

Nerds everywhere rejoice at release of 'Final Fantasy XI'

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THE CLACKAMAS PRINT

There is an overwhelmingly epic feeling that comes from seeing a legion of friends and allies all battling a gang of monsters—swords flashing, arrows flying and bursts of magic ripping into the enemy.

On October 28 the RPG pseudo-gods that make up Square Enix finally shipped to retailers the North-American version of their first online game, "Final Fantasy XI."

Classified as a MMORPG (Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game, for the uninitiated), "FFXI" takes players on a journey through the world of *Vana'diel*, where three nations stand at the threshold of war.

Granted, it's not a very original storyline, but that hardly matters in the grand scheme of "FFXI," since it is entirely possible to play this game for months while paying minimal attention to the so-called plot. In addition, the North-American release of "FFXI" includes the first expansion, "The Rise of the Zilart," generating even more features available to players.

Installation of "FFXI" itself is a test in patience. This game takes up a massive amount of space and system resources. The game client takes up almost 6 GB of space, and requires a minimum of an ATI 9000 series or equivalent 32MB video card just to run, which isn't really that bad, considering that "EverQuest 2" is going to require at least a 64MB video card. I personally wouldn't even attempt to run "FFXI" on anything less than a 1 GHz processor with 512MB RAM and a 128MB video card.

Registering can be a long process as well. Players are first required to sign-up for PlayOnline (Square Enix's online service), and for Final Fantasy XI itself (and yes, there is a monthly subscription fee). Players must then register for a content ID in order to create a character. However, once these steps are complete, it's time for the fun stuff.

Character creation itself is a joy, giving players the choice of what they want the race, gender, starting job class and overall appearance of the character to be. At this point players can name the character and choose one of three kingdoms in which to begin.

Following the obligatory intros and game-play tutorials, players are free to go forth and venture into the

magnificent community of *Vana'diel*. A player can choose to go out into the wilderness to do battle with monsters in order to become stronger or learn crafting skills to become a tradesman such as a blacksmith or leatherworker.

Less-adventurous players can simply park next to a quiet body of water and take up fishing.

For those more inclined to exploration lays the opportunity to accept missions and sub-quests from the governments and citizens of the country, many of which will force players to travel to other nations and explore the dangerous regions overrun with monsters and Beastmen (the bad guys).

Completing missions will increase players' ranks within the nation, allowing them to unlock even more missions and quests. By completing sub-quests, players can unlock new abilities, such as being able to set a secondary job class; gain special items like new magic spells, weapons and armor; and even learn new job classes, such as the dreaded Dark Knight and the powerful Summoner.

The battle system takes some getting used to. Players must lock onto an enemy, then choose the "attack" command from the menu in order to draw their weapon and initiate combat. This delay can be annoying at times, especially when encountering monsters that will attack without being provoked.

However, the sheer joy of fighting in a party overrides any downsides. Players can "party up" with five other players, for a total of six party members. Additionally, up to three parties can form an alliance, making it possible for up to 18 people to fight together against the forces of evil.

Fans of the series will be happy to know that XI continues in the tradition of stunning visuals and design, far exceeding any current MMORPG.

The music and sound effects also lend themselves well to the game, changing when a player enters a new area or goes into battle. While only a few songs could be called truly catchy, the rest are at least somewhat tolerable.

Despite suffering from the same faults as many MMORPG's, with continuing updates, including possible future expansions and the upcoming ability to duel with other players, Final Fantasy XI is at least good for several months of play.



INTERNET PHOTO

A hapless adventurer goes toe-to-toe against a menacing dragon in 'Final Fantasy XI.' Although this dragon appears enormous, there are many other monsters roaming across *Vana'diel* who won't obliterate new players. Of course, players can join a party of adventurers, but that means social interaction in one form or another.

FINAL FANTASY: THE TIMELINE

(The following list encompasses only those Final Fantasy games released in America)

| Title | Release Date | System |
|--------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| FF I | 1990 | Nintendo |
| FF II | 1991 | Super Nintendo |
| FF Mystic Quest | 1992 | Super Nintendo |
| FF III | 1994 | Super Nintendo |
| FF VII | 1997 | PlayStation |
| FF Tactics | 1998 | PlayStation |
| FF VIII | 1999 | PlayStation |
| FF Collection | 1999 | PlayStation |
| FF IX | 2000 | PlayStation |
| FF Chronicles | 2001 | PlayStation |
| FF X | 2002 | PlayStation 2 |
| FF Tactics Advance | 2003 | Gameboy Advance |
| FF Origins | 2003 | PlayStation |
| FF XI | 2003 | PlayStation 2/Windows |

Cast your vote for your favorite Final Fantasy game! Just cut this timeline out with your favorite game circled, and drop it off at the Print Office (Mod B) behind Randall Hall by the tennis courts.

Winners may be posted in the next issue!

WANTED: PHOTOGRAPHER

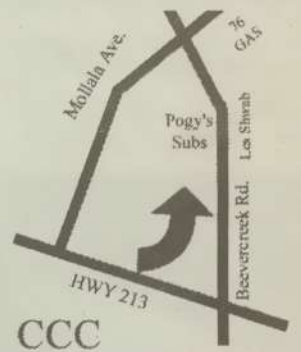


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