**Why every Final Fantasy game is the best AND worst in the series**

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Why your favorite entry is the best ever, and also why YOU ARE WRONG

If there’s one thing nerds love to do, it’s argue about our favorite things and which one is better. SNES or Genesis? Batman or Superman? Mike or Joel? Amongst the myriad of geeky topics than can spur internet flamewars, there’s a particularly contentious one: which Final Fantasy game is the best?

Anyone who has attempted to engage in such a debate has discovered something: your favorite FF game is somebody else’s least favorite FF game – and oftentimes for the very same exact reasons that you love it. With that in mind, we’ve set out to settle the debate once and for all. We’ve taken a long, hard look at all the mainline, numbered FF games – no spinoffs, no direct sequels ala X-2 – and have decided to end all arguments once and for all by describing why each and every one is simultaneously both the best and the worst Final Fantasy game ever. In the face of such irrefutable evidence, all arguments are certain to cease now and forevermore… right?

//Final Fantasy 1

**Why it’s the best FF ever:** Every saga has a beginning, and this is where the root of one of the most legendary game franchises of all time took hold. Final Fantasy I is a classic that hews closer to the classic pen-and-paper RPGs that inspired the genre than any game to follow. By assembling a party of your own choosing (out of classes that would become standard in sequels to follow), you decide for yourself how you will tackle the story – much like assembling a group of buddies for an AD&D campaign. There are countless ways to challenge yourself – how about trying to complete the adventure with an all-mage party? And by challenge, I do mean *challenge* – Final Fantasy has some very tough dungeons, and even the regular enemies pose a series threat to the party, unlike the pushover monsters in the games to follow. And when you do get to the end, prepare for a story twist that’s surprisingly sophisticated for its time.

**Why it’s the worst FF ever:** FF1 is nearly 25 years old, and it shows in the game’s sloppy construction. The story and the way it’s presented is lame: the game rarely spells out where you need to go next, leaving you wandering aimlessly quite often – this results in hundreds of unwanted, frequently lethal random encounters. These regular enemy groups are incredibly tough, while bosses are a relative pushover. And did we mention how incredibly buggy and imbalanced the game is in the magic department? Half the spells don’t work as advertised, and since the intelligence stat is completely worthless, mages are woefully underpowered at endgame. Sure, you can play Dawn of Souls on GBA for a lot of bugfixes and a revised MP system… if you like Wii-style Baby Mode difficulty.

**Personal Take:** Final Fantasy I is certainly a relic, and whether its oldness is charming or obtuse depends wildly from person to person. I found that if people didn’t really understand – or particularly like - the way old-fashioned RPGs were made, then they couldn’t enjoy FF1 very much. You’ll still find plenty of people who enjoy FF1, though it’s rare to see anyone hold it up as a de facto favorite. You can create multiple party variations so it’s got a surprising amount of replay value and offers a lot of ways for players to challenge themselves, so it’s not as impossible to love as some might think.

//Final Fantasy 2

**Why it’s the best FF ever:** The original Final Fantasy may have set the ball rolling, but Final Fantasy II is where traditions for games to come were set in stone. Final Fantasy II introduces elements like Cid, the much-beloved Chocobos and a host of familiar monsters that would make constant reappearances throughout the series. It was also the first game in the series to deliver individual, well-defined characters with their own distinct personalities and dialogue. You’ll meet several of them throughout the story as it takes numerous twists and turns that were uncommon for RPGs of its day. It’s also a wildly experimental game; the shift away from the standard “leveling” system and the unique conversation system show that even in this day and age, the Final Fantasy development team wasn’t afraid to take chances and introduce new, interesting elements to the series.

