

Game changer: Final Fantasy's decades of reinvention

June 21 2023, by Katie Forster



Final Fantasy XVI, seen advertised on a digital screen in Tokyo, has been described as the most grown up edition of the hit series yet.

With its innovative plotlines and steampunk airships, video game franchise Final Fantasy has delighted fans and critics for 35 years.

Ahead of the Thursday release of the latest title, Final Fantasy XVI, here are five things to know about the hugely successful Japanese series:

8-bit magic

Final Fantasy's rich storytelling and colorful characters have made it one of the top-selling game franchises, with more than 173 million copies sold worldwide according to publisher Square Enix.

Since the influential role-playing game debuted on Nintendo's original console in 1987, its 2D monster battles have evolved into real-time combat gameplay.

Fantasy tropes such as castles, wizards and magic crystals in the early games were later combined with sci-fi elements, from robotic armor to pixelated flying vessels.

More recent titles have picked up the pace with immersive graphics and tough heroes while keeping the expansive in-game worlds popularized by the series.

Switch to PlayStation

The first six Final Fantasy games were made for Nintendo consoles, but number seven broke that tradition in 1997 when developers switched to a new rival: Sony's PlayStation.



More than 173 million copies of the Final Fantasy series have been sold worldwide.

It was a smart commercial move, with high demand for the original PlayStation bringing the franchise a huge new following.

Final Fantasy VII, with its industrial aesthetic and mystical themes, was the first 3D game in the series and remains its best-selling title by far.

In 2020, Square Enix released the first installment of a three-part remake of the dystopian epic, which often features on lists of the best video games of all time.

Hit music, film flop

Final Fantasy games have won critical acclaim not only for their storylines but also their soundtracks, described by British radio station Classic FM as "incredibly cinematic".

But while the music is performed at classical concerts and has even accompanied a bronze-winning Olympic swimming routine, the film spin-offs have been less celebrated.

"Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within", released in 2001, was a mega-budget CGI feature that bombed at the [box office](#) and scored just 44 percent on review site Rotten Tomatoes.

Other poorly rated Final Fantasy films followed—but one better-received adaptation was a traditional kabuki theater version of the 10th game, performed in Tokyo this year.



Final Fantasy XVI producer Naoki Yoshida had his team watch the HBO series "Game of Thrones" for inspiration.

Online titles

Most Final Fantasy games are solo adventures, but the franchise has also ventured into the lucrative world of large-scale multiplayer [online games](#).

Final Fantasy XI, released in 2002, was its first online title, followed by 2010's Final Fantasy XIV.

The latter was originally a commercial failure but was redesigned in 2013 and is still going strong, with a cult following who pay a monthly fee to play at the top level.

Although Thursday's release is not an [online game](#), it was produced by Naoki Yoshida, the mastermind behind the reinvention of number 14 that led to its success.

'Game of Thrones'

Even before the release, keen fans were able to play a demo of the first part of Final Fantasy XVI, which specialist website Polygon hailed as a "slick, modern action-adventure".

The game, released on PlayStation 5 on Thursday, is influenced by TV megahit "Game of Thrones" and other [fantasy](#) classics from the West, producer Yoshida has said.

He told Eurogamer that when the game was in its infancy, he made the "core team" of developers watch the "Game of Thrones" box set, "because we wanted this type of feel".

The result is what has been described as the most grown-up Final Fantasy [game](#) yet, featuring sex scenes, drug use and graphic violence.

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