensation for this decision, the game boasts cutting edge graphics and, more importantly, a stunning art direction.

Sacrificing freedom has never been a popular decision with many fans, which explains the FFXIII's icy reception, but the developers have stood by their decisions.

The technical mastery allowed them to craft an extremely detailed game world with a unique, dreamy feel instilled by impressive lighting work. This is especially the case inside Cocoon, a complex, fabricated world of slender and futuristic structures. Even its wild landscapes feel artificial, such as the overly lush Sunleth Waterscape and its controlled climate.

The pinnacle of this world is the capital Eden, which designers created by guessing how our modern cities might look in a distant future. Most of Cocoon's visuals were, in that respect, left to the imagination of Kamikokuryo's art team.



Visiting the ruined Oerba was one of FFXIII's highlights.

Inside Cocoon, the complex social and political structure is detailed in the 'Datalog,' FFXIII's equivalent to the 'Primer.' During the first few hours of the game, the player must keep in mind numerous terms - l'Cie, fal'Cie, Sanctum, PSICOM and such - and characters rarely bother explaining them. The backstory is solid, but such reliance on written explanation in the menu is not an ideal solution, as the game may feel too esoteric.

Contrary to this secluded and artificial world, Gran Pulse was thought as a vast, horizontal and immemorial land. Unlike Cocoon, nature is at its centre and all remains of human civilization are slowly but surely being eaten away by vegetation.

Contrary to FFXII, Kamikokuryo didn't head out seeking direct inspiration, but rather happened on it. "I got the inspiration for it by going on a cross country tour of the USA from Washington to San Francisco, visiting all of the major national parks," he commented.

Gran Pulse's environment is dotted with centuries-old ruins, much like Greece, and archaic machines. Their origin, though, is very often shrouded in mystery. More than a simple quest to understand the past of this world, it is the feeling of awe inspired by these ruins that lies at the heart of Pulse's experience. Its final destination, Oerba, is an abandoned village where the player can simply witness remnants of its past everyday life, the town dusty and monster-infested, its people long dead.

There is no real need for copious explanation. Through highly detailed visuals and sounds - with diffused light, crystal dust floating in the air and soothing, acoustic music, the elegant art direction of Gran Pulse embodies the true richness of the game.

The online solution

As we saw, the unstable balance between high-end technology and plentiful contents led to longer development periods with FFXII and FFXIII. Staff at Square Enix must have been frantically searching for an answer for years - though one has sort of naturally presented itself in FF's MMO entries.

FFXI was a risky bet: with no prior experience in the MMO genre, the developers chose to release the game on PlayStation 2 first, which required players to buy expensive accessories and pay monthly fees in order to enjoy the game. The original title was developed in about two years by the team behind **Xenogears** and **Chrono Cross**. Producer **Hirohisa Tanaka** envisioned it as a true successor to the very first episodes of Final Fantasy, hence the return to a more medieval feel.

In the years following its release, several expansion packs opened up new areas and even a new continent that widened the scale of the world of Vana'diel. Given the persistent nature of MMO games, the map needs to be as wide as possible, and FFXI is probably still the largest FF ever produced.

Its fully explorable 3D world was the inspiration to FFXII director Matsuno, who envisioned that game initially as a 'offline MMORPG' of sorts.

Creating an enormous world is useless if you can't fill it with enough content; a lesson Square Enix learnt much to their dismay after the chaotic release of **FFXIV**. The world of Eorzea featured in the new title felt even more gigantic than Vana'diel, but at the time of the release, it was desperately empty.

Few quests and battlegrounds, only pretty graphics as far as the eye could see. FFXIV gave the painful feeling that there was no actual goal to achieve. This issue led to the development of a completely reworked version, the upcoming **A Realm Reborn**. Among the many changes brought by this new version, the topography of all areas has been remade so that the landscape feels more dynamic, less repetitive.

Producer **Naoki Yoshida**, who took the reins after the release, wished to give FFXIV a FF feel by adding "landmarks" of the previous games. Although a reductive understanding of the nature of the series, this idea was already found in FF Tactics in a subtler way - ancient lands and buildings nodding to past FFs could be uncovered on side missions. As any fan could expect, most of the world was original. We can only hope Yoshida's vision won't merely be simple-minded fan service.



There are also limitations within the MMO genre itself. To the normal FF fan, it feels only natural to go back to earlier titles from time to time, even the oldest ones, simply to enjoy their gameplay or storylines again.

Persistent game worlds are all bound to end someday: once the servers are closed, it is not possible to go back to them. Even when the MMO is still active, after years of existence, they may feel too massive for new players to join the game, when most of the players already have a high level. Offline titles are easier to access and enjoy, with no competition. Such accessibility is at the core of the FF experience, meaning opting for a MMO will always be risky in regards to the community.

There is yet another possible way of expanding a game after its initial release, even for offline titles: downloadable content. With the arrival of hard drive-equipped and ever-connected hardware, those DLCs have allowed the developers to add new quests, enemies, and areas to explore.

The catch is that, of course, these things cost money, and can lead to abusive business practices, cutting content from games to charge for it later. Hopefully FF can find the right balance.

In the future

What will Final Fantasy worlds look like in the future? Looking at the past entries, it's easy to assume that there will probably be conflicting schools, naturally leading to very different kinds of games. Some may be very linear, some may be open worlds. But the dilemma of being able to craft an entire world with State of the Art graphics will always remain.



Versus XIII, while still part of the Nova Crystallis Lore, is a perfect example - it's realistic aesthetic is very different to the rest of FF.

Forming a link between games in order to build some sort of "meta world" could be a satisfying way for developers to offer a complete vision of the universe they create. In that regard, one of the most interesting cosmogonies in the series is Ivalice.

All games set in this world share some distant link that still allows them to be original titles, with design similarities that bring a familiar feeling. Informal links like the ambitious Fabula Nova Crystallis myth, on the contrary, may be too vague for the common player or even less hardcore fans to grasp.

Indeed, the concept behind Ivalice goes against the purpose of the Final Fantasy series - reinventing everything - but due to their taking place in distant eras, the freshness of each new title allows for a true FF experience.

An ambitious experience that goes beyond simplistic landmarks such as Chocobos and airships: Final Fantasy does, has and always should explore new mythologies.

Written & Translated by Jérémie Kermarrec, owner of French fan site FFWorld. [FFWorld.com]

**“There was this incredible feeling I’ll never forget:
we were making a new thing...
making history.
Imagine.”**

- Yoshinori Kitase on FFVII, 2003

**“It’s a force of nature. You can’t sit back and
build these games logically. You have to throw
caution to the wind. You have to laugh at the
absurdity of the task. I think you can really feel
the series as its own force.”**

- Hiroshi Minagawa, 2006

“I think it’s about dreams.

The dreams of FF’s developers, the dreams of its fans.

Like dreams, the possibilities are endless.”

- Isamu Kamikokuryo, 2006

**“I don’t really have this huge goal in front of me.
It’s more what we believe in;
That’s all we basically focus on,
and see how that rolls into something grand.”**

- Tetsuya Nomura, 2004

**“Basically, what I’m trying to do is write good
melodies. No matter what the hardware is,
no matter what kind of sound is produced, as
long as the melody is really nice, I think that
you can listen to it on anything.”**

- Nobuo Uematsu, 2005

**“I think by now there’s a different generation
of users and gamers who are playing the
current FFs. So in a sense, this game has
provided content for a few generations
so far. Hopefully that will continue.**

That’s one of my dreams.”

- Yoshinori Kitase, 2004

“Yes, I’m really tired of talking about it.”

- Hironobu Sakaguchi in 2012 on trying to escape FF’s legacy.

BATTLE SYSTEM HISTORY



In its 25 year history the Final Fantasy series has continued to challenge the Japanese RPG genre and push innovation.

While story, characters and presentation have all been vital factors in FF remaining at the front of the pack, one area is most important of all: Battles.

In the JRPG genre the battles are quite literally your gameplay, the very crux of the user experience and interaction with an otherwise usually linear plot.

FF has come to be seen as a benchmark for battles - largely thanks to constant reinvention. As the series turns 25, its battle systems are worth remembering.

As is often the case, the genesis of the battle mechanics of Final Fantasy were simplistic compared to what would come later. The original FF's turn-based combat was as simple as could be.

Commands were entered at the beginning of rounds, and the characters' Speed stat determined when they would get to act. This traditional turn-based system would remain the standard for the next two installments, with only minor tweaks to each.

Laterality was introduced in **FFII** allowing characters to be more proficient in wielding weapons with their left or right hands, as well as introducing a skill level for weapon types, shields and magic. Being more proficient in the weapon type that was equipped allowed characters to deal more damage.

FFIII was the first foray into the job system, which brought with it numerous special commands. While the previous two entries limited the player to basic commands like Attack, Item and Magic, **FFIII** introduced class-specific commands like Jump, Steal and Summon, creating a more complex and dynamic battle system.

Jobs level independently from characters, and with 26 different jobs available, the potential battle line-up has much greater depth than previous games.

Beginning with **FFIV** Hiroyuki Ito's Active Time Battle (ATB) system would become the standard and remain a core feature of FF for the next decade. Once again, the 'Speed' stat is vital in determining when and how frequently a character gets their turn.

ATB allowed battles to be more fluid and feel more real-time. Commands are entered whenever a character's time gauge fills up and are executed immediately or in some cases after a small charge time. In the original version of **FFIV** this gauge was hidden, but is visible in all remakes.



Even 25 years on, the original FF's seminal layout is familiar.



FFIII revolutionized battle by offering deep customization through the Job System.



FFV's cast held specific locked job roles, but had variety elsewhere.



Jobs returned in FFV but with even greater depth in how they could be used.

FFIV brought another major adjustment in the form of the one-off five-man battle party.

Battle rows also became an issue, with members in the back row taking reduced damage from enemies but also dealing less damage as a result. This would be another consistent feature in the FF series right up to **FFX** nearly a decade later.

The job system was also discarded in favour of a more rigid set-up; characters had fixed classes as in the original FF, but kept class specific skills introduced in **FFIII**.

Jobs returned for **FFV**, and with it came the introduction of the battle reward 'Ability Points.' AP levels jobs to learn new skills and abilities, while EXP levels characters' base statistics.

AP would become an integral part of the series, responsible for teaching new tricks to the characters although occasionally appearing under a different name.

The concept of "sub jobs" - a key concept later used in **FFXI** - was also introduced in **FFV**. Each job has up to four command slots - Attack, Item and a class specific command, allowing the player to choose the fourth from other mastered abilities.

FFVI returned to the rigid class system of **FFIV**, but gave the ability to use magic to all characters. By equipping Magicite, each character was able to learn spells by accumulating Magic Points.

FFVI was a test bed of many ideas that would surface in a larger way later. Desperation Attacks became the concept for Limit Breaks, while Terra's 'Trance' mode later appeared in **FFIX**.

Next, the battle system had to endure a massive technical shift.



FFVI forms the foundations of FF's future.

The advent of 3D brought a very different type of FF; **FFVII** was vastly different from its predecessor. On top of the move to the PlayStation and 3D visuals which allowed battles, particularly summons, to look more cinematic, the ATB system that fans had grown familiar with had been retooled with freedom in mind.

Strict restrictions were tossed out, the materia system allowing any character to fill any role - though each has natural affinities. Better equipment would allow more materia to be used thanks to materia attaching to it.



FFVII looked familiar, but was more open than ever.

FFVII was also the first entry to have no real limit on the number of commands one could have in battle, leading to lists eight or nine commands long. Though this opened up customization potential, it also ran the risk of creating cookie-cutter characters; there needed to be some defining features distinguishing one character from another.

Salvation came in the form of Limit Breaks. Each character had a unique set of Limit Breaks that could be used when a bar was filled. This gave characters individuality in battle, separating them from being only aesthetically different.

FFVIII changed things significantly again with a system that polarized fans of the series by being initially too confusing and easy to break. MP for magic was discarded, magic treated like items, picked up and stocked.



FFVIII's Junction System was perhaps a little too open.

The Junction system allowed magic to then be equipped to increase stats based on the power of the spell. More powerful magic could be crafted from items or cards, extracted from enemies or found in the game world.

This was all made possible by Guardian Forces. Summon monsters had been a staple of FF for some time, but FFVIII made them a core mechanic. GFs facilitate the junction system and also dictate what abilities can be used by a character in-battle. Without a GF, the only command available is Attack. Characters once again returned to a four-command list, though these could be altered at any point outside of battle.

All about AP

Ability Points are as important to the heroes of the FF series as experience and gil. Without AP, characters would often be one-trick ponies. Here's a few notable instances of how AP is used:

Final Fantasy VI - Called 'Magic Points' in the original translation, AP are used to learn new magic through Magicite.

Final Fantasy IX - Nearly all equipment hides skills, unlocked by gaining AP.

Final Fantasy X - Replaces EXP, and is used to gain Sphere Levels to gain new skills and improve stats in areas of your choosing.

Final Fantasy X-2 - Gained by killing enemies or using class-specific skills and then used as is now tradition to gain more abilities.

Final Fantasy XII - Known as license points, they must be spent to buy 'Licenses' which are required to use equipment and skills.

Limit Breaks remained but were implemented in a slightly different fashion. The usage and effectiveness of Limit Breaks was determined by a hidden mechanic known as Crisis Level. Four stages of Crisis Level determined when a character could use their limits, how much time the player had to enter commands, what commands were available and damage effectiveness.

Several factors affected this mechanic: how much HP a character had, if anyone in the party is dead, and if the character is affected by a status ailment. Another minor adjustment was added: timed-hits. Both Squall and Seifer have manually controlled critical hits - the player can time the attack and press R1 as the blow lands to make it critical.

FFIX was marketed as a return to the old-school for the series, but it manages to blend updated familiar mechanics with all-new ones. Rigid classes are reinstated, with each of the eight characters playing their own unique role in battle.

Abilities are learned through equipment and gaining AP, while the 'Trance' system is something of a compromise between FFVI's Desperation Attacks and FFVII's Limit Breaks.



Trance builds up over time, but rather than a single powerful attack or ability, Trance offers a multi-turn power boost and unique commands and abilities. Trance also can't be 'saved' for a later battle; it activated automatically and ended with the battle.

With a new platform, it was time for change - and **FFX** delivered. Out was ATB, replaced with CTB, the Conditional Turn-based Battle.

CTB was as turn-based as the original FF, with characters taking turns, order decided by their speed stat. Different actions had different execution times, which adjusted what character would act next.

Players could keep track of this through the Act List, which showed exactly when each character and enemy would act. Players could manipulate the Act List, giving battles an added layer of strategy not commonly seen in the genre.

FFX also found a blend between a rigid class system and a fully customizable line-up. While the Sphere Grid allows characters to gain abilities at stats freely, their starting positions and 'ideal' path push them towards certain roles in battle - but these roles can be escaped.

Limit Breaks returned as Overdrives, though with more methods of filling the bar. FFX also allowed the player to alter the battle party mid-battle, adding another layer of tactics.

