**5 Reasons Final Fantasy Failed Worse Than Any Franchise Ever**

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* January 28, 2016

Gamers recently went chocoboshit over the announcement that *Final Fantasy VII* is being remade. I enjoyed the blocky classic that taught my teenage self that brooding loners are *too* the cool ones who get all the girls, but I'm not optimistic about the remake, considering there hasn't been a good *Final Fantasy* in a decade. And that shows in its [sales,](http://www.wired.com/2013/08/final-fantasy-is-still-dead/) which have been going down faster than all the women who find me irresistibly attractive for writing long essays about fictional magic teenagers. Maybe the *FFVII* remake will be great. But it will take a lot more than a polished throwback to the glory days to save the franchise, because ...

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**It's Drowning In Pointless Spinoffs**

It's hard to explain the appeal of *Final Fantasy* to non-players. Just look at this screenshot:

Anyone who played *FFVI* suddenly wants to play it again just for that [opera](http://kotaku.com/i-beat-final-fantasy-vis-opera-house-and-all-i-got-was-1727760995), while everyone else is wondering how their junior high poetry ended up floating over a drab castle. You need to know the context, which I'll try to explain even though I done don't word too good no more since the ol' accident.

Before "Final Fantasy" got slapped on everything short of Tonberry vibrators, it used to have a specific meaning. Every year or two a *Final Fantasy* game would come out, and every time it would deliver the same experience. You'd get a brand-new setting, cast, story, and combat system, but enough familiar elements that it was easy to jump right in. Fans could debate which the best was, even though it's obviously *IX*, but there was always a consistent level of quality. You knew *Final Fantasy* meant 20 to 40 hours of solid gameplay and story.

If that doesn't sound like a big deal, remember that they were coming out when an average game's story was a few hours of "Kill all those bad guys. OK, now kill all *those* bad guys." The idea of a game taking a breather for an elaborate con centered on an opera blew little kid minds. It didn't matter that it looked primitive. Your imagination filled in the blanks.

They're not masterpieces. *IV* brings so many characters back from the dead that comic book fans would roll their eyes. Most villains are cackling maniacs who are evil for the sake of it. There are plot holes and conveniences galore. But they *tried*. They told stories about war and love and friendship and betrayal when "Hold down the trigger until the aliens are defeated" was considered profound. It was an early sign that games could accomplish something serious.

Then the rest of the industry matched, then surpassed, that level of storytelling. Our standards rose, and Square took a good look at these new expectations and boldly ... decided to stop trying and just cash in on cheap nostalgia. They took all their beloved characters and slapped them into [universally reviled mobile games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Final_Fantasy_All_the_Bravest) that exist only to milk loyal fans with insulting transparency.

It took 14 years for the first 10 games to come out, during which there were a handful of well-regarded spinoffs. Since *X* was released in 2001 there's been one mediocre main installment and one awful installment, one mediocre MMO and one completely bungled MMO, and more forgettable spinoffs than there are people on the planet. *Crystal Chronicles, Crystal Defenders, Dissidia, Dimensions, Theatrhythm, Explorers, Record Keeper, Flan Fuckers* ... the list goes on and on. "Final Fantasy" isn't a sign of quality anymore; they're words that make you think, "Oh God, what stupid bullshit have they come up with now?"

No successful franchise, especially a game franchise, is immune to spinoffs. Mario has played every sport known to man. But no franchise just stopped giving a s\*\*t as abruptly as *Final Fantasy* did. Mario's extracurricular activities usually have thought and effort put into them. *Final Fantasy's*spinoffs are lazy money grabs with about as much original thought put into them as a BuzzFeed article. Oh, and Mario isn't the new spokesperson for [Louis freaking Vuitton.](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/fashion/people/final-fantasy-character-lightning-on-starring-in-louis-vuitton-c/)

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**They Forgot How To Write A Coherent Story**

*FFIV* is about a knight who saves the world and atones for his sins. *V* is about stopping an evil sorcerer. *VI* is about overthrowing an evil government. *VII* is about overthrowing an evil corporation. *VIII* is a gay romance gone wrong. *IX* is about a war with a sinister plot behind it. *Tactics* is about a war with a sinister plot behind it, but on a grid.

