

Fans hail 'dark' storyline as new Final Fantasy title released

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Final Fantasy fans queue in Seoul to grab the game's latest edition.

The eagerly awaited new game in the best-selling Final Fantasy franchise came out on Thursday, with fans hailing its high-spec action graphics and grown-up storyline.

"Final Fantasy XVI", the latest title in the long-running Japanese series, was released on the PlayStation 5 and is expected to boost sales of the Sony console, analysts said.

Producer Naoki Yoshida has cited US television megahit "Game of Thrones" as inspiration for the game, an expansive tale of magical monsters controlled by warring factions.

Fights and sex scenes feature alongside classic franchise tropes including missions to find crystals and cute running birds ridden by the characters.

In Tokyo, 37-year-old Naoto Nishimori, who stopped to pick up a copy on his way to work, said he has played every game in the influential role-playing series.

He said he was happy when he heard that Yoshida—renowned for reviving the popular online title Final Fantasy XIV—had been picked to produce the new game.

"I saw that and my hopes for this really went up. I have been really looking forward to this one," he told AFP, also praising its state-of-the-art graphics.

Yuan, a 21-year-old student who declined to give his surname, said he was attracted by the game's storyline, which has a "darkness" that makes it "uniquely appealing".



Analysts believe Final Fantasy XVI will boost sales of Sony's Playstation 5 console.

Final Fantasy is one of the world's top-selling game franchises, with more than 173 million copies sold globally, according to publisher Square Enix.

It debuted on the original Nintendo console in 1987 but developers switched to the rival PlayStation a decade later, bringing the franchise a huge new following.

The series is famous for reinventing itself with each self-contained game, with 2D monster battles evolving over the decades into real-time combat gameplay.

'Pseudo-medieval'

Fans in other countries also rushed to download the title or purchase it at stores.

In Seoul, 23-year-old Jo Young-min said the game should be a success because "Japanese culture is quite popular and also because Final Fantasy already has a hardcore fan base".

Daniel Ahmad, director of research at gaming industry analysis firm Niko Partners, told AFP that Thursday's release would be a boon for Sony.



Naoki Yoshida's vision for the game was inspired by HBO's 'Game of Thrones'

The company's PlayStation 5 hit shelves in November 2020 but was initially hard to get hold of because of supply chain issues, in part due to China's COVID lockdowns.

"We expect the combination of increased supply for the PS5, positive feedback for the Final Fantasy XVI demo, and the release of the first major third-party exclusive title for the console to drive PS5 sales growth over the next month," Ahmad said.

The Metacritic website, which collates reviews from critics, gave it a score of 88 percent, lower than the 96 percent enjoyed by "The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom", the last blockbuster game release.

Specialist site Eurogamer gave it three stars out of five, praising the "smart combat system" but criticizing the "ponderous pseudo-medieval soap opera, with some of the grandest bosses and dullest sidequests in FF history".

A user going by TheHolyNope on Reddit welcomed the "more linear design of this game", adding: "I couldn't love it more".

User Cryovolt on the Discord platform lamented that the frame rate was not ideal, saying the performance was "not smooth at all". But the user noted: "Other than that it's perfect".



Eager gamers play Final Fantasy XVI in a Seoul store.

Unlike the older titles, which usually feature a roster of characters who gain power and skills as the story unfolds, Final Fantasy XVI has one protagonist—called Clive.

The character's voice actor, Ben Starr, told the Radio Times that he had "loved" the reaction to the name.

"To a lot of people, especially British people, the name Clive doesn't necessarily feel very heroic," he said.

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