**Why it’s the worst FF ever:** Surely every gamer knows how “level” systems work – beating enemies earns experience points, which raise your level and boost your stats. It’s a mechanic ubiquitous to gaming… and it isn’t part of Final Fantasy II. Instead, you’ve got a hilariously broken stat-building system that you basically have to grind to proceed. Example: want to gain attack power? Use “Attack” a lot to build strength. Want to gain hit points? You have to be hit a lot - the game’s subtitle should be “attack your own party for fun and profit.” Oh, and there’s a whole word-learning and conversation system that’s awfully implemented. It sure is fun trying to find some NPC with a keyword I need to remember and pick from a list later in order to proceed! Wait, no it’s not. And stop me if you’ve heard this story before: a bunch of rebels organized by a princess works to fight against an evil Emperor. Hmm!

**Personal Take:** Final Fantasy II is a very odd beast. It’s usually on the bottom of peoples’ rankings of FF games… provided they’ve actually played it. It’s not hard to see why, either: the simple acts of building your stats and NPC conversation are changed in weird and frustrating ways. One interesting bit of trivia is that FFII was at one point slated for a North American release – in fact, [a very early translated version](http://www.lostlevels.org/200312/200312-ffan2.shtml)exists. It would be interesting to imagine how peoples’ nostalgia (or lack thereof) for this title would have been affected had it actually received a proper release back in the day.

//Final Fantasy 3

**Why it’s the best FF ever:** Everything people love about the golden age of retro-RPGs is wrapped up here in one wonderful little package. FFIII was the first game in the series to allow characters to gain and swap new abilities at a whim with its clever job system. Need an extra magic user? Just convert your sword-wielding fighter into a mage! A whole mess of now-standard FF classes made their debut here – what would FF be without Summoners to bring forth our favorite destructive monsters? It’s a visually endearing game, too: the Famicom original features exceptionally lovable sprite visuals, while the DS 3D remake boasts some wonderfully cute designs that capture that squashed, 8-bit feel perfectly.

The music of the Famicom original is some of the best on the platform, showing how memorable the 8-bit chiptune sound really can be. And tough? Oh hell yes, this game is wonderfully, brutally hard in a way few modern RPGs are. Every battle can be your last if you’re underprepared; strategy and using your job abilities to the fullest aren’t just encouraged but required, and some of the dungeons feature absolutely devious gimmicks that will make you feel like a true warrior once you’ve overcome them.

**Why it’s the worst FF ever:** You thought FF1 had nonexistent characterization? FFIII’s cast are literally blank-faced kids with no personality to speak of. They did get some semblance of identity in the DS remake, but they still have no distinguishing traits in combat, making them all just different-looking clones of each other. Some of these jobs are utterly worthless, too – hope you didn’t expect the Bard to be useful!

The story is all over the place, with bizarre plot elements pulled seemingly out of nowhere. And did we mention this game is stupidly hard? FFIII is probably the most unrelentingly difficult entry in the series, with dungeons designed to make you miserable (Run around as defenseless midgets! Fight monsters with certain weapons or they will multiply each turn!) and which have no save points whatsoever.

**Personal Take:** I have a strange soft spot for Final Fantasy III. Like FFII, it’s one of the least-played installments outside of Japan, so a lot of people haven’t experienced it enough to develop strong feelings about it. For me, it represents the best of things I love about 8-bit RPGs: a simple but distinct charm to both the story and presentation, and a difficulty that truly tests you. The job system is surprisingly complex for a game of its era, and it’s a lot of fun to play with, even if several classes aren’t worth sinking time into. I think FFIII is definitely worth a look if you haven’t played it – just know what you’re getting into first.

//Final Fantasy 4

**Why it’s the best FF ever:** Final Fantasy is a series known for its sweeping stories, and Final Fantasy IV took the series to new heights. It features a real character arc – main hero Cecil falls from grace, questions himself, hits rock bottom and then achieves ultimate redemption on numerous levels. The constantly changing cast that accompanies Cecil brings a lot of uniqueness to the table, as every character is distinct in their own way. Their individual fates are always in question too; characters can be swept away, betray you or perform heroic sacrifices at a moment’s notice, keeping you enthralled and eager to see what will happen next.