There's far more to all of these, of course -- *VI* ends up being about an evil clown, *VII* ends up being about a misguided male hair model, and so on. But the basics can be summed up with ease, and then the intriguing details slowly unfold. Even *X*, where the big twist is that fantasy Peyton Manning is the collective dream of a dead civilization, starts with a lost dude fleeing a giant monster. Now I'm going to try to sum up the opening hours of *XIII*. If your nose starts bleeding, don't worry -- that is normal.

*XIII* begins in Cocoon, where citizens of Bodhum are being Purged by PSICOM, soldiers of the Sanctum, for coming in contact with a fal'Cie from Pulse. The fal'Cie are turning people into l'Cie, who have a Focus, but if the l'Cie fail to complete their Focus they're turned into Cie'th. Our hero, Lightning, teams up with members of NORA to rescue her l'Cie sister from the fal'Cie Anima, and the story continues naturally from there. Did you get all that? If so, please explain it to me.

*XIII* throws more made-up and unexplained words at you than a cat playing Scrabble. It's like taking the third season of *Game Of Thrones*, which assumes you have preexisting knowledge of the universe, and airing it as the first. When *XIII* came out, some fans defended it by saying it really "opens up" at the 20-hour mark. You know, like how they tell you what Jedi, The Force, the Rebels, and the Empire are 70 minutes into *A New Hope*. Or how *The Lord Of The Rings* explains what Hobbits, the One Ring, and Sauron are on page 350. If your 50-hour game has 30 hours of fun locked behind 20 hours of incoherent garbage, *you've made a bad game*.

That's why *VII* doomed the franchise even as it launched sales into the stratosphere. *VII* was the first to use CGI cutscenes, but instead of realizing that a [restrained 47 minutes of CGI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HfWzVdPwBpY) could complement competent game-making, the lesson Square took away was "beautiful cinematics produce sales." Then they crammed more and more cinematics into their games until *XIII* collapsed under the weight of [eight and a half hours of them.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxMcuzOgVrU)

Ironically, the best *Final Fantasy* game to come out recently isn't a *FF* game. *Bravely Default*, the game Square released when they wanted to make a traditional *Final Fantasy* but realized that well was thoroughly poisoned, is a simple but engrossing fantasy about four kids saving the world. *Bravely Default* was a [surprise sales hit](http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2014-03-31-surprise-bravely-default-success-sparks-square-enix-rethink), but one that Square apparently learned nothing from considering that everything we know about the upcoming *Final Fantasy XV* sounds like [overwrought nonsense](http://finalfantasy.wikia.com/wiki/Final_Fantasy_XV#Setting).

I'm sure it will take only 10 hours to explain why those knights have guns, though.

**3**

**They Forgot How To Tell A Story In A Single Game**

*Final Fantasy's* storytelling problem is compounded by what I call the Fabula Nova Crystallis Excelsior Flapjack Boogaloo Conundrum -- they've become incapable of telling a story in just one game, and the more games they expand a story to, the dumber it gets. Square first dabbled in this with *X-2,* where players who enjoyed Yuna's world-saving journey of self-discovery in *X* could now follow her pop music and fashion career. Then came *IV: The After Years*, which was thrown together with as much care as its bad sitcom title implies. "If you enjoyed the original classic, why not pay us for a tedious spinoff that adds nothing to the characters or story?" Square asked, and gamers happily said yes because the world was still young then.

