



Final Fantasy XII-The Revolution Begins

Square-Enix has done it again...

And by that I mean is bring you yet another visually stunning, reality defying game in an already prolific series. Final Fantasy XII takes its place among the elite RPGs.

The Place: The world known as Ivalice (which coincidentally is also the setting for Final Fantasy Tactics).

The People: Vaan: a young would-be sky pirate, except for the fact that he doesn't have an airship. Ashe: the leader of a resistance movement in Dalmasca. Basch: a man who is held responsible for his king's death and who was supposed to be executed... Balthier: a sky pirate who does own his own airship, the Strahl. Fran: a Viera, a race with rabbit ears who is Balthier's partner aboard the Strahl. Penelo: an orphan who knows how to fight and looks after Vaan.

The Story: Dalmasca, a city-state in Ivalice, is caught in between two rival kingdoms, Archadia and Rozarria. Despite its neutral stance, Dalmasca is invaded by Archadia and falls under Archadian rule. You play as Vaan, a street orphan living in Rabanastre, the Dalmascan capital, tries to steal from the Royal Palace, vowing to take back Dalmascan treasures from the Archadians. Resistance forces leading an assault on the royal castle put Vaan in between Archadian troops and Dalmascan revolutionaries. He happens to meet Ashe, the dethroned princess of Dalmasca and leader of the Dalmascan resistance movement, while escaping through the sewers, and as they say, the rest is history...

The Gameplay: A revamped battle system and the new License and Gambit systems make this Final Fantasy one of the most difficult in the entire series. Gone are the traditional random battle sequences and the ATB (Active Time Battle) system. Battles occur in real time, in a system similar to that seen in Final Fantasy XI. This new system is called ADB, or Active Dimension Battle. To engage into combat, you simply look for a wandering enemy in the field screen. There is no longer a transition to a separate battle screen; you see an enemy, you access the battle menu, which is accessible any time, and you select the action you wish to take. There is, however, a Wait Time Gauge, which indicates how long before your actions take place. The wait time is determined by your character's stats and what the action is; powerful spells take longer than regular attacks and item use is instantaneous. One of the benefits of this system is that there really are no "random" battles; if you don't choose to fight, you see where the enemies are and go the other way (also you can hold the R2 button, which allows you to run away even when

enemies are chasing after you.) The revolutionary battle system breathes fresh air into this hallowed series; it is a welcome change to the “old school” random battles.

There are still things that will never change, however, and summon monsters make their appearance as Espers (first seen in Final Fantasy VI). You simply have to defeat the powerful beasts in battle and then you can acquire their services. When you summon an Esper, he/she stays in battle alongside with you, and has a certain time limit before he/she is banished. You cannot, however, control their actions; Espers have their own AI, which is a downside.



Chocobos also make their appearance in this game! Whenever you rent a Chocobo, you have a certain time limit before the Chocobo runs back to the city and you are left on foot. When you are on the Chocobo, enemies ignore you.



Limit breaks are also a part of the game, but they are called Quickenings. Characters unlock Quickenings by progressing through the License board; they are usually located on the edges. They get three Quickenings each, and they are all unique to each character; the first Quickening requires a full MP bar to use, and when they achieve the second and third Quickenings, the MP bar is doubled and tripled respectively. Characters are allowed to combo Quickenings into large attacks, and combining attacks effectively unleash special bonus attacks at the end of every combination.

The License and Gambit systems: Development of your characters is done via the new License system. You learn new abilities like magic and techniques like steal and poach by going to the panels on the License board and spending License Points. License points are obtained by defeating enemies in battle. You also gain licenses to use new equipment, and different kinds of attribute bonuses for your characters, like HP bonus. When you activate a panel, adjacent panels are unlocked. Like Final Fantasy X, this system allows for a great amount of customization for your characters; you can choose what weapons your characters equip and what spells they learn, and etc. While difficult to comprehend at first, there is a great deal of freedom when managing your players' growth.

The Gambit system is yet another step away from the traditional into the new era of RPGs. In this installment, the Gambit system is a type of party control system which allows you to program your characters to perform certain actions in battle once a certain requirement is met. Basically, the Gambit system allows you to give your characters their own set of AI when battling enemies. For example, you can program one of your characters to attack the nearest enemy upon seeing it, or to have them cast cure on an ally when the ally's health bar is less than 70% full. This is also another difficult aspect of the game to grasp, but once mastered, allows your team to plow through enemies without ever having to select a single action.

There you have it. While Final Fantasy X had the distinct advantage of debuting on a relatively new system at the time (back in 2001), Final Fantasy XII demonstrates that there is still a reason to play your Playstation 2.

Difficulty: Hard

Learning Curve: Two hours

(Scale 1-10, 1 being the worst, 10 being the best)

Gameplay: 8.5-It gets knocked down a little to its overall difficulty; this should not be the game for first time RPGers.

Graphics: 9.5-Gorgeous visuals. Trust me.

Sound: 10-A trademark of Final Fantasy is a great musical score, and they finally got good voice actors.

Replay Value: 9-Hunts, hidden Espers, and lots of side quests allow you to play this game more than once.

Camera: 8.5-Some parts of the game give you the worst camera angles, but overall it's fairly good.

OVERALL RANKING: 9.1 out of 10