On the tech side, FFIV not only took advantage of the vastly upgraded SNES hardware with its impressive use of Mode 7 visuals, it also introduced the FF-standard Active Time Battle system, which added an element of urgency to the decision-making process. Enemies would keep on attacking as you made critical choices, and certain skills had a “charge time” associated with them, making battle far more intense than ever before. Plus, it got rid of that awful “limited number of uses” magic system from the earlier games in favor of a traditional MP pool. Thank goodness!

**Why it’s the worst FF ever:** You call this an epic story? It’s like a constant stream of out-of-nowhere betrayals, revelations and deus ex machinas arranged into something that somewhat resembles a coherent story. Half the characters don’t stick around or get killed off too fast for you to form any sort of attachment to them. And the big bad villain… isn’t a big bad villain at all, he’s controlled by a bigger, badder villain you don’t learn about until the ass end of the game! How’s that for awesome plotting?

At least back on the SNES you had the excuse of a bad translation to cover all of the gaping plot holes, but once the game was “properly” presented… it turns out it’s just as dumb! Plus, it’s clear Square didn’t really test the whole Active Time Battle thing out like they should have. Sure, I can see why powerful spells take longer to cast… but they’re totally worthless if I can deal just as much – if not more – damage with regular attacks before the spells finish chanting. Speaking of worthless, how about that Edward, eh? He’s possibly the worst meat shield to ever grace a Final Fantasy game – except he doesn’t even function as that. Go ahead and hide some more, sissy-boy.

**Personal Take:** Considering how many re-releases and editions this game has seen, I was surprised to see how many people I surveyed just didn’t care for it at all. Maybe the appeal has been lost to time for some – but the people who really, really love FFIV often hail it as their favorite in the series. It’s definitely a high point for me as well, even though I might not list it among my top picks. The cast is great – even though a lot of them don’t get nearly enough screentime – the story is simple but effectively told, and there’s a lot of fun hidden stuff and extras to seek out. The spoony bard can rot for all I care, though.

//Final Fantasy 5

**Why it’s the best FF ever:** In terms of sheer gameplay depth, it’s hard to top Final Fantasy V. The job system from FFIII returns, and it’s more complex and engaging than ever before. Instead of swapping jobs in and out when needed, you gain Job Points alongside EXP in battle, allowing your job levels to increase separately. As your jobs skills increase, you can actually retain the skills from each job and carry them over into other jobs, resulting in a myriad of potentially awesome skill combinations that puts your imagination and strategic planning to the test.

The story forgoes much of the constant melodrama of FFIV, delivering a more straightforward tale that still has a good deal of memorable moments, surprises and characters. (Who doesn’t love tomboyish pirate captain Faris?) We also get to meet one of Final Fantasy’s most lovable returning faces, the eternally inept Gilgamesh and his classic battle song.

**Above: So good!**

**Why it’s the worst FF ever:** After Final Fantasy IV’s epic saga of betrayal and redemption, that took us and a constantly changing lineup of heroes from the underground all the way into space, we get a followup with… some boring stuff about meteors, flying dragons and parallel worlds with a small gang of nondescript heroes. And they really are nondescript – these guys are basically empty shells with no distinctive abilities of their own. You can certainly craft them into whatever you want with the job system… through hours upon hours of grinding to master all of the good skills, which don’t come easy. Oh yes, and the main bad guy… is an evil tree.

**Personal Take:** Make no mistake about it: Final Fantasy V is my favorite FF game. The story might be weak compared to other installments in the series – and that’s why some fans don’t care for it as much – but the gameplay is absolutely meaty. There’s a lot of complexity to the job system that begs to be explored and tested, and while it’s entirely possible to find some game-breaking exploits, it still requires significant effort and strategy to do so. It might be tough to get past the slow-moving intro and the relatively weak soundtrack, but there’s a rich creamy center underneath that I just can’t get enough of.