FFX-2 returned to ATB with a focus on speed and a revamped job system. Jobs could be changed on the fly - but only between ones chosen before battle. Players had to think carefully.

FFXI is actually rather similar to much of the FF series in spite of its MMO format. This system was called RTB - Real Time Battle - and eliminated random encounters, having all enemies on-field with a seamless transition to battle. Once in battle, this system functioned like ATB.

FFXI mixes in elements from other games - spells and abilities have cast times and weapons and magic have skill levels of their own, similar to FFII. Limit Breaks are replaced with Weapon Skills, unleashed after a character deals out or takes a certain amount of damage.

Perfect for an MMO, the job system once again returns with six main jobs and fourteen advanced jobs to choose from. FFXI also features Support Jobs, a concept pioneered by FFV. Players can designate a support job, which allows use of abilities, traits, and spells from another chosen job at a lower level.



FFX was the best-looking FF yet, but also shook up its battle mechanics.



The Sphere Grid's influence would echo on for several games after FFX.



FFXI's combat went MMO without compromising on FF's key elements.



FFXII's battles followed FFXI as closely as a single-player game could.



Licenses fit FFXII's lore and allowed for Sphere Grid style progression.

For many, **FFXII** appears to be a single player adaptation of FFXI's MMO formula - and while not entirely accurate, at a basic level that works as a descriptor. This time it's ADB - Active Dimension Battle - and here combat takes place in real time with a seamless transition once again.

With no real-life people to form a party with, FFXII introduced a major new system - Gambits. Gambits are essentially basic AI programming made of two parts - an action, and when to perform it. As an example, you could instruct characters to attack any enemy targeting the player as a priority.

Different types of gambits and the ability to set more at once are unlocked as the game progresses. Clever players can construct gambits which allow the party, even the player character, to function completely autonomously. FFXII was criticized for 'playing itself,' but it was a hugely deep system.

Similar to FFX, the active battle party can be changed at any time as long as the character isn't currently being targeted or mid-action. This also applies to incapacitated party members; even if the active battle party is wiped out, the reserve party members are still able to continue the battle.

Also similar to FFX is the License Board, which has a resemblance to the Sphere Grid. It restricts equipment usage and gives out character enhancements. Though characters still level with experience, the License Board is responsible for all of the important upgrades outside of the gambit system.

The ability to use summons is also controlled by Licenses, as is FFXII's Limit Breaks equivalent: Quickenings. Each character has access to three unique abilities during a Quickening, and these can be chained together individually or with the rest of the battle party to deal massive damage.

As seems to now be tradition, a new set of consoles dragged with it major changes - and FFXIII introduces its own new battle system. It wouldn't be a FF battle system without a ridiculous acronym - and for FFXIII, it was CSB - the Command Synergy Battle. A streamlined version of ATB, it still features the iconic bar - but broken into sections.

Each unit of ATB can be used to execute an attack, but some attacks take up more ATB units than others. Each character has access to three of six classes, otherwise known as paradigms - Commando, Ravager, Medic, Sentinel, Synergist and Saboteur - with the others becoming available as the game progresses.



FFXIII looked more dynamic and action-packed, but was still a fully-fledged RPG at heart.

Paradigms restrict characters' abilities in a more strict manner than previous installments. The Medic only has access to healing abilities and cannot attack, for example, while the Synergist can only buff team mates.

An 'Auto-Battle' command is added, which automatically selects the most effective combinations of skills and deploys them. While the player is only able to control one character's actions and is unable to switch leaders during battle, the other party members' actions can be influenced by using Paradigm Shift.

A paradigm deck is constructed prior to battle, allowing players to create various sets of classes across their characters. Players can then switch between these during battle. Though the player is limited to six combinations, they can be switched between freely during battle - similar to FFX-2's Dress spheres.

That isn't the only similarity to adventures in Spira, for FFXIII's levelling system is once again reminiscent of the Sphere Grid. Each character has access to their own 'Crystarium,' which is split into six separate sections: one for each paradigm.

The freedom of the Sphere Grid is removed, with each Crystarium being almost completely linear. The player still needs to choose which paradigm to focus on enhancing, however.

FFXIII-2 is far more faithful to its prequel's mechanics than FFX-2 was. The battle system remains largely unchanged, though the leader can now be changed at any time. The third party slot is now filled with a monster.

Stupendous Summons

First introduced in FFIII (though a Wyvern can be summoned in FFII via an item), Summons have become a major staple of the series and are used in a variety of ways. Here's a few:

Final Fantasy IV - Rydia's special battle ability allows her to call on a variety of beasts.

Final Fantasy VI - Known as Espers, they play an important role in both story and battle. Espers who die crystallise into Magicite, used to learn magic. They can also be summoned in battle.

Final Fantasy VIII - Guardian Forces are closely linked to characters' abilities and stats, but GFs can also be summoned in battle. The damage dealt can also be boosted button presses.

Final Fantasy IX - Eidolons and those who summon them are integral to FFXIX's story.

Final Fantasy X - Known as Aeons, they also play an important role in the plot. When summoned by Yuna, they replace the party instead of performing a single action.

Final Fantasy XIII - Summons are fought before they become an ally, and like FFX replace the party when used.



FFXIII-2 allowed enemies, including the iconic Cactaur, to join up with the player's party in battle.

Monsters fill the same battle roles as humans but can't be controlled. Collecting monsters to deploy in your party becomes a large part of the game - a little touch of Pokemon. Crystarium returns, albeit slightly altered and tweaked. The primary purpose - increasing stats and gaining abilities - remains the same.

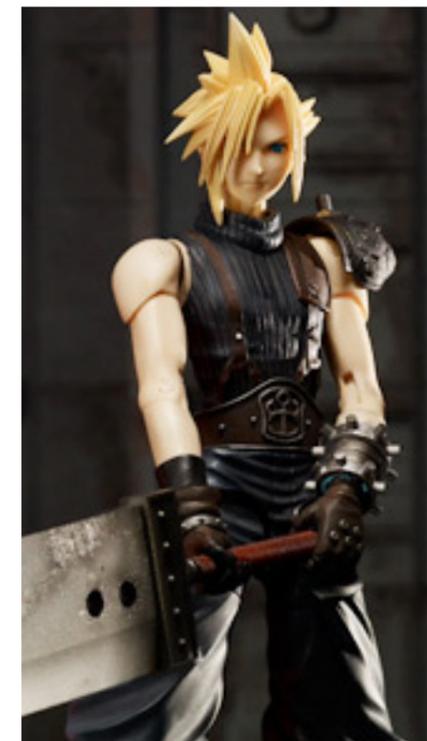
The simple traditional turn-based battle has evolved considerably from FF's origins. Along the way have been numerous tweaks, changes, improvements and additions, as outlined here. The series and its creators should be commended for the relentless pursuit of improvements and innovation.

The series has had to pioneer new styles and systems in an effort to constantly provide new and unique experiences for the players. With FFXIV: A Realm Reborn, Versus XIII and Lightning Returns all in the pipeline, there's no doubt that the series will continue to try new formulas and keep providing an innovative combat system for its fans.

By **Dakota Barker**, a contributor to fan site **Eyes on Final Fantasy**. [eyesonff.com]



With figures of this quality, it's no surprise they have a following.



Almost as long as I've been a fan of Final Fantasy - since first playing FFXVIII - I've had a thirst for collecting its merchandise. I was in love with the series; the story, music, gameplay and stunning cinematics - but I most of all loved its characters.

Getting gaming merchandise when I used to live in Poland wasn't easy - no local stores would stock it, leaving me scouring eBay auctions - and even then, many sellers wouldn't ship internationally. I eventually got my first Bandai-manufactured figures of Squall, Rinoa and my favorite character, Zell, in 2000. I finally had figures, and since then collecting FF figures and merchandise has become an obsessive hobby!

The merchandise business is huge for **Square Enix**, something well leveraged as early as the original FF's release. There are countless types, and it'd be wrong to have a fan celebration of the FF series without taking a look at some of the items on offer.

Heroes in your hand

A great number of companies including **Kotobukiya**, **Bandai** and **Banpresto** have all tried their hand at creating FF figures.

Bandai was one of the earliest, creating figures known as the Extra Soldier and Extra Knights. They began with 5-inch figures of the **FFVII** cast with the strange omissions of Yuffie and Cid. They followed that with three **FFVIII** sets that ran at a slightly larger 6.5 inches - first of the complete core cast followed by a set of the 8 GF eidolons from the game. All of the figures came equipped with a stand, weapon and impressive detail.

Both sets made their way West, though some figures were left out of the international release. Despite that they were successful - laying the groundwork for future releases, including their **FFIX** sets featuring the full playable cast.

2001's Bandai **FFX** figure line was slimmed down to just 3 characters - Tidus, Yuna and Seymour. The company has also released 'chibi' style mini-figures and keychains of many characters from almost every FF.

The Official Option

As the merger with **Enix** was becoming reality in 2003, Square handed production to Kotobukiya. Their Play Arts line featured incredible detail whilst being fully posable, standing around 7 to 9 inches tall, shipping with accessories and around 18 points of articulation per figure.

The figures were bigger and more detailed than anything on the market at the time, and the first release of **FFX-2's** trio sold well.

Kotobukiya then released the Play Arts figures based on **FFVII: Advent Children**. Featuring better detail and more articulation and even a full-sized Fenrir motorbike with Cloud figure, they were a massive success. Square Enix noticed, and shortly after founded **Square Enix Products** - an in-house studio dedicated to designing and producing the figures and merchandise officially.

The quality remained, with Square Enix beginning to mine their back catalogue, creating high quality Play Arts figures of characters from **FFVII** through **FFXII** as well as figures for other franchises in the years that followed. Extra accessories including iconic weaponry from the games was also released separately.



FFVIII's cast were some of the first released.



FFIX's figures displayed a jump in quality.



Some figures came under fire for quality.



Play Arts Kai figures are of incredibly high quality.

2009 saw a new improved range debut - titled Play Arts Kai. Larger, better articulated and again more detailed, Kai figures usually have over 26 points of articulation. The first FF Kai set was for **FFXIII**, featuring Lightning, Snow and Vanille. The response was mixed - the figures were improved, but had various issues including strange-looking knees, quality issues and a noticeable price hike.

The **FFXIII** Kai figures sold well and continued, introducing the rest of the cast and impressive figures of Shiva and Odin that transformed into vehicles.

The Kai brand went from strength-to-strength from there, including figures for **FFXIII-2** and **Dissidia** alongside the expansion of the Products division. They then began acquiring licenses, producing Kai figures for franchises including **Tomb Raider**, **Metal Gear Solid**, **Resident Evil**, **Street Fighter**, **Mass Effect**, **Halo** and more. Square Enix Products is now one of the company's most lucrative ventures, making all sorts of merchandise.

Statues and Rarities

In addition to figures, a number of more expensive statues have been produced over the years - and often in limited quantities.

Cold Cast statues are some of the rarest, sometimes fetching up to \$900 per piece when sold. Most of the statues were limited in number, shipping with a card which told you what number you own. The Dioramas, depicting scenes from FFIV-VIII and Cloud vs Sephiroth statue have been out of production for many years and only available on eBay.

Kotobukiya released a 'Transcendental Collection' - incredibly detailed statues of the FFVIII cast alongside their GFs. These were also individually numbered and limited to 3000 per piece. It took me 3 years to find them all at reasonable prices, and they're in many ways the crown jewels of my collection. More statues have been produced for titles including FFXII and Advent Children.



FFVIII's 'Transcendental' GF figures are very rare.

and most expensive items, though. Also rare are FFV-FFIX chibi-form chrome statues, released and limited to 3000 pieces in 2000.

A new line replaced statues - Static Arts. So far only featuring Cloud and Sephiroth, two Kingdom Hearts heroes and some other SE characters, the range is expected to expand in the future.

Square, Marketing and more

Some merchandise came as a result of promotional collaborations with other companies. In 1999 Square joined with Coca Cola, bundling FF mini-figures with the drink. Three variants of 1.5 inch figures of FFVII-X heroes were available in the Japanese promotion.

More famous is Potion, a FF-inspired energy drink produced by Suntory. Various potion-shaped bottles were made together with 350 ml cans adorned with character art.

A special FFVII Anniversary set was limited to 77,777 sets and included specially designed Potion bottles with the Anniversary Ultimania book. Produced alongside this were 8 special edition 4-inch FFVII Trading Arts Mini figures.

Dissidia's Potions feature 16 different cans sold in two series - Cosmos and Chaos. FFXIII's Potion was called Elixir, and again featured 16 cans with different art as well as 6 mini play arts figures. All of the Potion promotional drinks were only available in Japan.

Many loved Triple Triad and Tetra Master in FFVIII and FFX. Bandai leveraged that, producing real versions of the games. Triple Triad contained 110 cards and 72 artwork



'Chibi' takes on characters often make cool figures.



The 'Potion' drinks look like in-game potions!



Several vehicles, such as Cloud's motorcycle, have been released.



It's possible to enjoy FF's card games for real!

cards together with a playing mat. These cards were only sold in Japan and are now hard to obtain, but many unofficial copies exist.

Tetra Master was a European production by Dino, containing 120 cards, 2 die, 20 counters and a playing board. The game has undergone minor changes to make it work better and be more quickly playable without the aid of a computer, and special cards have been added.

Fan-made Goodies

It'd be crazy to write this article and not talk about the hard work of a particular part of the fan community. Driven by the desire to have figures of less popular characters who Square Enix are unlikely to release figures for, many fans have taken to customizing Play Arts figures, using original parts as a base to build all-new custom figures.

I personally have made around 20 figures, including the entire FFVIII cast, Fran, Penelo, Beatrix, Noel, Caius and more. It's a challenging but rewarding little hobby.

This is just the tip of the iceberg; FF Merchandise became my ultimate hobby - and the same is true for many. Collecting rare merch has become as much of a passion for me as the games themselves.

I work on a website dedicated to the subject - and I often think about one way getting involved in creating official figures. If you'd like to get involved, you should come and join us via the link below!

If you've never owned a figure, think about picking one up! Just be warned - it's addictive!
Tomasz Rozejowski [[@Zelu1984_FFM](#)] is a global moderator on Final Fantasy Merchandise. [[FinalFantasyMerchandise.com](#)] [[zelu1984.deviantart.com/gallery/26476972](#)]



This incredible figure of FFX's awesome Beatrix is a fan creation.

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS

ファイナルファンタジータクティクス

Final Fantasy Tactics is a game I've always had a lot of adoration for - mainly because it required a decent investment of both time and mental capacity.

I enjoyed keeping a journal - pages of notes on my characters and battle strategies. I'd map out roughly where I wanted characters to be later in the game. There was never an ideal build - just one that fit best with my particular play style. I found it fascinating.

Every single aspect required a thoughtful process in order to succeed. Every decision carried with it a sense of gravity. Too many poor decisions could lumber you with a mediocre party - a high level alone isn't enough. With unforgiving difficulty, careful planning was a necessity. This intense strategizing allowed this tactical RPG to sink its hooks deep into me.