*X-2* was at least aware of how goofy it was, but its success set the stage for bloated disasters. If you want the full *XIII* experience you need to play *XIII, XIII-2, Lightning Returns, Type-0,* and whatever else they decide to s\*\*t out under the laboriously named *Fabula Nova Crystallis Final Fantasy*subseries. That's [135 hours of gameplay!](http://howlongtobeat.com/) Not counting side quests! Jesus, I just want to fight an evil wizard! If only there had been a sign that strategy would backfire.

Are you looking forward to re-experiencing *VII's* nicely self-encapsulated story? Well, too goddamn bad, because now you need to play *Before Crisis, Crisis Core,* and *Dirge Of Cerberus* to get the full experience. Oh, and watch *Advent Children* and *Last Order*. Drag out a simple plot point with unnecessary backstory, save the world you already saved, but this time do it as an emo vampire, *and*watch the doodles on your junior high math book come to soulless life! You don't have anything better to do with your time, do you?

Then there's the fact that these games feel like grim death marches through a thousand LiveJournals. Games like *Crisis Advent Nova Zero Breaker Breaker* aren't fun; they're *exhausting*. Earlier games had serious stories, but they also had fights with a self-proclaimed member of octopus royalty and an angry old man chasing a bard around for trying to bang his daughter. *XIII* has characters that give endless, rambling, whiny speeches about their emotions as filtered through Philosophy 101. *XIII* has a character named Hope *learn the meaning of hope*. If Square made a *Batman* game, Bruce Wayne would give a 40-minute speech on bats, and then Bane would say that humanity's true bane is feelings.

To put it another way, *VI* has a character declare, "My life is a chip in your pile! Ante up!" which makes you want to go punch a villain's stupid evil face in. In *XIII*, Lightning's explanation of her name is "Lightning. It flashes bright, then fades away. It can't protect. It only destroys," which risks putting a permanent cringe on your face. Who wants to grind through multiple spinoffs with a character that joyless?

**2**

**Gaming Has Matured, But *Final Fantasy* Has Regressed**

Before the release of *Lightning Returns*, the [developers revealed a huge innovation](http://www.dualshockers.com/2013/07/27/more-information-on-lightnings-boob-job-in-lightning-returns-ffxiii-emerge-yes-theyll-jiggle/) that promised to revolutionize the series: They made Lightning's breasts bigger and perfected their jiggle physics. Jesus, no wonder she's so mopey. Here's Lightning in *XIII*:

Kind of under-dressed for combat, but otherwise nothing unusual. *XIII* may have been a dumb game with a tremendously boring heroine, but at least its tedious self-seriousness kept Lightning from being a sex object. Here are some of the costumes she can wear in *Lightning Returns*:

They're not all that bad, but come on. She even looks like she's been forced into them at gunbladepoint. And they're not cosmetic -- each costume has different abilities, so switching to fantasy prostitute mode might help win a fight. I'd be embarrassed if someone walked in on me playing that. *X-2* pulled the same nonsense. Here's Yuna and Rikku in *X*:

And here they are in *X-2*, which isn't about their quest to stop a fabric thief:

You can play dress-up with them too:

They look like they should be picking up johns at the Gold Saucer. Look, I'm a grown man. If I want to see an attractive woman wear revealing clothing I'll go on a date, have her lose interest in me because I can't shut up about video games, then secretly follow her home and watch her through the window while she changes. I don't want characters who are barely old enough to drink virtual alcohol shoving their pretend tits at the camera.

Gaming's always pointlessly sexualized heroines, but *Final Fantasy* used to be an *exception*. Let's look at Terra in *VI*.

Oh, right, she's just a bunch of pixels. They didn't make her hot because they couldn't, right? But here's how she and the other heroine were portrayed in the manual, which you actually had to read then:

You're clearly getting a mysterious fantasy adventure, not bouncy anime boobs. And when the series progressed to 3D, they kept it classy while other developers worked on perfecting their [low-res strippers](http://dukenukem.wikia.com/wiki/Babes). Here's *VII's* Aeris ...

... *VIII's* Rinoa ...