//Final Fantasy 6

**Why it’s the best FF ever:** The more story-driven FF games tend to focus primarily on a single lead character, but Final Fantasy VI doesn’t have just one lead… it has a whole cast of them. Its presentation of different character tales, all carefully interwoven with each other, is unusual and unique for the series, and for gaming in general. Plus, every character is a very distinct entity with their own unique skills, personality, and quirks, but you can also customize them as you please with special accessories and techniques and boosts granted through the use of Magicite. The epic presentation matches the story - many games threaten you with the end of the world, but so few games have the cajones to actually carry out global destruction over the course of the narrative. On top of it all – figuratively and literally – is an awesomely insane killer clown of a villain who mocks you at every turn.

**Why it’s the worst FF ever:** Three words: World of Ruin. What was once an excellently structured, interesting game goes completely off the rails in a more “open” second act. The World of Ruin throws difficulty balancing out the window; its open structure means monsters all over the map wildly vary in level, as there’s no way the devs could know what level your crew will be at when they take on various dungeons, and your own team becomes so powerful near the end that if you can’t annihilate anything in your path you must deliberately be playing it wrong. Hardly as tightly knit as prior games in the series.

**Personal Take:** Final Fantasy VI was like a revelation back in 1994: a complex, hope-filled story with multiple leads that takes players to Armageddon and back again. It also showed that, despite 32-bit power looming just over the horizon, the SNES was still very capable of delivering a graphically and musically rich experience. It’s a game that had a profound influence on me, and I played it constantly as a teenager. Nowadays, I can look back on it and see a lot of its flaws, but much of its presentation and ambition still holds up amazingly well.

//Final Fantasy 7

**Why it’s the best FF ever:** Everyone has played this. Its revolutionary presentation - the cutting-edge visuals, the lengthy, gorgeous CG cutscenes, and the awe-inspiring summoned beasts – set the stage for RPGs in the generations to come and introduced a whole new batch of players to the genre. The mix of technology and fantasy created a fresh new world unlike anything else in the series before it, and the varied cast of characters – drawn by a new character designer Tetsuya Nomura – remain beloved to this day.

Beyond the main game, there are numerous sidequests and mini-games to explore and master (Chocobo Racing!), setting a precedent for installments further down the line. But what’s really important is that FFVII has some of the most memorable story scenes in all of video games. In fact, the death of Aeris may be THE single most memorable videogame sequence of all time, period.

**Why it’s the worst FF ever:** It’s the FF game everyone has played and remembered… and it’s a clear case of nostalgia goggles. The stunning graphical presentation may have wowed us then, but its visuals have succumbed to time more than any other FF title. It introduced the RPG world to unskippable, lengthy summons and magic spells that look rad the first time and grow progressively more infuriating to sit through. It’s also the first step away from the “Fantasy” part of the “Final Fantasy” title – what’s with all the TVs and cellphones and crap?

The Materia system means characters are practically interchangeable save for their Limit Breaks… which you shouldn’t expect to use much. The main villain is a long-haired pretty-boy with mommy issues - Ooh, what a badass! And an ambiguous ending (which two characters don’t even show up in) leaves plenty of room for spinoffs and cash-milking of fans! But perhaps worst of all, FFVII also introduced us to the character designs of Tetsuya Nomura, whose style has since guided the general JRPG aesthetic. The epidemic of sullen heroes with spiky hair, stupidly huge swords, and zippers? It all began here, friends.

**Personal Take:** Depending on whom you ask, Final Fantasy VII is either the herald of the best era of FF or the first step towards the series’ precipitous decline. Personally, I’m somewhere in the middle – FFVII isn’t a terrible game, but as a longtime RPG fan, I felt it didn’t live up to the crazy hype and promotion it had running in 1997. Of course, other folks had their eyes opened to a new genre they had dismissed entirely, and it’s easy to see why FFVII holds a special place in their hearts. It’s perhaps the most enduring installment in the series, as well – one look at all the numerous spinoffs and cameos it has inspired proves this is one of the most beloved games of not just the series, but of all time.

//Final Fantasy 8

**Why it’s the best FF ever:** Final Fantasy VIII took the next-gen conventions that VII established and brought them to new heights. The story focuses more intently on character drama, with sweeping themes of loss, love, resentment and finding yourself with a cast of attractive young heroes. The graphics match the newfound sophistication in character design; gone are the ugly, Popeye-armed character models of VII, replaced with full-sized character models that actually look like the characters they’re based on.