The core of FFT is the job system, a massive evolution on **FFV's** effort. A wide variety of classes are available, each with unique traits. Each job was leveled individually, skills equippable after being mastered.

This meant you could have a dual-wielding Ninja with a Monk's high HP and the 'Jump' ability of a Dagoon. New jobs are constantly unlocked, allowing for a massive amount of combinations. It's a deep and intricate avenue of heavy decision-making.

In battle, grid-based movement combines with traditional turn-based strategy to create an impressive level of depth. Understanding how terrain effects the flow of battle is key. Like Chess, it's important not to be reckless, to plan battles several turns ahead.

I really enjoyed how differently things could play out based on how the first few moves went. If I wasn't able to succeed initially, all I needed to do was tweak my strategy a little to find myself far better off as a result.

Its visual design was also a departure from FF tradition at the time. The characters have an interesting look about them - this is a bright, colorful world but also gritty and believable as a world at war, and the character portraits are fantastically detailed.

Originally Released: June 20 1997
Available On: PS1, PSP, PSN
Key Staff:
 Yasumi Matsuno, Hideo Minaba,
 Hiroshi Minagawa, Hiroyuki Ito,
 Akihiko Yoshida, Hitoshi Sakimoto
Article by: Zack Reese



FFT's story also sets it apart from the core series of the time. It's a thickly-layered tale that could be ripped from a novel, the story of the Kingdom of Ivalice.



A fifty-year war has recently ended, but wartime tension remains - with Ivalice trapped in a power vacuum thanks to the death of their King. The two princes war, while the church also gets involved for their own noble-but-nefarious reasons.

The player follows two friends, Ramza and Delita. Despite being from opposite social classes, they work together - but things change early. Delita is touted as a war hero who helped to bring about peace, while Ramza is labeled as a heretic, excommunicated and accused of trying to orchestrate mankind's destruction.

"FFT's brilliant gameplay and story are like a fine wine"

Players see the story's pivotal moments through Ramza's eyes, leading to an incredibly sombre tone. With many story elements left to player interpretation, fans left debating details of certain story beats.

Ivalice's strict social structure colors many encounters. From trying to stop a group of thieves from pillaging a town for survival, to helping a group of indentured servants escape capture, FFT is rife with socioeconomic discord.

For me, FFT's brilliant gameplay and story are like a fine wine; they get better with age. With age has come a deeper understanding of tactical gameplay as well as the labyrinthine plot's complexities. It's an incredible twisting tale of love, betrayal, corruption, politics, religion, class warfare and more.

Combine that with a beautiful soundtrack and wonderful visual flair and it's no surprise that I regularly replay FFT. It still hasn't grown stale - it's still a masterpiece.

Zack Reese [@zackreese] is a contributor to RPGSite.net and UFFSite.net.



Even more Tactical: The Sequels

With Final Fantasy Tactics successful enough to see a sequel green-lit, the 'Tactics' brand was free to grow as its own spin-off series.

Final Fantasy Tactics Advance (GBA) kept the basic mechanical values of the PS1 original, but introduced 'Judges' and in-battle laws, dictating a set of rules for each battle. Broken laws will see characters imprisoned, forcing players to either play without that character or pay up for bail.

FFTA differed greatly in its narrative - offering a more whimsical story of an Ivalice that appeared to have been created by the minds of children - who must battle to escape back to the real world. It also features the most unintentionally cruel hero in FF history.

Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift (DS) picks up from FFTA, seeing another innocent sucked from the 'real world' to Ivalice through a magical book. That said, the story takes place in the real Ivalice, and is set during the events of **FFXII** - which in a sense can also be considered an FFT spin-off.

The game forgoes a linear path, instead embracing a mission-based structure perfect for handheld gamers, with hundreds of missions to complete.

Crystal Defenders (Mobile, XBLA, PSN) could be considered the last major Tactics-like release thus far, though it does play very differently - it's a tower defence title! Featuring unit types from the Ivalice-based games, players must fend off waves of enemies with tactical placement of units.

Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions (PSP, Mobile) is an incredibly competent, expanded port of the original FFT - and is the best way to play it now.

“[Final Fantasy] exists in a category of its own, the first citizen of the new world of cyberfilm.”

-Roger Ebert, 2001



Originally Released: July 2 2001

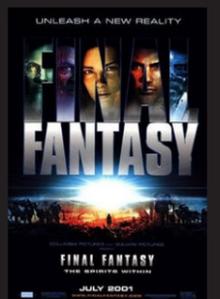
Available On:

DVD, UMD, Blu-Ray, Streaming

Key Staff:

Hironobu Sakaguchi, Moto Sakakibara, Chris Lee, Akio Sakai, Al Reinert, Elliot Goldenthal

Article by: Alex Donaldson



It's very easy to point a finger at **Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within** and say it sucks. The largest box office bomb ever on release after only making back \$85 million of its \$137 million budget, it almost bankrupted Square and set in motion the chain of events that would see **Hironobu Sakaguchi** exit the company.

Its failure can largely be chalked down to the sheer ambition of the project. After four years of production it had run over-time and over-budget - mainly thanks to pie-in-the-sky ideas about the future of Square Pictures, the company's new movie arm.

Aki Ross, the movie's CG-generated lead, was intended to become a 'flagship' star for the company. Voiced by **Ming Na** - known to gamers for playing Chun-Li in the live action **Street Fighter** movie - Aki was designed to go on to star in different movies and roles. A fully digital actress. That never came to pass.

In the run up to release Square and Columbia Pictures, production partners, were confident. "We're working on the concept of a second feature. We don't have a title yet, but a director just finished a treatment," Producer **Jun Aida** told press prior to release, indicating another movie was planned.

That, too, didn't happen. The resulting massive monetary losses saw Square in dire financial straits. That eventually led to the merge with Enix, but for a while the future of the company was very uncertain indeed. It was arguably Final Fantasy's darkest hour.



Most critics mauled but some evangelized, seeing it as more than the sum of its parts. Renowned critic Roger Ebert called it "a technical milestone, like the first talkies or 3-D movies," rewarding the movie 3.5 stars out of 5.

He's right - It's a technological milestone as massive as Toy Story - even if it is a less competent movie in its own right. It also gives today's fans a valuable glimpse at a more naive Square with deep pockets and massive ambitions outside video games.

It failed for numerous reasons; chiefly in appealing to both the Japanese and Western tastes, in the end pleasing nobody. The technology, while impressive, wasn't and still isn't ready to replace real actors. Worst, it was massively over budget - a kiss of death.

The actual movie itself is as nuts-and-bolts and predictable as Hollywood sci-fi fantasy comes, but is by no means terrible.

While The Spirit's Within's story of a post apocalyptic New York terrorized by ethereal spirits is a far cry from Midgar - leave alone Baron or Alexandria - the core of the movie's themes should feel very much familiar to those who've played the FF games.



Carrying regular FF themes of spirit, life force and coping with death, the movie *feels* like part of the FF lore even if it doesn't *look* it at first glance. It's not the blink-and-you'll-miss-it Chocobo cameo that makes this FF - it's the movie's heart.

More than just being a part of the series, The Spirits Within provided valuable experience that'd be carried forth into Square developments. Even so, the movie is now scarcely mentioned by fans or Square Enix.

Technology tested here was of course taken forwards by Square Enix's Visual Works studio who'd go on to create FMV sequences for future Final Fantasy titles and FF's other movie feature, **Advent Children**.

Directorial experience of Sakaguchi and other key members of staff was also ploughed back into the cinematic sequences for future titles, giving games like **FFX** an edge over rivals before many other developers started to truly understand cinematic games.

Perhaps most significant of all, The Spirits Within makes FF a vital part of Hollywood history.

The Spirits Within did huge damage but also provided experience necessary for Final Fantasy and Square to grow. For that it should be remembered.

It's just a shame we'll never get to see Aki Ross in another role. I always thought she was a very well designed... Actress? Character? Model? Just what is she? Ah, so *that's* why that idea didn't work...

Alex Donaldson [[@APZonerunner](#)] is the Co-owner and Editor of [RPGSite.net](#) & [UFFSite.net](#).



When people are asked what their favorite SNES game is, one answer seems to crop up as much as **FFVI - Chrono Trigger**. This fantasy adventure romp is an all-time great - and that's not nostalgia talking.

It's of note to us here as a perfect foil to FF, created by a dream team of industry veterans with experience from FF, **Dragon Quest** and beyond. It's distinct from FF but clearly related right in its DNA.

Hironobu Sakaguchi recruited Dragon Quest and Dragon Ball artist **Akira Toriyama** to shape the game's visual design. His style of quirky characters and vehicles, humorous but intimidating enemies and whimsical locales immediately distanced the game from FF.

In other areas CT more closely resembles its brother, featuring **FFIV's** Active Time Battle system for combat. Tweaks and additions including a minor emphasis on character positioning on the battlefield and special 'team' attacks helped the game feel unique in spite of shared ideas.



The use of on-screen encounters was groundbreaking, doing away with random encounters by having enemies appear on-field. Random encounters were considered a necessary evil due to technical constraints, so CT's removal of them and the ability to avoid fights outright felt incredibly fresh at the time.

Many of CT's combat elements such as on-field enemies, seamless battle transitions and positionally aware combat are still being explored in even the most recent FF titles. It was ahead of its time, in part thanks to the efforts of FF veterans including **Yoshinori Kitase**, **Hiroyuki Ito**, **Takashi Tokita** and **Kazuhiko Aoki**, most of whom worked on this between **FFVI** and **FFVII**.

Nobuo Uematsu contributed to the soundtrack, though most of this incredibly emotional suite comes from **Yasunori Mitsuda**, who allegedly broke down in tears upon hearing the final version of the credits theme; a testament to the creators' love for the project. It is genuinely one of gaming's best ever soundtracks.

The track in question, "*To Far Away Times*," was intended to evoke a feeling of 'aspiring dreams' - the perfect summary of CT's thematic heart. It's more light-hearted than FF, but there's still adult themes here; loss, humanity, racism, classism and more. Best of all, these tough themes are deftly handled.

Often these themes are weaved into the gameplay. Acting selfishly during the Millennium Fair will haunt the player, turning the RPG trope of the characters being unpunished thieves on its head. At one point, the player can go to the past to save the legs of Lucca's paralyzed mother - but only if they think fast.



Split between silly sci-fi fantasy adventures and more thought-provoking events, CT resonates thoroughly. The theme of using time travel to change lives for the better is key - even when brought down to a personal level, as is the case with Lucca's mother. Everyone has regrets in life, so the ability to actually alter one's past can lead to very empathetic and poignant experiences.

When changes are made to the past it's impressively reflected throughout the game. The multiple timelines are fully taken advantage of; while the game is linear at a base level, you see enough change to feel your time travel adventures are having an effect.

Planting a single seed in 600 AD can lead to a forest in 1000 AD in one instance, while another can see the motivations of towns or characters change dramatically. This gives the world somewhat of a transcendental connection that even time cannot fully restrict.



CT's time travel mechanics feel apt, as it often feels like a game far ahead of its time. Some see a charming adventure with a hint of depth. Others see refined combat with great variety. Most see a great game.

Even if not as well-known, Chrono Trigger, 17 this year, deserves to stand alongside its FF brethren and on just as impressive a pedestal. The dream team wasn't just hype - they created something incredible - and something few games can compare to even today.

By David Kreinberg, a contributor on RPGSite.net and a 'brolicious' writer on NeoGAF spoof game 'Dudebro II' (grimoireassemblyforge.com/dudebro2/)

The rivalry between **Square** and **Enix**, **Final Fantasy** and **Dragon Quest** and the fans of both is nothing new; it's been around since the beginning of both franchises.

As with any rivalry - especially those long-running - it's only natural that those who have placed themselves firmly in one camp or the other tend to be unaware of the benefits they've reaped through the healthy competition.

The two share a particularly close relationship - part of the reason that Square even decided to make Final Fantasy in the first place was the success of Dragon Quest, released a year prior.

That game had been massively successful beyond anyone's expectations, and Square rightfully thought that the demand for more games like it would give them a good chance for success. It is not a surprise, then, that FF's success bred a sort of rivalry between not only the two franchises, but between their fans as well.

With the release of **FFII**, that series seemed to solidify its more story and character-oriented focus, further distinguishing itself from Dragon Quest's world and journey-oriented design.

Unfortunately, **FFII** wasn't as well-received as the first game, primarily due to the poor response to the game's progression system, so with the record-breaking success of **Dragon Quest III**, Square once again looked to its rival for inspiration. A year and a half later, **FFIII** hit shelves - and bore more than a passing similarity to parts of **DQIII** in its gameplay systems.

One of the most successful aspects of **DQIII** was the class changing system. The player could create his or her own characters and then change their class, allowing each character to take on different roles throughout the course of the game.



It turns out that this sort of system would come fairly naturally to FF, as the first game already had the concept of character jobs.

With that in mind, **FFIII** took the original **FFI** jobs, along with many new ones, and tackled the idea of class changing in a new and different way: each character's job could be changed at any time as long as the player had the requisite capacity points available to spend.

Doing so would not reset the character's level as it did in **DQIII**. This allowed for much deeper customization, and perhaps more importantly, it fostered experimentation by allowing that customization to occur on-the-spot.



The structure of **FFIII** also shifted away from the character-driven narrative of **FFII**, although not completely. **FFIII** managed to blend the vignette approach of **DQ** and character-focused **FFII** approach to storytelling in quite a masterful way, all told, resulting in an epic journey dotted with some of the most poignant moments seen in gaming up to that point.

The result of this brilliant meshing of styles was a FF game that did so well that it sold twice as much as its predecessor, and cemented the series in fans' minds as one that wasn't afraid to change things up, a stark contrast when compared to the far more conservative Dragon Quest series.



Like the Chocobo, DQ mascot Slime has its own spin-offs.

Indeed, it worked so well that Square tried again two years later with **FFV** and was met with nearly doubled sales over that game's predecessor once more - and it's in large part thanks to

Dragon Quest. Without **DQ** as an early guiding light, **FF** might have failed early in its life.

The favor was returned, too - later **DQ** titles would follow **FF's** lead in switching to PlayStation hardware, while the latest in the series, **DQX**, is following in the footsteps of **FFXI**, launching as a console-driven MMO.

Final Fantasy, meanwhile, had learned its lesson. In the decades that followed Square continually took risks and changed up each **FF** as it did with **FFIII**, inspired by Dragon Quest - and in doing so assured its place as one of the most beloved franchises of all time.

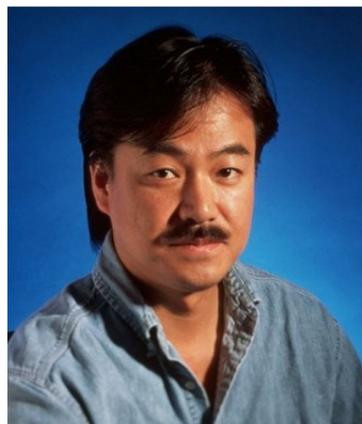
By Brianna Tierney [@aeana], a Japanese Teacher and a mainstay of the FF and DQ communities on NeoGAF.com.