... and *IX's* Dagger.

Even Tifa, who was clearly designed to have sex appeal, looks like she's ready to hit the gym and knock a punching bag around, not be ogled by some lonely artist.

For well over a decade, *Final Fantasy* heroines looked like actual people while, say, *Tomb Raider*used Lara Croft's tits as a selling point.

Now the *Tomb Raider* reboot is praised for [having a strong female lead](http://www.themarysue.com/tomb-raider-review/), while *Final Fantasy*, well ...

What the hell happened? It's not like they're trying to attract new young fans going through a very special time in their lives, because [kids are all about mobile gaming](http://gamerant.com/final-fantasy-15-end-console-gaming-japan/). But older gamers who were happy to play through dignified adventures when they were hormonal teenagers aren't suddenly looking for virtual skin now that they're adults. It's no secret that *Final Fantasy* struggled to adapt to rapid changes in gaming demographics and development. But it's pathetic that the only solution they could come up with was to design a bunch of stripper outfits and hope someone would be interested. Well, [*Lightning Returns* flopped](http://www.siliconera.com/2013/11/27/lightning-returns-lowest-opening-sales-final-fantasy-xiii-game/), and the franchise feels lost and directionless while the industry moves on without it. At least Louis Vuitton is letting Lightning wear clothes.

**1**

**Creators And Fans Have All Stopped Caring**

The collective shrug that greeted *Lightning Returns* was the latest sign that Square now views its *FF*fans the way a pick-up artist views women: mysterious others that can never be understood, only tricked and manipulated. The new *VII* is far from the first *FF* remake. The first six have been ported, updated, remade, and re-released so many times I'm pretty sure you can play *IV* on your toaster. Sometimes legitimate love and care is put into them, but recently Square has been giving fewer fucks than a nun at a chastity convention.

In 2014, remakes of *III* and *IV* were released on Steam after previously popping up on the DS. They were both well-received for making smart modern updates while still keeping the charm and feel of the original. You could quibble about semantics, but in the end they were fun, well-made games.

Then, in 2015, Steam got the half-assed, [widely reviled mobile version](http://www.technobuffalo.com/2015/09/11/square-enix-further-battering-final-fantasy-vs-legacy-with-ugly-pc-port/) of *V* that looks like a child made it in Flash. And they wanted $16 for it.

They ignored the backlash and did the exact same thing with *VI*, releasing the mobile version that had a [game-breaking bug](http://www.destructoid.com/final-fantasy-vi-android-port-has-a-game-breaking-bug-269288.phtml), typos in their own made-up words, and [entire essays written about how ugly, lazy, and sloppy it is.](http://www.fortressofdoors.com/doing-an-hd-remake-the-right-way-ffvi-edition/)

It's not like there weren't other options -- *V* and *VI* both had well regarded Game Boy Advance remakes -- but slapping the ugly, bug-riddled port onto the Steam store was just easier. And easy money seems to be all that motivates Square anymore.

Even by the standards of first-world problems, "The re-release of my beloved childhood game is ugly and overpriced" is difficult to make people care about. And, honestly, you shouldn't care. I find it hard to, and I just wrote 3,000 words on the subject. There are countless better games you can buy for 16 bucks. Square released this junk because they still think slapping *Final Fantasy* onto something is a license to print money. But it's not -- *III* and *IV* sold better than *V* and *VI* on Steam because they actually had thought and effort put into them.

Square might figure that out and the *Final Fantasy* name might mean something again, but it's OK if they don't. The originals are still classics. Indie developers are [making the kinds of games that Square shaped their childhoods with](http://kotaku.com/eleven-indie-jrpgs-on-my-radar-472671723), and they put more passion into them than Square's shown for a long time. Maybe it's a sign of how far the industry has come that we don't need *Final Fantasy*anymore -- there are more than enough other games telling good stories now. And hey, at least *Dragon Quest* is still going strong, right?