The CG quality has also increased dramatically, making the cutscenes look better than ever. And who can forget some of those great story points? The parade, the dance, the game’s theme song playing with Squall and Rinoa floating through space together… oh, the memories! Plus, the Junction system introduced one of the most complex and interesting character-improvement methods in all of the Final Fantasy titles – you would literally suck spells out of monsters and store them for later use.

**Why it’s the worst FF ever:** Whatever, Squall, you’re a terrible lead who needs to get the hell over himself. Seriously, it’s obvious you’re leading a pretty comfortable life, but you’re still just wasting your time moping constantly. Actually, considering all of your party members are equally obnoxious, that isn’t terribly surprising. And wait, you actually knew each other when you were kids and you just completely forgot because your Bahamut buddy somehow destroyed those braincells? What? Well, there’s no time to explain that, because we’ve got a crazy lineage of time-warping sorceresses attempting… time compression? That’s the stupidest thing ever!

No, wait, the fact that everything is somehow Squall’s fault in the end is even stupider! Let’s not forget the comedically broken Junction system, either – you can game this thing for all it’s worth very, very early on with just a few hours of grinding, effectively sucking the challenge out of the majority of the fights.

**Personal Take:** Final Fantasy VIII is one of the series’ more divisive entries – you either love it to bits or you loathe it with the burning fury of a thousand suns. I definitely fall into the latter category – it is easily my least favorite installment of the series. Frankly, I would have preferred the goofy, lovable Laguna as the permanent protagonist over wimpy, whiny Squall, but even that wouldn’t have fixed the what-the-hell-is-going-on-here plot and the busted Junction system. It’s a game that definitely inspired heated arguments on both sides, and may be the most controversial of all FF games… but maybe not so much now that FFXIII is out.

//Final Fantasy 9

**Why it’s the best FF ever:** Take the beautifully rendered graphics and cutscenes of Final Fantasy VII and VIII, but meld them with the aesthetic sensibilities and traditional fantasy story of a classic Final Fantasy game: that’s what you get with Final Fantasy IX. Gone are Nomura’s belts, zippers, and gunblades, replaced with endearing, cute character designs who boast some of the most lovable personalities and surprising development in the entire series. Every character adds a distinct aspect to battle, as well, and the four-person parties are a welcome return to tradition after the three-person groups of VII and VIII. You don’t need to worry about crazy complex systems like Materia or junctioning, either – you’ve got a nice, simple system where you can learn skills from equipment. The charming story, fun battles, and great characters are all accentuated with one of the best musical scores in the entire FF series.

**Why it’s the worst FF ever:** Oh hey, remember the sophisticated, mature character designs and personal dramas in Final Fantasy VII and VIII? The ones that drew a lot of people into the series and showed how games could be a storytelling medium? Yeah, uh, forget that: we’re going back to a bunch of freakish midgets saving the world. Hooray! The character designs look outlandish and goofy (Good lord, what is with their childbearing hips?), and the fusion of technology and fantasy that made the worlds of VII and VIII so cool are replaced with typical swords-and-sorcery crapola. The lack of a complex skill learning system saps the game of depth, side missions and mini-games are atrocious (Chocobo Hot and Cold is the stuff of nightmares), the cutscenes and summons are still too damn overwrought, and the final boss comes completely out of nowhere.

**Personal Take:** Final Fantasy IX has the misfortune of being released just as the hype for the Playstation 2 and Dreamcast reached critical mass, therefore ensuring that it would get far less attention than its two PS predecessors. It’s a game a lot of people seem very indifferent towards. You won’t find a lot of people who hate it with the same passion as, say, FFVIII, but you won’t find a lot of folks who are madly in love with it, either. It’s a solid little title with its own charms, but it’s one that, in most cases, doesn’t really provoke emotions either way.