Q1 1997 - Square forms Square Pictures

Towards the start of 1997 *Square USA* formed a new Hawaii-based studio, **Square Pictures**. At the time of its inception, Square expected the studio to cater for a third of the company's worldwide operations. FF creator **Hironobu Sakaguchi** moved to Hawaii to oversee the new studio.

Opening Square Pictures and Square USA saw the company post a \$27 million loss - the first since 1986, the year before FF launched. The company swallowed the loss in an attempt to remain ahead of the curve.

These decisions remain significant - as they set in motion the chain of events that would lead to massive changes at the company. **Toy Story's** success had been noted, and Square had decided that their in-game CG could be turned to another market - feature films.



2000 - Proposed Enix merger falls through

After those first losses, things got worse for **Square** - but **Enix** was also hurting. They'd spent 99.2 million yen on shares in **Game Arts**, the developer of the **Grandia** franchise - thus securing rights to the series - but little came of it. Delays and increased development costs saw Enix's profits dropping rapidly.

Enix began to look for a partner, eventually forming an online agreement with Square and **Namco**. A full merger was tabled as a point of discussion, but was eventually stifled completely thanks to declining profits at Square that were largely caused by the ongoing disaster at Square Pictures.



February 2001 - Tomoyuki Takechi Resigns

Tomoyuki Takechi joined Square in 1996 and became the chairman in 2000, given the undesirable task of turning things around from the company's ongoing and worrying decline.

Under his leadership, Square went into the red for the first time - a mere four years after posting those early losses. In February of 2001, he shocked with his resignation.



May 25th, 2001 - Sakaguchi Plans his exit

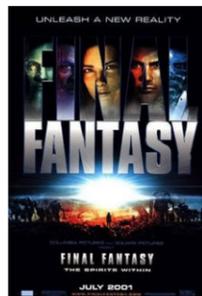
Over in Hawaii, Square Pictures was in trouble. **Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within** was nearing release but was poorly organized and burning money on ideas that would never be used. One high ranking employee revealed that an incredible 1427 shots were cut from the film - more than the 1336 in the final release.

The production was a complete mess, and ultimate responsibility fell at the feet of Sakaguchi. He clearly sensed the storm that was to come - on May 25th, 2001, two months before FFTSW hit theatres, he registered a trademark for **'Mistwalker'**, the name of his new company, though he remained at Square for a few more years.

July 2001 - The Spirits Within releases, bombs

Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within premiered on July 2nd, 2001. Despite Square investing approximately \$167 million into the film, it was a swing and a miss. The CG, while impressive, was too creepily real for most consumers, and the film's sci-fi subject matter failed to excite. Even the most loyal FF fans saw little association with the games they loved beyond the name.

The Spirits Within was an impressive technical experiment which helped today's prevalent CG to earn audience acceptance, but it ended up as the biggest box office bomb ever at the time of its release and retained that dubious honor for some time. All told, it lost Square \$87 million.



October 4th, 2001 - Square Pictures Ceases Production



With *The Spirits Within* firmly confirmed to be a failure, Square revealed that they would exit the movie business. The company announced losses they described as "extraordinary" - \$115 million.

Square Pictures had one last job to complete - an all-CG excursion in the universe of **'The Matrix.'** Titled **'Final Flight of the Osiris,'** the short is considered the official prequel to **The Matrix Reloaded.** Following the project's completion, Square Pictures was turned into a simple Research and Development studio.

December 2001 - Yoichi Wada ascends to President and CEO



Yoichi Wada joined Square in April 2000. By June of the same year, he was named director and chief financial officer. In September 2001, he was appointed chief operating officer - and placed in charge of fixing the messes of recent years.

Wada's early tenure was hugely successful - under him, the company was revitalized, staging a dramatic recovery. The company posted its highest ever operating margin in its history in the 2002 fiscal year. Wada's reward was to be named President as well as CEO in December 2001.

November 26th, 2002 - The merger is on

In November 2002, the proposed 2000 merger of Square Co. and Enix Corp was finally set to come to fruition after years of intense planning and negotiation. With Wada's Square returned to profitability, Enix was no longer apprehensive about the merger - and so a deal, worth around \$727 million, was made.

"The merger is seen as a positive move for both companies as it will provide ample funds to cash-strapped Square while helping to smooth wide earnings swings at Enix, which depends solely on Dragon Quest sales," analyst Takeshi Tajima said at the time. The merger was set for April 1st, 2003.

January 2003 - Square's Founder objects to the merger

With mere months to go until the merge was finalized, a major voice rose in opposition - Square's Founder and largest shareholder, **Masashi Miyamoto**. He was concerned that the move would devalue Square's stocks.

The agreement was quickly reworked which saw Enix shares to be exchanged at a lower cost than Square shares. Satisfied, Miyamoto ceased to question the merger.

March/April 2003 - The deal is done

SQUARE ENIX™

With nothing in the way of the deal, the future of Square - and Final Fantasy - was set to change forever. Changes at each company's office began to take place in the months leading up to the merge, culminating in the release of the company's new logo - still used today - on March 31st.

Even in this time, Wada's forward-thinking approach was being felt at Square. March saw the release of the first ever direct sequel in the main FF series in **Final Fantasy X-2** - the first tentative step in a new direction for the company that would also form a vital tone-setting release for **Square Enix**. On April 1st, 2003, Square Co. and Enix Corp ceased to exist - and Square Enix was born.

By Darryl Kaye [DarrylGU], based on an article from his site, Gaming Union. [gamingunion.com]

The youngest of FF's siblings, **Kingdom Hearts** is the third major pillar of Square Enix's Japanese development business, standing proudly alongside FF and **Dragon Quest**.

Its birth has always been an interesting story to tell. One account has **FFIX** Producer **Shinji Hashimoto** hatching the idea with a Disney Japan executive in a prolonged elevator journey, though we'll likely never know the full truth.

What we do know is that series director **Tetsuya Nomura** volunteered when the project was first being discussed by Hashimoto and **Hironobu Sakaguchi**. "It would be impossible to do without Disney-level star power characters," he said in an interview with Nintendo. "But it stuck in my head. So, when I heard them talking about something with Disney, I knew I wanted to do it..."

Nomura is a vital component of KH's success, and marked his first foray into directing. He's famously known for his character designs in **FFVII**, **VIII**, **X** and **XIII**, but had a background in debugging and lower-level monster design before that.



He was the perfect candidate, and his directorial experience propelled him to new heights. He'd later act as creative producer on sleeper hit **The World Ends With You** and also return to FF, directing **FFVII: Advent Children** and directing the upcoming **Final Fantasy Versus XIII**, bringing KH ideas with him.

Other FF staffers who moved to KH included FFVII, VIII and X scenario writer **Kazushige Nojima** and FFX scenario planner **Daisuke Watanabe**. Both returned to FF - Nojima for the upcoming Versus XIII and Watanabe in **FFXII-2** and **Lightning Returns: FFXIII**.



KH's story is famed for being even more convoluted than FFXIII - an impressive feat.

For now, though, back to KH. The most notable feature of the KH series to FF fans is the inclusion of cameo characters from the FF series - but this wasn't always part of KH's design.

When Nomura began creating KH's story, he wanted a simple game using Disney characters. Sakaguchi told Nomura it would be doomed to fail with that simplicity, instructing him to make it a more complex story similar to the FF series.

In the end, Nomura's own staff pressured him into adding FF characters to help cover gaps that the Disney characters might not be able to fill.



Nomura has stated that he didn't want to use characters from FF games he didn't create as he didn't know the backstory of those characters. When it came to the characters he did create, he redesigned them to fit in the universe while at the same time keeping their personalities similar.

Characters usually fill similar roles; **Cid** starts out helping players upgrade their spaceship (he's a pilot in FFVII, remember), while **Cloud** is hired as a mercenary, as he was in FFVII, though with the nefarious task of killing Hercules.

Dead-man **Auron** is summoned by Hades in the Underworld for the same task as Cloud, while **Tidus**, **Wakka** and **Selphie** are shown as young kids.

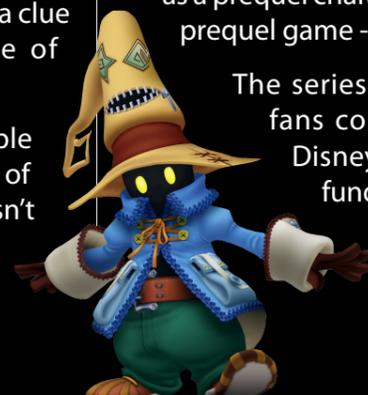
Balamb Garden's disciplinary committee of **Seifer**, **Fujin** and **Raijin** fill the same role in KHII's Twilight Town - though that game features the debut of two non-Nomura FF characters.

Bowing to pressure from staff and fans alike, Nomura included **Setzer** from **FFVI** and **Vivi** from **FFIX** as part of the Struggle tournament. Setzer is its champion, while Vivi is a participant with admiration for Seifer's gang.



FFX-2's Yuna, **Rikku** and **Paine** show up as a group of treasure hunting fairies. FFVII prequel star **Zack** appears in KH prequel Birth By Sleep, with Nomura stating that as a prequel character himself he felt a nice fit for the prequel game - and these are just a few examples.

The series was a massive success. With FF fans coming for the cameos and many Disney fans experiencing the addictive fundamentals of a Japanese RPG for the first time, KH even threatened to eclipse FF in its success.



The time since KH's release has been a turbulent one for FF, with the series undergoing massive changes. With the success of KH's battle system, FF has been replacing much of its classic random encounter, turn based role play with more active battles, open world settings, and on-screen enemies.



Versus XIII's combat looks very similar to KH - and may be a sign of things to come.

Games like Crisis Core, Type-0, Dirge of Cerberus, and the upcoming Versus XIII all seem to have adopted the same formula in one way or another - a formula that the KH series birthed and tested for them.

Footage of Versus XIII shows gameplay almost identical to KH but with major improvements and expansion such as switching between party members on the fly and using vehicles in combat - very different to the norm for FF and its fans.

When we look back on FF's 25 years, it's important to acknowledge not only how far the series has come, but also how it got there. Struggling with FF's direction, Square Enix has frequently turned to the series' younger 10-year-old brother for help.

Kingdom Hearts and FF share a symbiotic relationship; they're mutually beneficial to each other with one borrowing characters, the other borrowing gameplay, and the pair sharing staff.

With an entry as vital as Versus XIII in the hands of what is essentially the Kingdom Hearts team, it's not far-fetched to suggest those wanting a look at the future of FF should watch KH closely.

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Final Fantasy and **Nintendo** had always been together - and fans were rightfully shocked when the series decisively departed Nintendo machines.

The decision to take the series to Sony platforms didn't only shape the future of FF, but also shook the entire world of gaming. But why did it all happen? To learn that, we have to dive deeper than FF and Square.

In 1988, **Nintendo** and **Sony** were doing something that would be completely unthinkable today - working together. The concept was to use Sony's extensive knowledge of the impressive CD-ROM format alongside Nintendo's unrivalled experience in games, the result intended to be a CD add-on for the Super Nintendo.

A few years later in 1991, Sony debuted the fruits of their labour and partnership - a SNES with a built-in CD drive. It looked set to dominate the market.



One of the only images of the original PlayStation - part Sony, part SNES.

The very next day Nintendo announced they were pulling out of the agreement, unsatisfied with how profits would be split. Nintendo signed a deal with **Phillips**, resulting in the frankly terrible CDi console.

Negotiations with Sony continued into 1992, where they soon collapsed completely. Incensed by their humiliation at the hands of Nintendo, Sony made the decision to try to enter the video game market alone, placing visionary **Ken Kutaragi** in charge. PlayStation was born.



Nintendo found themselves burned by the CDi's putrid quality, and decided CD technology wasn't yet ready for games, citing load times and noise amongst other factors. Their next machine, the **Nintendo 64**, would remain cartridge-based - a crucial decision.

In 1994, work on FFVII was well underway as a 2D SNES title. The game was to take place in New York in 1999 and was said to be like a detective story. Aspects of this remained - a dystopian, Blade Runner-like New York became Midgar, and story elements such as the cast blowing up part of the city in the opening remained.

Chrono Trigger caused FFVII to take a back seat and by the time the team returned, 3D was 'in.' **Hironobu Sakaguchi** had always intended FF to mimic cinema and using such visuals would help games to do just that. A 3D tech demo was constructed based on the N64's specs, showing FFVI characters in a cinematic battle.



Locke faces a Golem in Square's N64 tech demo - which laid the groundwork for FFVII's FMV sequences.

3D assets are larger than their 2D counterparts, and on N64 carts - which topped out at a couple of hundred megabytes - this proved a problem. For a 40-hour epic, it soon became apparent that Square needed CD, and in turn they needed the PlayStation.



Sony needed them, too - requiring a killer app for their console. They aggressively pursued Square, offering them special deals on the cost of manufacturing and distribution. They even had a hand in the game's (awful) translation and helped to publish it in the West.

It wouldn't be too much of an exaggeration to say that Sony milked it. CD-quality music, 40 minutes of FMV and incredible pre-rendered graphics were driven home in a blistering ad campaign. "Someone please get the guys who make cartridge games a cigarette and a blindfold," one print ad brazenly stated. FFVII became the breakout JRPG hit, and the PlayStation became the default JRPG system for western gamers.

FFVII helped to make the PlayStation, and in turn helped to break Nintendo. That relationship wouldn't repair easy.

Watching a game that could've been theirs light up the charts and kickstart **PS1** sales wasn't an easy pill for **Nintendo** to swallow. Seeing FFVII's success, others followed suit in ditching the **N64**, including Enix and the Dragon Quest series, FF's inspiration.

Based on the way company executives were talking, it was easy to imagine that the two companies might never engage again.

"FFVII, with three CD-ROMs, would weigh in at 1.8GB of data," Sony executive Phil Harrison said at E3 1997, using FFVII to highlight a perceived inferiority in Nintendo's philosophy. "There's no way that any Nintendo cartridge-based system could cram that much data into one game."

Nintendo responded in-kind. "Most of our customers wouldn't want or appreciate such a slow and tedious game," Marketing boss George Harrison said.

The most scathing comments of all came from the famously sharp-tongued Nintendo CEO and President of the time **Hiroshi Yamauchi**.



Asked by press about FF, his response was simple. "[People who play RPGs are] depressed gamers who like to sit alone in their dark rooms and play slow games." Ouch.

Even a full generation later, as Nintendo prepared to launch the **GameCube**, the company remained cold, refusing to allow Square to publish for it at first. In 2002, with Yamauchi preparing to retire, incoming Nintendo boss Satoru Iwata was keen to patch things up with the publisher that helped assure the PS1's success.

It wasn't straightforward. Sony owned 19% of Square, and an agreement existed which stated that Square could only create games for PlayStation hardware.

Square's solution was sneaky and clever. They founded a new 'shell' company, **The Game Designers Studio**, of which they owned 49%. The other 51% belonged to **Akitoshi Kawazu** - the creator of the **FF: Crystal Chronicles** series and one of FF's original developers.

With this a new studio, Nintendo provided some funds to get the team up and running and it got around the Sony agreement. All this was allowed by Sony, broadly, as long as the studio did not effect the decision-making process driving projects at the rest of Square.

"[People who play RPGs are] depressed gamers who like to sit alone in their dark rooms and play slow games."

- Nintendo President Hiroshi Yamauchi after FF went to PlayStation

The five-year lovers' tiff between Square and Nintendo was finally announced to be over in June 2002. At the time, many felt Sony had just given away their greatest asset. For those that thought the uproar of **FFXIII** heading to **Xbox 360** was bad, you should've seen this.

Provided with a team and an entirely new studio to work with, Kawazu began building a vision of the FF series designed specifically for Nintendo consoles.



Crystal Chronicles made use of both the GameCube and Game Boy Advance, and while complex in control methods, the series established a lighter-hearted and more accessible tone which remained in its subsequent **DS** and **Wii** sequels.

The deal also opened the door for a slew of other titles, from GBA and DS remakes and re-releases of classic titles to all-original FF spin-offs.

Despite FF's support, Nintendo's push for innovation over horsepower left it between a rock and a hard place. While FF's Crystal Tools produced the beautiful **FFXIII** on PS3 and 360, Wii games only looked about as good as the PS2 FF entries in the FF series.

With FF obsessed with its visual output as much as its gameplay, it seemed a poor match for the underpowered Wii hardware. Unfortunately for Nintendo, many other third parties felt the same same way.

That was a wake-up call, and when the time came for the sun to set on the Wii and dawn to arrive for a new platform, rumors and speculation all pointed to one thing: a machine that would be a significant power jump over its predecessor.

Project Café was coming. The question on the lips of FF fans was if it would offer features that would make a difference to their favorite series.



With the announcement of the **Wii U** at E3 2011, Nintendo was ready to fight back against the apathy that had set in against the Wii. Even so, not all went to plan. An unclear presentation meant that many were left perplexed as to whether the Wii U was an entirely new console, or a controller that served as an additional controller to the already existing Wii.

Nintendo had at long last galloped confidently into the HD arena, but fell from their horse through mixed messages and a third-party reel that comprised of footage captured on rival platforms. Nintendo attempted to put such confusion to rest, but have since faced similar issues with marketing the Wii U alongside launch. Ignoring the condensed, easy to understand appeal of "Wii would like to play," it is now consumers that are puzzled by what the new console has to offer.

Yet I digress - this article isn't about Nintendo. It's about Final Fantasy. The Wii U has some solid third party support - but FF is a notable gap that should be filled. For Japan at least, Square Enix are to soon deliver Dragon Quest X. Yet beyond this the publisher's support for Wii U remains worryingly quiet. We know that Australian studio Straight Right have been contracted to port a Square Enix game to Wii U - and that is largely expected to be Tomb Raider.

With that said, it wouldn't be entirely ridiculous to consider the release of a **FFXIII** trilogy compilation for Wii U - with **Lightning Returns** on the horizon, the interest would likely be there. If there's something that the console is already lacking outside of Japan, it's most certainly RPGs. Beyond this there's Lightning Returns alone, as well as the fact that the general status and platform exclusivity of **FF Versus XIII** remains in question. With Nintendo having now caught up in terms of hardware, I can't be alone in my desire for Square Enix to reunite the core series with the platform holder with whom it solidified its foundations back with the Famicom release of Final Fantasy.

Whilst the Wii U GamePad may purely be used to trawl menus and aid navigation of your surroundings, it could also provide a window with which Square Enix can apply their creativity. We already know that customisation will play a key role within LR:FFXIII, altering Lightning's abilities on the fly, and it is here that a Wii U version could surpass competitors simply by ease of use.

There's already so much untapped potential, and whilst Crystal Chronicles has been kind to Nintendo it is time for the shackles to be loosened. With soaring production costs, platform exclusivity has become lost amid an industry that must seek profit to survive.

What I'm saying is simple - there's no way that I am alone in wishing that the key entries in the Final Fantasy series may at long last return home to Nintendo's latest console. Make it happen, please?

By **Alex Seedhouse** [[@Seedy87](#)], Editor of **Nintendo Insider**. [[nintendo-insider.com](#)]



Hatched as part of a major kiss-and-make-up deal between Square and Nintendo, **Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles** was a brave project intended to use many of the strengths and features of Nintendo's Gamecube hardware to its fullest.

For one, the Gamecube featured a more family-friendly audience. It also had an audience who appeared far more likely to get together and play together around a console thanks to titles like Mario Party and Super Smash Bros. Finally, it sported a very interesting feature for Square's designers - the ability to connect a Game Boy Advance to the machine as a controller.

The result was a game that featured clever concepts but was prohibitively expensive to properly experience - it required a Gamecube, the game, four players, four GBAs and all the necessary cables. In spite of that, it remains one of the most bravely different FF titles to this day.

The legacy of Crystal Chronicles isn't its cost or GBA-using antics, but its world. From this point on the series would become Nintendo's personal arm of Final Fantasy, getting several sequels and spin-offs of its own. Five years passed, but 2007 saw the **Ring of Fates** release on DS, while 2008 had FF:CC expand into strategy with the kingdom management sim **My Life as a King** as a download on Wii. This underrated gem is one of the best FF titles this console generation.

2009 was a banner year for Crystal Chronicles, seeing the release of three new titles in the franchise. **Echoes of Time** for both Wii and DS once again exploited console connectivity, while downloadable **My Life as a Darklord** was an evil-tinted version of My Life as a King. **The Crystal Bearers** was the most ambitious title in the series to date with a fully-fleshed out story and motion controls.

It's unclear if the FF:CC series will continue on the Wii U and 3DS - but we hope it does.

Tasked with creating a Final Fantasy title for the Nintendo Wii, the core team behind the **Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles** series decided a drastic change of direction was necessary - doing away with the series' multiplayer-focused gameplay.

The Crystal Bearers still owes much to the other FFCC games, taking the races and world of the Gamecube original and utilizing them in new ways.

Set 1000 years after that first title, warring races and nations have crafted a very different landscape - one more suited for a single-player adventure.

Players take on the role of Layle, a cocky, self-assured mercenary whose personality vaguely resembles **FFIX's** Zidane. Granted power over gravity by a crystal embedded in his right cheek, Layle is powerful and knows it - thus his cocksure attitude.

On paper Layle should be difficult to like, but in reality his confidence is a welcome change from a slew of self-doubting leads, whilst his jokey attitude is a similarly welcome change from too-serious protagonists.

The Crystal Bearers' action-based combat combines the Wii Remote and Layle's gravity-based powers to allow players to fling enemies about with a flick of the wrist. Like many core Wii games one does end up wondering if motion controls were really necessary.

Often poorly implemented controls are the game's greatest flaw - and it was no surprise to learn that it began life with a traditional control scheme on a traditional controller. The mini-game laden structure, where the story is punctuated with unique gameplay moments, was a solid idea - but ended up far from perfect.

Where **The Crystal Bearers** succeeds is its atmosphere and world. After several games developing the land and races of the FFCC universe, what's on show here has depth, yet retains the whimsical nature much modern FF now lacks.

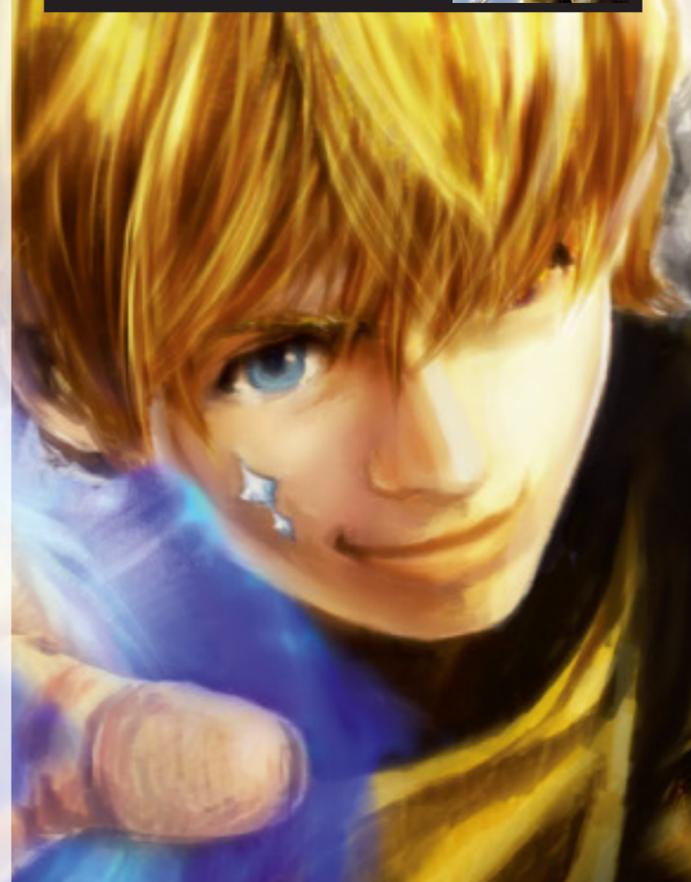
Some may think it too childish, but I for one embrace the light-hearted 'Saturday morning cartoon' feel of the game, and it also sports music and artwork that rivals big-budget FF at its best.

The Crystal Bearers is a far cry from the finest hour of the FF series, but it does offer a different experience that is a great example of how diverse the series can be.

It's an underrated title that didn't sell brilliantly - and with the Wii now cheap, if you've not given it a try it's definitely worth a look.

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Akitoshi Kawazu, Toshiyuki Itahana, Kumi Tanioka
Article by: John Davison



Akitoshi Kawazu

King of Chronicles

Credited: FFI (1987), FFII, FF Legend, FFXII, Crystal Chronicles Series
Now: Designer at Square Enix



If Hiromichi Tanaka was the right hand in shaping the original **FF's** design, Kawazu was the left. Kawazu moved on after **FFII** to create **Final Fantasy Legend** and its sequel for the Game Boy. These titles were actually part of the new **SaGa** series, but were rebranded as Final Fantasy titles in the West.

SaGa would keep Kawazu busy and away from FF for over a decade, and when he returned he created another side-series of a sort - **Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles**.

He then acted as Executive Producer on several FF:CC sequels including **Ring of Fates** and downloadable Wii title **My Life as a King**. He'd also write and produce **The Crystal Bearers**, the series' plot-driven Wii entry.

Kawazu did get his chance to return to the core series at last - and acted as Executive Producer on **FFXII**, filling a Sakaguchi-shaped void in an uncertain time. He remains at **Square Enix**, and is currently working on mobile RPG **'It's New Frontier'**.

Kumi Tanioka

World Music Master

Credited: FFXI, Crystal Chronicles Series, Chocobo Series
Now: Composer at Square Enix



While not as well known as Nobuo Uematsu, Kumi Tanioka has become a staple of the sound of the FF series thanks to her numerous contributions to major spin-off titles.

She's contributed to **FFXI** alongside others and worked on the **Chocobo** spin off games, but her main claim to FF fame is in **Crystal Chronicles**, a series she has musically made her own.

Working with arranger **Hidenori Iwasaki**, Tanioka set a theme of 'World Music' and used a variety of styles, instruments and cultural inspirations to create a score that stood out but retained an FF feel. Tanioka has been joined by other composers in subsequent games, but the template she set with the original Crystal Chronicles remains firmly in place.

Her work on FFXI led her to join 'The Star Onions,' a band of **Square Enix** employees who perform live arrangements of music from FFXI and have released two CDs. [@tanikumi]



Distant Worlds

music from
FINAL FANTASY.

Final Fantasy has a lot of different legacies. To borrow an old phrase, it has its fingers in a lot of pies - and it's tough to tell which are the tastiest.

Without a doubt one of the series' most important and enduring legacies is its music - which has now found a new lease of life through a vastly successful concert series.

Distant Worlds: Music from Final Fantasy tours the globe playing excerpts from the scores of each FF title to sell-out crowds, giving fans a chance to experience the music behind the series in a whole new way.

Distant Worlds' story begins in 2004, when Square Enix America decided to bring the concept of a FF concert West for a one-off special.

The concept of a video game music concert was nothing new in Japan, but this was a first of its scale in the West. That year during E3 in Los Angeles the first ever North American FF concert was performed to an audience of mostly press and industry folk.

After this success **Arnie Roth**, the owner of AWR Music Productions, decided to perform a public variation of that concert, '**Dear Friends**' in Chicago.

The single performance in February 2005 was a sell-out success - and more concerts were quickly planned with Roth conducting across America.

Roth had discovered a new outlet - and would play with one-off FF concerts such as '**More Friends**' as well as more general game music-based shows such as 'Play: A Video Game Symphony' over the following years. By 2007, he was ready to make FF concerts a regular fixture.



Named after the soaring vocal title track of **FFXI**, Distant Worlds was born.

The show has since played in Australia, Canada, Japan, Poland, Singapore, Scotland, South Korea, Sweden, Taiwan, the UK and all across the United States.

In the coming months the show will also finally debut in France, Germany and Malaysia. That's quite a line-up.

Distant Worlds is one of many aspects that marks Final Fantasy as more than some video game fad; it's a cultural phenomenon - and a significant one.



When on stage, **Arnie Roth** cuts an easily recognizable figure. His ever-present ponytail is in my mind something of a trademark, and a clever one - conductors are of course usually seen from the back.

If that's deliberate or not I don't know, but one thing is clear - Roth is clever. Chatting to him about Final Fantasy and his work with **Distant Worlds**, he's thoughtful, insightful and very clearly cares deeply about the series and the composers whose work he plays.

You don't need me to tell you that, though. The transcript can speak for itself.

How is your choice of the pieces you play in Distant Worlds decided? Is much through fan feedback?

Well, I always love getting feedback from the fans. The best way for fans to give us their ideas is just posting on our Facebook site, on the wall there. We do really read everything that comes in there - we don't respond to everything but we certainly get all the ideas that are going through there - so that's the best way to reach us with suggestions.

We feel that we're mostly playing the popular - the greatest hits if you would - from FF already at this point, based on our knowledge from the fans and Uematsu, who has much to do with the decisions we make about repertoire.



He and I kind of bounce these decisions off each other all the time. We feel like we're already playing some of the things that are more in demand. When **Final Fantasy XIII** came out we tried to add more titles from FFXIII, and there are certain areas where we can do more of that.

We don't like to do oodles of medleys. We prefer... Distant Worlds started based on the template of [**Nobuo**] Uematsu and [**Shiro**] Hamaguchi.

The template of **Dear Friends** and several concerts that had existed up to that point - the **Voices** concert in Japan, **More Friends** in LA... When we put Distant Worlds together, we were certainly conscious of that.

My point is that in Distant Worlds we do an awful lot of pieces that try to stay faithful to the one title that we're performing. If we're doing '*Aerith's Theme*' it isn't a medley of several different things from **FFVII** but really is Aerith's Theme. If we're doing '**Liberi Fatali**,' we're going to perform it that way.