//Final Fantasy 10

**Why it’s the best FF ever:** Final Fantasy VII evolved the series for the PlayStation generation, but Final Fantasy X is the game that really took the series into the future. Gone are most of the jagged polygon models and pre-rendered CG backgrounds, replaced with lavishly animated, motion-captured characters and in-engine environments that actually look like their original concept art. It’s a gorgeously designed game with a unique look and style that still holds up today. But that’s not all – instead of reams of exposition through text, Final Fantasy X gives the characters actual voices during story scenes for the very first time. It’s here, too, that the series proves it’s not afraid to reinvent itself for a new generation: gone are archaic RPG holdovers like the world map and the aging ATB combat system. The careful, strategic combat is a refreshing change, and the character-enhancing sphere grid system is oodles of fun.

**Why it’s the worst FF ever:** If Final Fantasy IX was a return to tradition, Final Fantasy X is basically giving tradition the finger. Gone are series staples like overworld maps and the beloved Active Time Battle system. Forget the fast-paced combat of yore that required you to make smart decisions under pressure, archaic turn-based battles are once again the norm! Tidus is a complete doofus, and not in a good way: he’s cheerfully oblivious until the story calls for him to be the now-stereotypical emo lead. Several of his comrades are either obnoxious or unnecessary – hell, it’s pretty easy to forget Kimahri even exists. And let’s not even get into the exercise in suffering that is Blitzball.

**Above: The dialogue? Don’t make me laugh. HA HA HA HA HA!**

**Personal Take:** Square debuted on the PS2 with a bang here. It’s far from my personal favorite FF game, but FFX is beloved in the eyes of many longtime fans. It’s not hard to see why, either: it looks and sounds great, and despite releasing pretty early in the PS2’s lifespan, it still holds up well visually. I didn’t particularly care for the characters and story, or some of the outright awkward events throughout, but the existence of Final Fantasy X-2 seems to suggest I’m in the minority there.

//Final Fantasy 11

**Why it’s the best FF ever:** Take every element you love about Final Fantasy – character classes, magic and skills, classic monster designs, a rich and flavor-filled setting – and now make it so that hundreds of thousands of people can all enjoy it at the same time. There is a mind-boggling of content to explore in XI, and the ability to play with others makes every adventure exciting. Numerous classes and character types – and combinations of each – allow you to truly create a unique character that represents you and your personal tastes. Meeting and playing with people online can help forge new friendships, and working together with a group to surmount some of the game’s most difficult challenges is a very satisfying experience. FFXI is constantly supported with tweaks and expansions, as well, meaning that even if things start to grow stale, there’s always something new just around the corner.

**Why it’s the worst FF ever:** The idea of online Final Fantasy sounded like the best thing ever on paper. Imagine playing something as awesome as Final Fantasy X with friends, enjoying the story and characters and quests together! Yeah, that didn’t happen. What you have instead is a painful grind of an MMO modeled after the days when Everquest ruled the roost. You’d best learn to like an awful interface loaded with menus all over the damn place, because you’re going to need to spend a massive amount of time grinding at your job and sub-job (and let’s hope you didn’t pick one of the crappy jobs!). Be careful not to die, either, as that will actually make you lose some of that hard-ground EXP you fought for. And if you ever decide to try and learn skills like crafting or fishing… those are literal days of your life you will never get back.

**Personal Take:** It’s incredibly hard to tell a strong story in an MMO, and while FFXI features a lot of the more traditional elements of Final Fantasy, the lack of memorable characters and a saga with well-defined events and climactic points is enough to turn a lot of players off. Plus, there’s the interface, which doesn’t work like any other FF game and is very off-putting… and that whole monthly fee thing. But the game maintains a devoted fanbase, and is regularly updated to this day – so there are still plenty of people out there enjoying it.

//Final Fantasy 12

**Why it’s the best FF ever:** When you bring one of the most respected directors in the Japanese game industry to make a game in one of the biggest, most beloved RPG series of all time, you wind up with an installment that’s unlike anything else before or after. Final Fantasy XII tones down the world-threatening crises to instead deliver a more down-to-earth saga of turmoil and strife amongst kingdoms and their rulers, cutting out a great deal of the melodrama and emo-angst that the series had become notorious for. Each member of the party is very personable in a way characters from other FF games aren’t, and they all get their chance to shine as part of the story.