I can't take any credit for this - Hamaguchi and Uematsu kind of set this up prior to our getting involved. We like that template. We've of course added video to Distant Worlds, which I think brings it to a different place in terms of some options that we can do.

If we were to line up all the repertoire from Final Fantasy that we already have, we would do almost three completely distinct concerts without repeating any music at this point.

Can you explain the decision to avoid medleys a little more?

It's difficult to just explain. But... the issue for me - I don't want to simplify it and say it's about quality versus quantity, that kind of thing - that's not really the answer, but the point is that there are some absolutely gorgeous arrangements done for some of these pieces. Some of them even appear in the game that way! [cont overleaf]

We're trying to - first, our first step is to try to stay faithful to how it was presented in the game. Even if it was only presented in 8-bit audio back then with two or three computer voices - fine - we're doing an arrangement of that and we'll try to expand it but we're still trying to stay very faithful.

What we're trying not to do is strive into the area of orchestral fantasies that are based a little more loosely on the various themes. I don't want this to be about the mind of the arranger.

I want the performances of these pieces to be very firmly about the way they existed in the game, and the way they were conceived by Uematsu originally.

That strays far away from that. The problem with mashing a whole bunch of these things together in medleys is... you can do that if you're going to just give everyone a snippet of this theme, that theme and that theme quickly.

But I wonder if everyone is satisfied - more satisfied - with something like that against a fully fleshed out version that might have the development sections or some of the other material that was in the original track when it was first presented in the game.

"I want the performances of these pieces to be very firmly about the way they existed in the game"
- Arnie Roth

I don't know! I'll be honest, I'm not sure what the best way to go is, but I will tell you that in terms of doing big medleys it's, to me... I like the consistency of each game.

We can differentiate between each one of the versions of Final Fantasy a little better when we do something from **X**, something from **IX**, or even **XII**... the pieces are distinct.

By the way, there's an tremendous amount of fantastic new music from Uematsu coming out of Final Fantasy XIV that remains unexplored, though we have played a bit of it. We're also waiting for the right time to perform it, for the act with the game to get sorted out.

Uematsu himself is always very concerned - it'd be easy for him to say "yes, let's do more new scores from FFXIV," but the reality is he's very concerned that because FFXIV has had the technical problems and fans haven't become very familiar with the music, he'd rather satisfy fans.

He wants them to be happy - he doesn't want them to be disappointed, for instance, with us playing 4 or 5 pieces from 14 at the expense of not playing some of the other big hits like *Zanarkand* or *Aerith's Theme* or whatever it might be... These are very, very popular pieces of music, after all.



We're happy to be able to be able to add *Clash on the Big Bridge*, for instance. That's going back to **FFV**, yet it's a very popular piece - I had no idea, but it's the most popular piece of music from Final Fantasy in Japan!

It's a very memorable battle - and it helps that the theme recurs in some other games, too.

Yeah - there was good reason to get it going in the orchestra version.

There's a lot of pieces like that - *Eyes on Me*, for instance, for many years Uematsu wanted to do it but we never had access to the orchestra arrangement.

Finally Square Enix said "Oh, we've found the Hamaguchi sheets from the 'Fithos Lusec' recording they did a while ago and we were able to do it.

I guess we could be digging through Final Fantasy scores for a long time to come and not cover everything - you know better than I how deep that book is - it sort of goes on forever.

Do you have any plans to include more of Hitoshi Sakimoto's original FFXII score in the show?

Y'know, you're not the first to ask me about that. We are considering the best way to bring some of that in. I wouldn't say that many of the fans have asked for it, but it's funny - a lot of the interviewers have asked when we might integrate some of the stuff from FFXII.

A lot of this is driven by the orchestra scores that are available and also the wishes of Square Enix.

It's not just Nobuo Uematsu's design or my design, the repertoire - we're bouncing a lot of this back and forth with Square Enix because obviously the license is a partnership with them.

There have been people that have been crying out for us to do some of Sakimoto's score, and I'd like to. I've worked with so many video game composers at this point - easily 30 or 40 of them on different tours that I've done - that it'd be great pleasure to do that.

How do you deal with the temptation and pressure to just do lots of music from the biggest titles?

Well, that's the problem - we do so much from **FFVI**, **VII** and **VIII** already. We could keep pulling out more scores from those and fans would be very happy.

We've thought about other ways to theme concerts--

Do we do an evening of all music of FFVI, VII or VIII? What if we do an evening of just FFVI, VII and VIII together and nothing else? All those things are possible - we have enough scores already to do that.

Most people split the FF games by era - I-III, IV-VI, VII-IX, X-XIII.

Yeah, you're absolutely right - the way they were released dictates. The question would be if the fans would support a concert in that format.

If we considered doing two or three performances where one night would be FFVII, VII and VIII - I hadn't considered doing a whole evening of FFI, II and III or IV, V and VI, but we could do it that way as well.

Based on the popularity, FFVI, VII and VIII on one evening with everything else on another makes the most sense, but, I don't know!

I'm not sure what the most logical way to do it is, or if there is a logical way to do it. If you don't do *One Winged Angel* in these concerts, I feel like you're disappointing quite a few fans. I'm open to all suggestions!



You were of course involved in Symphonic Fantasies - the Chrono arrangement there is one of my all-time favorites - Do you have any plans to go wider, at DW or otherwise? General Square Enix?

[Laughs] Yes. You, sir, are going right down the path that we have been investigating, I can tell you that. That particular game - Chrono Trigger, Chrono Cross - I agree with you. Of all the scores we play - there's some wonderful things from Kingdom Hearts as well - but there's some really wonderful stuff in Chrono Trigger and Chrono Cross.

You're right - a kind of music of Square Enix tour is something that we've actually spoken about. I'll tell you this; many orchestras and presenters ask us to come back after we've played there the first time, and we've particularly investigated this as a way to come back with a different tour.

What I think might happen - maybe perhaps right after the 25th Anniversary period - is the development of that kind of tour which might have some Final Fantasy music, but also some Chrono Trigger, Chrono Cross, some Kingdom Hearts, some Legend of Mana, Secret of Mana kind of scores... and as you know, there's many other games that they've done.

I mean, look - Dragon Quest is hugely popular in Japan. That might be something we could bring out as another part of such a tour - and there's many more in their stable.

So, you've bought up something we've already been speaking to Square Enix about!

The problem is that the 25th anniversary is right upon us, and starting up something else in the middle of that... It makes a lot of sense to be looking at this for later.

If we stay in the format we're using right now, using video sequences, it takes time to generate that the proper way in a high def resolution. Square Enix's Visual Works department works hand in hand with us on that, and getting them to move along on that takes some time.

Are there any particular pieces you're desperate to do personally?

[Pause] Well. That's... a tough one. No matter how much repertoire I've worked on and performed in any genre, there's so much more out there. Gaming, symphonic, classic symphonic... movie scores. There's a lot of movie scores I've conducted, and I really enjoy doing that.

In terms of video games, I find that I'm already on a path right now where scores are coming to me all the time and there's always new things to discover and do. Within the FF book - this vast book of thousands of hours of music, I'm kind of very excited about our unearthing several scores that fans know about but perhaps wouldn't think of right away.

We're wading through these various scores and deciding that one really will be a fantastic orchestration, this one would be better to do with a rock band versus orchestra, this one, maybe finally we can go and do an orchestrated big band thing like *Swing De Chocobo*... a lot of fans are crying out for that style to come back in something else and we love doing it.

To try to name one score that I'm dying to do, it'd be hard for me to do. One of the recent ones that I unearthed myself personally - I'm really very proud of this one - we'd been trying to get Nobuo to play live with us as a performer on stage for years. He always said no.



He was always embarrassed and nervous to be on stage with major orchestras. He always kept on saying "No, I can't do that, I can't do that," - it was like pulling teeth trying to get him up there!

Finally I discovered *Dark World* from FFVI - which isn't the most popular piece of music - but it was an ideal piece for him to play. A simple keyboard part, some sound effects to trigger... I was delighted that with that piece he said "Okay, alright - as long as you play the violin, do the duet line with me."

The two of us play that live, and finally we're able to get him up live on stage. That was a great triumph, to do that... and I had a lot of fun writing that arrangement.

**Interview by RPG Site's Alex Donaldson [@APZonerunner]
Extended version available on RPG Site. [RPGSite.net]**

Wonder if, as they began to lay the foundation of the complex mythology of **Final Fantasy** and compose the first notes of its music, **Hironobu Sakaguchi** and **Nobuo Uematsu** imagined that they had 25 years of international successes in front of them.

London was definitely the best place for Distant Worlds to start its celebratory tour that will culminate with a concert in Japan. In a single day, the UK is capable of moving through Burmecia-like showers through to the winds of Mount Gagazet, while the night is as sleepless as one in Zanarkand.

The famous Royal Albert Hall isn't entirely dissimilar to FFVI's Opera House; a perfect location to celebrate the series. During its first 133 years this impressive theater was defined as "the only place where a composer could listen to his work twice" thanks to terrible acoustics, but in recent times it has seen a restoration that allows everyone to hear each piece as originally intended.

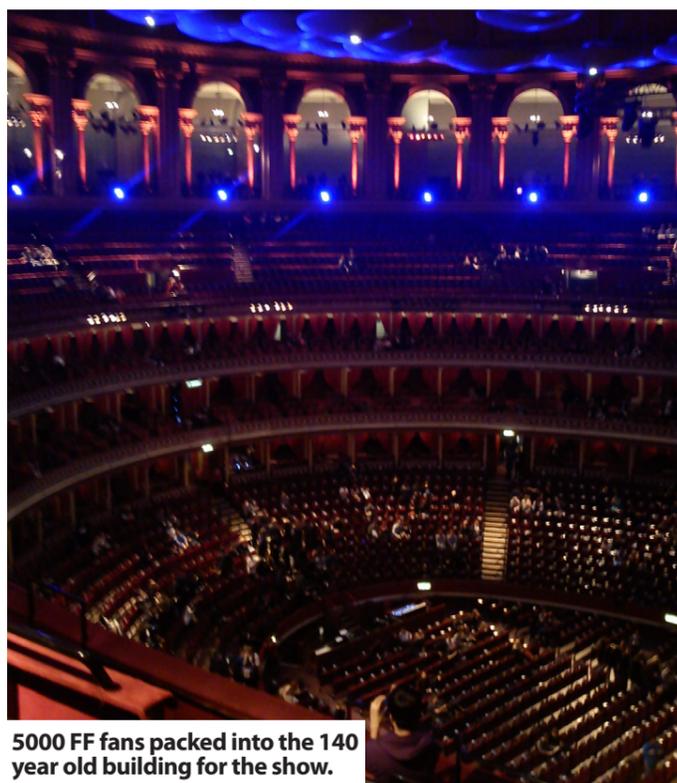
These special shows follow a different structure and feature a different line-up to the rest of the Distant Worlds shows - all for FF's 25th. The 5000-strong sell-out crowd were welcomed with the classic *'Prelude'* as a prologue to a journey through the history of FF starting with a medley of themes from **FF**, **FFII** and **FFIII**.

With these games covered, the orchestra turned to individual pieces for the rest of the games. **FFIV** was commemorated with one of its most characteristic; *'Battle with the Four Fiends.'* Behind the orchestra, the movie that accompanied the performance mixed scenes from the original version and from the DS remake: it was a particular way to not to exclude fans of old nor the new generation of players.

At this point it was the turn of the 'black sheep' of the family, **FFV**, the episode ignored most by Distant Worlds... until today. The adventures of Bartz, Lenna, Ex-Death and Gilgamesh are brought to life on the notes of the main theme of their game's main theme, *'Ahead on Our Way'*, in a newly arranged version. If you don't know it, it's time you give FFV a chance.

Unlike FFIV and like V, **FFVI** has remained anchored in a 2D perspective. While fans wonder if we'll ever see the adventures of Terra, Shadow, Relm and the rest of FFVI's massive cast come to life in a more modern setting, we can be consoled with a new version of *'Phantom Forest'*, another great arrangement composed for the occasion.

This time the movie behind the orchestra let us venture with Cyan, Shadow and Sabin in the tangled ghost forest and the dark train running through it. It's a sequence loved by fans of the beautiful sixth FF chapter.



5000 FF fans packed into the 140 year old building for the show.

It's easy to imagine what came next. Not all fans know those early six entries, but every FF fan knows of the **FFVII**'s icy antagonist and his theme, *'One Winged Angel'* is. The audience were encouraged to join the chorus and chant out the name of the son of Jenova.

FFVIII was represented with a Distant Worlds favorite, allowing fans to relive the adventures of Balamb Garden's elite SeeD with soaring battle theme *'Don't be Afraid!'* On the screens, this time, the assault on Dollet and attempting to assassinate Sorceress' Edea.

FFIX's return to FF's roots was marked with the classic *'You're Not Alone.'* Accompanied by footage that focused in large part on Bahamut's assault on Alexandria, this track also recently featured in Dissidia 012.

Attempting to summarize **FFX**'s incredibly diverse world with a single melody is a thankless task. The choice fell on the beautiful *'To Zanarkand'*, the piece that acts as a prologue to the game and returns in the finale.

After so many pieces and intense moments it was almost time for a break - but first we were treated to something more light-hearted in a special new arrangement to celebrate FF's most beloved mascot.

The Moogles, Moomba and others all bow before his majesty the Chocobo. This new medley of several versions of the *'Chocobo Theme'* was accompanied by a movie that showed Chocobos being reared from hatching to adulthood in a variety of FF titles.

After the break the concert resumed with **FFXI**, a special chapter thanks to its nature as an MMORPG. Some fans have never tried it, but it'd be hard for anyone not to enjoy the brief glimpse at the world of Vana'diel Distant Worlds provided through one of the title's biggest anthems, *'Procession of Heroes.'*

FFXII has typically been represented in Distant Worlds by Uematsu's *'Kiss Me Goodbye,'* but this time Hitoshi Sakimoto's score got its dues in the form of the debut of *'The Dalmasca Estersand.'* On screen, we meet FFXII's eclectic cast and are called back to the vast, seemingly endless deserts of Dalmasca.

The licensing of a Leona Lewis track for **FFXIII** was something that left many fans as cold as protagonist Lightning's demeanor; but Distant Worlds instead delighted fans with the beautiful *'Blinded By Light.'*

Our journey through history would be concluded with a true epic; **Susan Calloway** joined the stage to perform **FFXIV**'s *'Answers,'* the game's soaring theme. On screen, we saw imagery that heralded in the upcoming return of the title in A Realm Reborn.

In a sense, that is the most anticipated answer of them all. Thanks to the terrific live performance of Calloway and the accompanying video, thousands of new people learned to appreciate this song.



With that, the journey through FF's fourteen classic and beloved episodes was completed - but the celebrations were still far from over. Now it was time to revisit some of the most-loved pieces that weren't included as part of the chronological trip through FF.

First up was a return to the world of FFIV and the love story of Cecil and Rosa with the romantic *'Theme of Love.'* FF's beautiful love stories became a leading thread through this part of the concert; the two pieces that followed continued that theme.

For some FFVIII can be considered in certain aspects symmetrical to FFIV, from its focus on love stories to trips to the moon. That only makes it natural that after Cecil

and Rosa another of FF's celebrity couples would be featured - Squall and Rinoa. The hall's screens fired up to show their infamous dance. Japanese pop diva **Crystal Kay** took to the stage to sing *'Eyes on Me,'* pairing with the orchestra to do justice to the popular piece.

Next came the biggest addition of the night - a return to the earlier referenced Opera from FFVI, *'Maria and Draco.'* An arrangement based on **The Black Mages'** rock version of the piece, it perfectly demonstrated FF's musical diversity.

Other classics put an end to the celebrations - but as one. Distant Worlds usually eschews medleys - mixtures of different pieces - as Arnie Roth explained to us in our interview - but for the 25th, they created one.

Stringing together FFV's *'Battle on the Big Bridge,'* FFX's *'Fight with Seymour'* and FFVII's *'Those Who Fight,'* the piece perfectly encompassed FF's battles with footage from all three games.

As Cloud, Yuffie and Tifa dealt the killing blow to an enemy, the piece seamlessly transitioned to the ever-familiar *'Victory Fanfare'* - leading the crowd into massive applause - crying out for an encore.

The final curtain was lowered with the perfect encore; the original, classic theme, *'Final Fantasy'* which has featured at some point in every game. The typical British rain outside would've been dwarfed by the raucous applause from the crowd.



Hamauzu, Roth and Uematsu on hand for autographs.

Applause was saved in particular for Arnie Roth, the conductor and man behind Distant Worlds - but most of all for **Hironobu Sakaguchi**, **Masashi Hamauzu** and **Nobuo Uematsu**, all in attendance - the minds who made these wonderful games and music happen. Their works will remain in the hearts of every fan, regardless of whether they have participated in the festivities in first person or not.

By Andrea Bernardi, a contributor to Italian fan site Zell Fantasy. [zellfantasy.it]
Translation by Stefano Gennari [@zellfantasy] of the same site.

Music is a vital part of **Final Fantasy's** legacy, and over the years there have been a huge number CD releases celebrating that. Aside from the original soundtracks, here's some we think you should check out:

The Black Mages



Nobuo Uematsu cites a lot of influences in his soundtracks, and obvious is that he grew up 60s and 70s surrounded by the rock revolution - something audible in many FF pieces. In 2002 he and six other Square employees formed '**The Black Mages**,' a rock band that focused on playing high-octane, heavy arrangements of FF music. It was, put simply, awesome.

After 3 CDs and several live appearances, The Black Mages split - Square Enix owned the name and they wanted to perform some original music. Uematsu's new band, the '**Earthbound Papas**,' features some of the same guys and still plays some FF music and other Uematsu game compositions as part of their line-up.



Piano Collections



Almost every FF title has a full album of piano arrangements, often under the title 'Piano Collections.' Each offers up a selection of classic pieces from the game in question arranged for a solo piano performance.

Each collection is soothing and relaxing, making for perfect chill-out music. FFX's collection is considered by many to be of particular note. For the 25th Anniversary two 'Piano Opera' CDs were released featuring music from the first six games rearranged for piano under Uematsu's supervision.

Final Fantasy Chips



Released especially for the 25th anniversary, the 'FF Chips' releases ask a simple question - what if FFVII, VIII, IX and X were all on NES or SNES? Each CD reimagines a portion of the soundtrack from each game using chiptunes.

Distant Worlds



Distant Worlds should need little introduction - and if it does, you should flick back a few pages. The concert series has released 2 CDs and 1 DVD so far as record of their live efforts - and all three are worth owning. A third CD is in the works.

The DVD, 'Returning Home' even includes The Black Mages, performing the Advent Children Complete version of 'One Winged Angel' live with the orchestra.

Symphonic Fantasies / Symphonic Odysseys



Another concert series conducted by Arnie Roth, 'Symphonic' covers more than just FF - but two of its releases are significant. Symphonic Fantasies covers FF, Kingdom Hearts, Chrono Trigger and Mana, while Symphonic Odysseys covers all of Uematsu's work, FF and otherwise. With more fantastical, bold arrangements, these CDs are a great companion to Distant Worlds.

Final Fantasy POTION



Actually a 'Best Of' collection of pieces from other arrangement albums including 'Piano Collections,' the intention of the two 'POTION' releases is to provide a selection of relaxing and mellow FF tracks that'll regenerate the listener much as an in-game potion would. Both are impressive collections that definitely fulfill their relaxing promise - perfect albums to work to.

Nobuo Uematsu

Music to define a genre

Credited: FFI (1987) - FFXII (2006), FFXIV (2010)

Now: Founder/President, Smile Please & Dog Ear Records



Described by many as the 'John Williams' of video games, Nobuo Uematsu's distinct musical sound is likely to forever be associated closely with Final Fantasy.

Uematsu alone provided the musical score for every major FF title up to **FFIX** - and continued to contribute heavily with **FFX** and **XI**. **FFXII** only saw him offer up one piece of music, but he and his signature sound returned in full force for the soundtrack of **FFXIV**.

Uematsu's strong, memorable melodies and acute sense of what made each game in the series tick made him the perfect partner to help Sakaguchi execute his cinematic vision.

For decades now Uematsu has conveyed the life blood and mood of each game through an impressively wide variety of musical styles.

Ambition pushed him to challenge the abilities of the SNES sound chip with **FFVI's** Opera and massive finale Dancing Mad, and the dawn of CD-quality music in **FFVII** let him finally incorporate a choir, creating one of gaming's biggest anthems.

Uematsu's efforts and skills didn't go unnoticed - **FFVIII's** 'Eyes on Me' sold a record 400,000 copies as a single, with that and other works winning countless accolades over the years.

Perhaps most significant of all is that his scores are played by orchestras, cover bands, solo artists and bedroom remixers around the world every day.

After parting ways with **Square Enix** Uematsu would start his own company and record label. There he continues to freelance and still contributes to both Final Fantasy and Sakaguchi's **Mistwalker** titles. His band 'Earthbound Papas' still play Final Fantasy music as part of their line-up.

He lives with his wife Reiko and dog Pao in Tokyo, and brews his own beer. [@UematsuNobuo]

Nobuo Uematsu is one of the gaming industry's most recognizable composers in large part thanks to his stellar work on Final Fantasy.

His work throughout the series has often served as a benchmark for other video game composers, and in that he has helped to shape the video game music world - a massive, impressive achievement.

Square Enix clearly felt that his work and the works of other composers who have contributed to the series was worth celebrating, and have done so with a full game release to celebrate FF's 25th Anniversary.

The first Nintendo 3DS FF title, **Theatrhythm: Final Fantasy** is most definitely an ode to the fantastic music that Uematsu and others created for the series - finally giving a nod to a particularly beloved part of the series.

There's been plenty of CDs and live concerts - but somehow a music and rhythm title is a more fitting tribute to FF's musical legacy.

The story of Theatrhythm is similar in premise to **Dissidia**. The Warriors of Light, a collection of characters from all of the main FF games, must come together in order to save the magical life-giving crystal from the evil forces of the demon Chaos.

For once story is a minor part of an FF experience, taking a back seat - letting gameplay and music become the primary focus - and rightly so.

With simple rhythm-based tap-and-slide gameplay augmented with basic FF-style RPG elements, Theatrhythm is an incredibly fun, addictive experience.

With three different modes of play, a good music selection and music DLC, the game will make even the most hardened fan nostalgic.

If you're an FF fan who hasn't had the opportunity to try Theatrhythm, you should. Rhythm games might not be your thing, but this fun spin-off could well be the start of a rhythm obsession for FF fans.

Lauren Kaye [[@fozzness](#)] is a contributor to *Final Fantasy Union* and *Kingdom Hearts Union*. [[finalfantasyunion.com](#) / [kingdomheartsunion.com](#)]



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Available On: 3DS
Key Staff:
 Ichiro Hazama, Tetsuya Nomura, Nobuo Uematsu, Hitoshi Sakimoto, Masashi Hamauzu, Yoshitaka Hirota
Article by: Lauren Kaye

Hitoshi Sakimoto Composer of the Empire

Credited: FF Tactics Series (1997-2007), Crystal Defenders, Vagrant Story, FFXII (2006)

Now: Founder, Basiscape, Freelance Composer



Largely associated with Yasumi Matsuno, Hitoshi Sakimoto has become the man best known for the sounds of Ivalice - scoring the majority of the games set in that universe.

Before joining Square Sakimoto had a varied and impressive career. He started composing for games at 16, working on some 40 titles before working on Quest's **Ogre Battle**. There he worked with Matsuno - who then hand-picked Sakimoto to score **Final Fantasy Tactics**.

FFT's score was a hit with Matsuno and gamers, and their collaboration continued for **Vagrant Story**. Even after leaving Square in 2002 he'd return for Matsuno, scoring **FF Tactics Advance** and then **FFXII**, **Revenant Wings**, **FFTA2** and tower defense title **Crystal Defenders**.

Sakimoto's musical style is quite the contrast to Uematsu's, heavily orchestral in nature and thickly layered. He still credits Uematsu as being his largest inspiration for the FFXII score, however. Sakimoto now works at his own music production company and record label, **Basiscape** - and scored Matsuno's latest title, **Crimson Shroud**.

Masashi Hamauzu Piano Piece Master

Credited: FFX (2001). Dirge of Cerberus, FFXIII, FFXIII-2 (2011)

Now: Founder, Monomusik, Freelance Composer



Hired by Nobuo Uematsu in 1996, Hamauzu began his career at Square with work on **Front Mission** and **Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon** before working uncredited on **FFVII** as a synthesizer programmer for one piece of music - but was credited alongside his wife as one of eight people singing in 'One Winged Angel.'

Hamauzu then scored **SaGa Frontier 2** and was then chosen to aid Uematsu with the score of **FFX** alongside Junya Nakano, who also worked on the Front Mission title that was his debut. His contribution was well-loved, as was his Piano arrangement album of FFX's pieces.

He then contributed to several non-FF titles before returning to the series for **Dirge of Cerberus**, FFXII's ill-fated shooter sequel. His largest impact on the FF series came with **FFXIII** - the first title to be scored with no input from Uematsu whatsoever. He'd also contribute to **FFXIII-2** as well as assisting arrangement for **FFIV's** PSP port.

Hamauzu's style is often more pleasingly ambient than epic. He's well known for his dominating piano melodies and sweeping use of strings. He left Square Enix in January 2010, forming a one-man personal studio called **Monomusik**.



Final Fantasy has always been a series with a focus on innovation and creativity, but with anchors to certain staples that help make it “*Final Fantasy*.”

What exactly makes a game ‘FF’ is difficult to pin down. It’s different for everyone - often depending on when you first became a fan. The difficulty Square Enix faces now is in creating games that appeal to fans old and new alike.

Some of the newer entries have ventured into territory that didn’t play it safe, and were divisive as a result. One was an MMO, another a single-player RPG with MMO-esque combat, and another a trio of games that are basically a series of their own.

All of these games branched out and tried something new, but wound up being very divisive titles. With that in mind, a future FF could do very well by taking a similar approach to **FFIX** where the game was crafted as a reflection back on the rest of the series.

Nostalgia is a powerful weapon to use on fans, but with the right new additions it could end up bringing old fans back and gaining new ones in the process.

Setting is an important factor in a FF game. Many of the older titles featured a strong fantasy setting, but were never afraid to add in a touch of sci-fi or modern tech where needed.

With a new entry, a hefty dose of those core fantasy elements such as magic, summoned creatures, and fantasy weaponry like Excalibur could go a long way toward recapturing the nostalgic feeling. This is not to say that this FF renaissance would need to follow a paint-by-numbers formula that included all of these features, but a strong fantasy setting could help shape the rest of the experience.

The playable cast is always a major aspect of a FF game. As **FFVI** and **FFIX** have proven, it’s not always the lead character that makes a game special. The cast as a whole and how they interact is what makes the story memorable. **FFIX**’s Vivi remains a much-loved fan favorite - over even Zidane, that game’s lead.

Sure enough, characters like Cloud, Squall, and Tidus were set out as prominent figures in their respective games, but without interactions with the rest of the crew, these characters would have fallen flat.

So in recapturing the spirit of a new, classic FF, the developer focus doesn’t need to be on crafting a marketable hero or heroine, but instead should be on bringing together a strong group of heroes with their own motivations and backgrounds.

Along with having a great setting and strong cast, there are other modern RPG features that have been mostly

avoided by the FF series. Meaningful player-driven story decisions and relationship dynamics have been difficult to incorporate into the series due to its cinematic nature. This heavy reliance on cutscenes has made it difficult to offer a dynamic experience.

The series has dabbled in these ideas in the past, though. Even as far back as **FFVII**, the series offered gamers a small and early taste of this with the dating section in the Gold Saucer. Earlier still, **FFVI**’s non-linear second half showed a great deal of flexibility, but in recent days, these areas have gone untouched.

For a time it looked as though we might get this in **FFXIII-2**, which had sections where the player could make dialogue selections to decide how to respond to a situation - but these ended up being fairly simplistic and not very important. Other RPGs such as the Shin Megami Tensei or Persona series have been able to incorporate choice and relationships in an interesting way that actually had an impact on the story - and that’s without even mentioning the slew of Western RPGs for which this is a major feature. These dynamic features could help bring a new life to the series.

All of these aspects are important, but combat and its surrounding systems are typically the foundation upon which everything else about the game is built. Many old school fans clamor for a turn-based combat revival, while many newer fans desire a more of an action focus - and this makes it difficult to find a pleasing solution.

The fine details of the battle system are best left to the developers, but I will say that there has to be a middle ground that could satisfy turn-based fans while still keeping things quick and action-oriented for those wanting brisker combat.

Along with this, a return to having a more open world map to explore could be a great boon. This doesn’t mean something completely non-linear, but games like **FFVI**, **VII**, and **IX** gave room to explore an overworld while still keeping players focused on a narrative path. There are plenty of ways to drive the story in the direction it needs to go without being completely on-rails or waiting until the end of the game to allow exploration.

I also feel it’d be great to have back character-specific abilities and unique classes. **FFXIII** offered classes of sort, but these were more temporary roles a character would take on. **FFXII**’s license board let players build characters however they wished with only the Japanese-only Zodiac Job System making characters more unique by restricting them to a single combat role.

FFX was the last game to grant characters abilities that were unique to them, but still offered a great deal of flexibility via the Sphere Grid.

A great new FF could benefit greatly by having its cast be a diverse group of individuals with their own strengths, weaknesses, and abilities in combat. Combine that with a robust class system or a skill customization setup to enhance these unique features and that would be even better.

Plot, visuals, and music are always important to consider in the future direction of FF, but these are issues that are not really as important to address, despite how vocal many get. If the setting feels right and the cast is strong, the story shouldn’t be too difficult to make work.