The battle system has undergone another radical shift to a quasi-realtime system, eliminating random battles entirely and allowing you to engage in a seamless combat experience. Despite you only assuming direct control over a single character at a time, you can issue direct commands to your teammates, as well as set well-defined parameters for their behavior with the Gambit system. You’re also able to customize everybody as you choose with the use of the License Board. FFXII not only plays great, but looks and sounds great, too; the game’s visual design is among the best on the PS2, and the soundtrack puts a new spin on a lot of familiar FF motifs.

**Why it’s the worst FF ever:** After giving us a Final Fantasy MMO, Square-Enix goes back and gives us… a single-player game with MMO-style combat. Oh boy, just what we asked for! And hey, remember all the epic Final Fantasy stories where the fate of the world hung in the balance? Well, this time you get… politics! Because those worked so well in the Star Wars prequels, right? Hell, the alleged lead character basically gets shuffled off to the sidelines early on the in the story – which goes to show how much the creators cared about some of the cast. You never would have guessed that the director went nuts and left the project considering how disjointed some of the game elements are.

But it’s not like you actually have to play the game, either – abusing the License Board will give everyone access to the best weapons and armor the game offers, and with the Gambit system and a bit of programming know-how, you can make the game play itself while you kick back and watch everybody kick ass.

**Personal Take:** FFXII is definitely one of my personal favorites – I’ve been a fan of Matsuno’s style since FF Tactics, and seeing him put his own spin on a mainline Final Fantasy game was a real treat, even if it did drive him nuts and force him to abandon his baby. The Zodiac Job System edition of FFXII – which is, sadly, Japan-only – refines the License Board and improves an already great game significantly. I can understand how it can turn off a lot of players, but I found it to be one of the freshest, most enjoyable installments in the series.

//Final Fantasy 13

**Why it’s the best FF ever:** In an era when Japanese-made RPGs are facing increasing criticism, a series like Final Fantasy needs to reinvent itself to remain fresh and relevant. Final Fantasy XIII takes this idea to dramatic extremes and delivers one of the most unique installments of the franchise yet. Eliminating distractions like cities allows a new approach to RPG storytelling, which keeps players constantly engaged in the events and battles unfolding with few interruptions. The gameplay – particularly the intense, challenging battle system – finds new ways to keep players on their toes by making them change their strategies constantly, as well as by gradually introducing more and more new elements to combat as they progress further into the story. The linearity serves its purpose, too - by the time you’re dropped into the more open world of Pulse, you have learned – and likely mastered – all the elements of combat you’ll need to succeed. And getting to the more open environments is a reward in and of itself; can you think of a prettier world in any game yet made?

**Why it’s the worst FF ever:** Remember that old meme about the internet being a series of tubes? That is almost literally what Final Fantasy XIII is for the majority of the game: straightforward areas with few secrets and next to no deviation from a set path. Hope you weren’t attached to things like towns and chatting up NPCs, because you won’t be seeing any of that here, either. You might have heard the battle system is deep and rewarding, but does that really matter when it takes almost 20 hours to unlock its full potential? You can *complete* most games in the amount of time it takes for FFXIII to “get good.”

**Above: Pretty cool battle system… 20 hours into the game**

**Personal Take:** Talk about divisive! Much like VIII, XIII is a real love-it-or-hate it sort of deal. Some have argued that if the game wasn’t an FF title, people wouldn’t be so critical of it and accept its style of gameplay and presentation on its own merits. But that also proves a point: players have come to expect certain established elements in a Final Fantasy game, and when you eliminate them, you’re going to leave a lot of people disappointed. FFXIII was a very long time coming, and it seems it wasn’t worth the wait for a lot of people. Maybe XIII-2 will turn things around?

**Why it’s the best FF ever:** …yeah, you know what? We got nothin’.

**WORST FF EVER**