Most fans are forgiving of crazy, fantastical stories as long as the other areas are strong enough to support it. High-quality graphics is something the series has never struggled to achieve, so as long as the bar stays as high as it has been, any new game in the series should have no problem.

One could argue that the ever-increasing desire to improve graphically has led to a style over substance mentality that needs to be kept in check, but that’s about it. Like graphics, FF’s music has also always been a strong point, so whether **Nobuo Uematsu** returns, **Masashi Hamauzu** continues to assist, or if in-house composers such as **Naoshi Mizuta** or **Takeharu Ishimoto** step up to the plate I believe the series will stay on point there.

There are many different directions a new FF game could go, but these are just a few ideas of directions that could help keep the series in a positive light for long-time in the eyes of fans and newcomers alike.

RPGs are no longer a tiny niche market - fans are spoiled for choice. From the wide open worlds of Elder Scrolls and choice-driven stories of Mass Effect through to the hardcore strategy of Disgaea and the dark quirk of Persona, FF needs to fight for its space in the market more than ever.

To stay at the top of the heap, FF’s developers simply need to remember what made the series so special in the first place. Fresh ideas combined with certain series staples could easily be a recipe for success. The formula is there and the fans are hungry, so all Square Enix needs to do is make it happen.

By Michael A Cunningham [[@FinalMacstorm](#)], Editor-in-Chief of [RPGamer](#) and Founder of [Pocket Console](#).
[[rpgamer.com](#)] [[pocket-console.com](#)]



Final Fantasy Type-0 was announced in 2006 as Final Fantasy Agito XIII, a mobile game and part of the FFXIII-based **Fabula Nova Crystallis** compilation.

After a turbulent five years of development including a name change and platform switch to PSP, FF Type-0 finally released in October 2011 in Japan.

Though whispers from Japan have suggested an international release nearly a year later there remains no official confirmation. Insatiable fans remain excited, and continue to eagerly anticipate a localized release.

Type-0 takes place in a world at war. Each of the nations of Oriense hold a power-granting crystal, and the l'Cie soldiers of Milites Empire invade the others to take their crystals, voiding a peace treaty among them and leaving a trail of bloodshed in their wake.

Rubrum is the final nation remaining - but their crystal, Suzaku, grants magic - and the nation resists. In an effort to cripple the defense, the Milites Empire attack Suzaku Peristylum, the magic academy where the most skilled magic users of the nation reside within a school for the magically gifted.

Members of Class Zero have the ability to wield magic granted by their crystal. Rather than negotiate with the tyrannical Cid, the class take matters into their own hands by launching a mission to overthrow Milites' military and restore peace by capturing and returning the crystals.

Type-0 features real-time, action-based gameplay that's laced with ATB elements similar to **Crisis Core** - with the addition of swapping between characters.

Each of Class Zero's 14 playable characters come with their own tactical advantages and disadvantages in the field like long range attacks or movement speed.

Swapping on the fly makes for fast paced battles where your characters never stand still for long. Summons are in the mix too, but the player takes full control of the Eidolon when summoned, operating it through the battlefield just like the rest of the class.

Balancing a complex story and a large cast is difficult, but this combination actually strengthens Type-0's appeal. We saw teenaged war fighters in **FFVIII**, but the militant grit of Type-0 and sorrows that befall this cast engage the viewer and can't be taken lightly.

Though stylistically it breaks away from its XIII counterparts, its uniqueness makes it a robust standalone Final Fantasy.

Fans have been waiting to see the series offer something new once more, and with its mix of interesting mythos and bold intrepidity, it's no wonder Western fans await a release of Type-0 - for it does offer what many have been looking for.

By Olivia Slayton [@sqexgal], Owner of SQEX.info and a freelance Japanese Translator and Journalist.



Hajime Tabata

Building a Portable Empire

Credited: Crisis Core, Before Crisis, Type-0

Now: Director at Square Enix

Despite being a relatively recent addition to the ranks of Square Enix's Final Fantasy production team, Hajime Tabata has proved to be a safe pair of hands indeed, guiding a number of successful portable ventures to release.

Information on the early parts of Tabata's career are scant, but his first real brush with FF came with 2007's **Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII**, where he was entrusted with directing a spin-off of the most beloved and successful FF title.

Crisis Core was a critical and commercial success, and remains one of the best-selling PSP titles ever. Since then Tabata has worked on a plethora of mobile titles including **Kingdom Hearts: Coded** and **Parasite Eve: The 3rd Birthday**.

His work on **Final Fantasy: Type-0** is stellar, and marks him as a potential director of a big-screen FF one day. Tabata is definitely a face to watch in the future.

Takeharu Ishimoto

Musical Mr. Twister

Credited: FFX, Crisis Core, Dissidia, FF Type-0

Now: Composer at Square Enix



Takeharu Ishimoto and Hajime Tabata have become something of a team, the pair collaborating on a number of portable Final Fantasy efforts - but Ishimoto has his own claim to fame, too.

The composer of 2007 cult hit **The World Ends With You**, Ishimoto quickly came to be regarded as one of Square Enix's top composers. The game's genre-hopping soundtrack is considered a classic, and takes up a quarter of the space on the DS cartridge.

Ishimoto's first brush with FF came in 2001 as a Synthesizer Programmer on **FFX**. In 2004 he first collaborated with Tabata, composing scores for **Before Crisis** and **Last Order**, weaving new material in with arrangements of Uematsu pieces from **FFVII**.

Work there led to him composing and arranging music for **Crisis Core**, **Dissidia**, **Dissidia Duodecim** and **Type-0**. He also contributed to several portable Kingdom Hearts spin-offs.

Ishimoto plays guitar in a band, SAWA. He's a frequent twitter user, and often posts pictures of his pets. [@ishimoto_t]



E3 2006 may be remembered for a lot of things, but one of the biggest standouts was the announcement of **Final Fantasy Versus XIII** for PlayStation 3. Although fairly short and only CG the first trailer, released later, offered quite a bit of insight into this modern fantasy from the people behind **Kingdom Hearts** and **FFVII: Advent Children**.

Unlike **FFXIII** proper, Versus XIII is an action RPG in the same vein as Kingdom Hearts. Although it shares a place under the Fabula Nova Crystallis umbrella of titles, it's a completely original concept set in its own world with a unique take on the mythology that's already been a part of **FFXIII**, **XIII-2** and **Type-0**.

It'll feature a world map with massive fields and other locations which will allow greater exploration. It's not open world, but is said to be closer to past FF, including the ability to drive vehicles and pilot airships. These classic concepts are being married with new ones such as seamless environments, day and night cycles and even the ability to take screenshots with an in-game smartphone.

The pace and presentation of the battle system is to be similar to KH coupled with additional mechanics including elements of third person shooting. Of course, traditional magic, summons and various weapon changing abilities all have a role to play.

While the majority of the story remains under wraps, the underlying theme ties back to a classic FF staple – crystals. In Versus XIII, crystals represent great power in the realms of politics, military might, and a country's economic welfare. The story takes place in a world similar to reality - one of technological advances such as cars, skyscrapers, and cell phones. They're so advanced over surrounding kingdoms that they've isolated themselves from the rest of the world and remain protected by an ancient line of kings.

In the past, the surrounding nations too kept watch over their own crystals, but lost them over time due to the hardships of war. Peace was agreed upon between the various nations, but it wasn't meant to last...

Versus XIII will present a darker, more emotional story, which aims to demonstrate how painful burdens heroes carry can be. It will also touch on the importance of brief moments of happiness in a world filled with both greed and despair. These are elements that aren't typically found in FF, and are at least in part influenced by Shakespeare's Hamlet.

As a "new vision" of FF, Versus XIII aims to focus on the cast's humanity while distinguishing it from other entries in the series. Because of this, the main character is vital.

Noctis Lucis Caelum is the prince and remaining heir to the throne of the only kingdom which still controls a crystal. While in reality a shy person, Noctis tries to hide this by acting cool when the situation calls for it.

Director Nomura says he'll be a character unusual for FF – one that he's wanted to try for a long time. Noctis is said to have a strong, distinctive personality despite being a young man who acts tough on the exterior in order to protect his kingdom. It's because of this that he sometimes reacts unnecessarily and overestimates his own abilities.



Based on the information we have, Versus appears to revolve around Stella as much as Noctis.

The likely heroine of the story is blonde Stella Nox Fleuret. Although not much is currently known about her, she dominates screen-time in most of the game's trailers and appears to share some sort of connection to Noctis.

Accompanying Noctis through his trials and tribulations are three young men: Ignis, Gladiolus and Prompto. They will serve as both companions and secondary party members in the game, and have also appeared in the short battle footage released.

According to the original press release, Versus XIII wasn't envisioned as a spin-off, but 'another FFXIII' or rather, a counterpart to both XIII and Agito XIII, the latter of which was later renamed to Type-0.

Helmed by **FFVII** and Kingdom Hearts staff including writer Kazushige Nojima and composer Yoko Shimomura, it's clear that Nomura got a good deal. Little did he know that it would take most of a console generation for this plan to bear fruit.

Despite being announced 6 years ago, development details for Versus XIII remain sparse. While there's been dozens of interviews and news pieces over the years, it's only deduction that leads us to believe that actual development didn't begin until late 2008 or 2009 – around the time that engine work was likely completed. In addition to that, parts of the puzzle point to a complete rebuild of the game - including switching the much-touted world map from being in the style of **FFVII** to something more like **FFXII**.

By June 2010, clothing design contracted out to Roen Creative Director Himuro Takahara had been completed. It was around this time that the game's story was completed, along with the first public screenshots of the game in real time. In August it was confirmed that voice casting was underway, and in September the public caught a glimpse of the first gameplay during Tokyo Game Show.

At the start of 2011 a brand new trailer was shown. The all-new seven minute trailer painted a completely different picture of what fans had come to know about the game in the years prior. Long gone were the KH-style character designs and in their place a focus on extreme realism. The various promises from over the years were now being realized in a visible form.

Given Square Enix's renewed enthusiasm for FF, many assumed that trailer would be followed up by even more media throughout 2011. However, this was not to be as both **FFXIII-2** and **Type-0** would share the spotlight instead.

As of FF's 25th anniversary and nearly 7 years since being announced, Versus XIII remains shrouded in mystery. Nearly two years have passed since that last trailer and nothing has come out since. While the Internet has run rampant with rumors of cancellation and the like, it has been confirmed by the CEO himself that the game is still in development.

Square Enix promises that the game is turning out 'absolutely amazing,' and that the final product will be enough to knock you off your feet. Tetsuya Nomura has promised fans Versus will show the future of Final Fantasy - Let's hope that it will be one worth waiting for.

By Erren Van Duine [@ErrenVanDuine], US Editor of RPG Site and Owner of Nova Crystallis. [rpgsite.net] [novacrystallis.com]



We've seen Final Fantasy tech demos before - but Agni's Philosophy is different. It paints an exciting picture of what the future of the series could be.

Released at E3 2012 to showcase what Square Enix's next-generation graphics engine is capable of, it offers a speculative suggestion of what the future of Final Fantasy might look like.

More than just being a flashy showcase of graphical muscle-flexing, its design is a bold statement for the series - East-meets-West, traditional Final Fantasy design mixed with contributions boldly picked from Square Enix's California-based Crystal Dynamics.

The world depicts a temple-like place and a shanty-town, eschewing both the medieval castles, sweeping plains and futuristic dystopias Final Fantasy has become known for.

AK47-wielding villains look more like they're ripped from Call of Duty than FF, but they clash with more traditional cloak-clad mages. Even then the mages are vulnerable and fail to hold back the enemies, burning out bracelets that amplify their power.

It's a far cry from Lightning effortlessly blasting guards in FFXIII's opening, seemingly invulnerable. Artistically it's even further still from the work of Tetsuya Nomura and Yoshitaka Amano, the artists who arguably defined the series.

It's bold and brave - and it works. Besides being an incredibly impressive demo that showcases CG-rivalling graphics running in real time, it shows off a desire to take FF somewhere truly different - to reuse old concepts in all-new, exciting ways.

Indeed, it leaves me sad that it isn't actually a green-lit game project - just a technical demonstration.

"In the beginning of creating a concept, we started to discuss and really consider 'What is Final Fantasy?' Project Lead Yoshihisa Hashimoto told me at E3 2012.

"We tried to narrow down what has to be there to be FF. So we filtered some of the things that we felt not necessary to remain. We just excluded them and just kept only the core, essential things."

If you ask me, somebody needs to give these guys full control of a proper game.

By Alex Donaldson [@APZonerunner], Co-owner of [RPGSite.net](#) & [UFFSite.net](#).

1996 - Final Fantasy 64

Before moving to PlayStation for Final Fantasy VII, Square experimented with Nintendo 64 hardware by creating a Final Fantasy VI-based demo.

Created in 1996, the demo shows Locke, Terra and Shadow from FFVI facing an enemy in full polygonal 3D. Players could choose what'd happen in the battle based on a selection of basic pre-set commands - though the way the battle played out resembled a FMV game more than a traditional RPG.

The demo never actually ran on N64 hardware - instead built on high-end PCs designed to emulate what the machine would be able to do. Technology from this demo would later be reused in the creation of FFVII's CGI cinematics.



1999 - Final Fantasy VIII PS2



Square stuck with the concept of recreating part of a previous, familiar game for their PlayStation 2 hardware demonstration, showing what Final Fantasy VIII's famous ballroom dance scene would look like if reproduced with real-time graphics on the PS2.

The demo looks similar to and laid the framework for FFX's cutscenes. The faithful recreation caused a buzz and gave birth to the suggestion that PS2 remakes of VII, VIII and IX were on the cards - but they never happened.

2005 - Final Fantasy VII PS3

With **Advent Children** hype at an all-time high, it only made sense for Square Enix to pause production on **FFXIII** to spend six months producing a **Final Fantasy VII**-focused demo for the PlayStation 3's E3 2005 debut.

Recreating the opening scene of the game with visuals closer to Advent Children than the original game, the impressive demo laid the groundwork for FFXIII and kicked off yet another round of fan hopes, dreams and rumors of a PS3 remake of FFVII... which, of course, is still not happening. Yet.



2012 - Agni's Philosophy



Debuting at E3 2012, Agni's Philosophy is a real-time demonstration of Square Enix's new Luminous engine.

Featuring an all-new scenario built as lovingly as the engine itself, it features character design from the Tomb Raider team mixed with more traditional designs from Japan, and offers an interesting take on what FF can be.

The visuals of the demo closely rival those currently being put out by Visual Works - but in real time - and gives hope that the next FF will look this amazing and visually bold.

This project has been an effort from a huge number of fans. Spanning multiple fan sites, countries and communities, this magazine never could have been without the contributions of the people on this page.

Some work in games professionally. Some are fan site owners. Others are just FF lovers who don't usually get involved in this sort of thing. Every single one of them was essential. Thank you to each and every one of them - and thank *you*, too, for reading.

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We hope it lasts **forever**.
 See you in 25 more years.

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