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MYACE

THE MAGAZINE TO DISCOVER SOMETHING NEW



ISSUE COVER

Final Fantasy Resonance

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IT'S ALL ABOUT THE GAMES

With hundreds of thousands of titles spanning over multiple decades, it's impossible to play every single game out there. The goal of Mage Magazine is to shine a light on the ones worth playing and to help shape the perceptions of misunderstood games. We work hard to ensure that we're helping everyone enjoy video games to their fullest.

This magazine is another medium for the hosts of The Thirsty Mage Podcast to share their experiences to either point readers to those towards good experiences, or maybe even warn against not-so-great ones.

No stone goes unturned in our pursuit of fun video game experiences. From the early days of Atari, all the way to modern releases on the Nintendo Switch 2, our writers share the good, the bad, and the ugly as they set out on a journey to document every great experience they come across.

As a small indie magazine, word of mouth is key. Our only ask of all our readers is that if you enjoy reading about video games, old and new, please share it with a friend. Maybe even post about it on social media.

We hope you enjoy this issue!

STAFF

David Lloyd - Editor in Chief

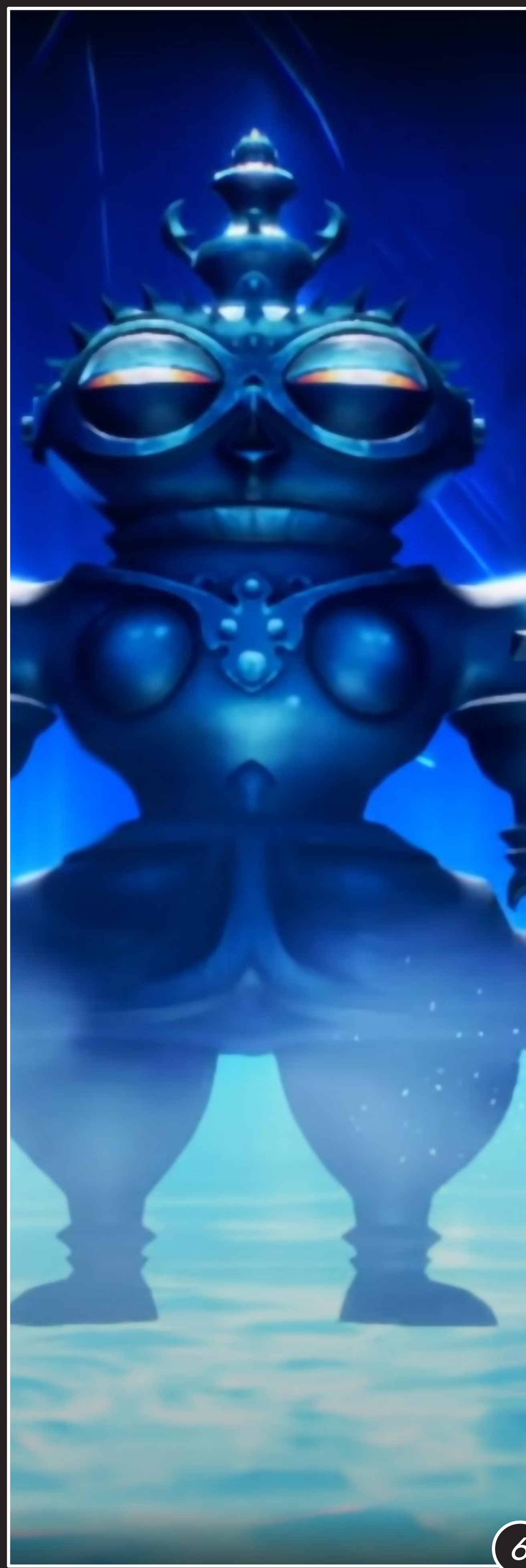
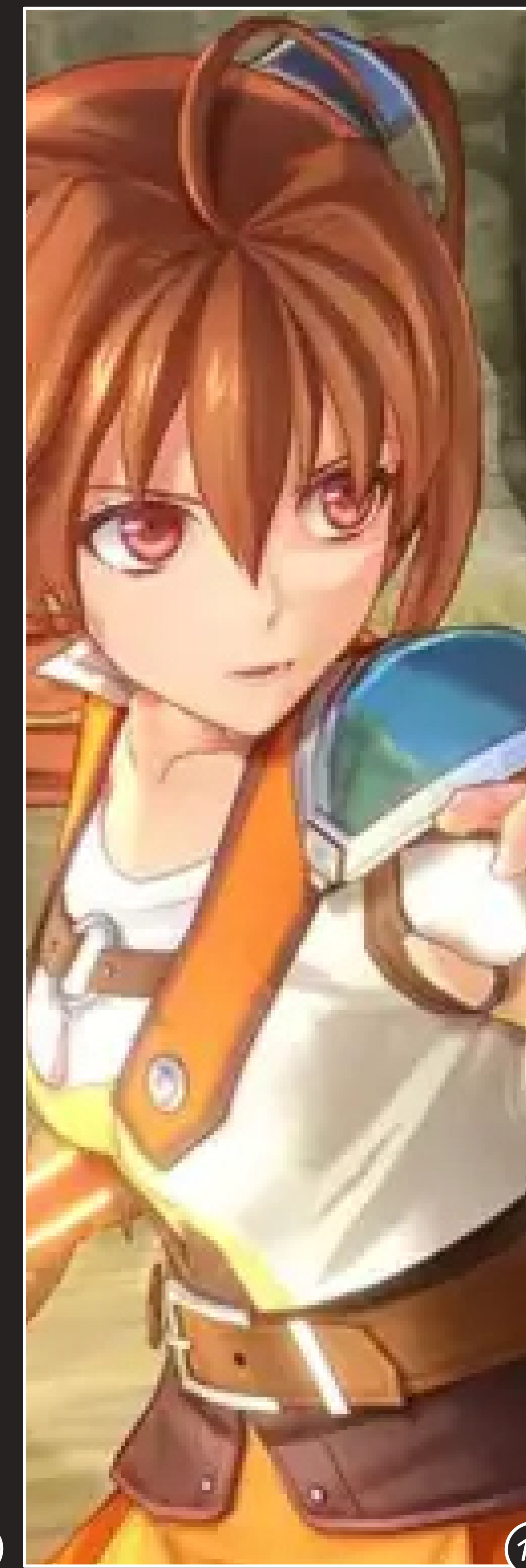
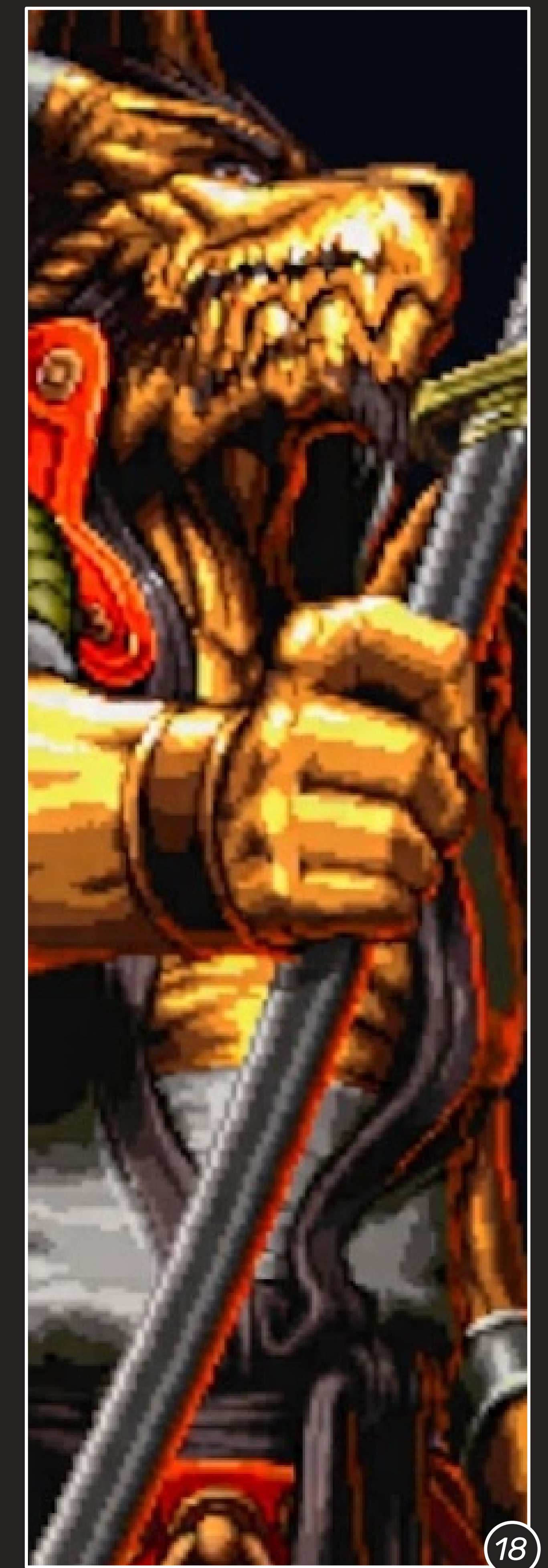
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FINAL FANTASY



NES ERA RETROSPECTIVE

BY DAVID LLOYD

Trying to convince a young gamer to go back and play an RPG from an early era of gaming is often a fool's errand. Whether it's the pixel graphics, simplified mechanics or the time commitment, it's hard to fault anyone under forty for not having the patience to play most of the early RPGs. That's the case for most early RPGs anyway, but a select few have defined the genre to such a degree that they remain timeless to this day. The trio of Final Fantasy titles for the Nintendo Entertainment System arguably are the most replayable of all the RPGs from the 8-Bit era, even more so with the recent Pixel Remasters that have added many modern improvements. Each of the three titles is unique in how they play and feel, but each one is worth the time and effort to enjoy a piece of video game history.

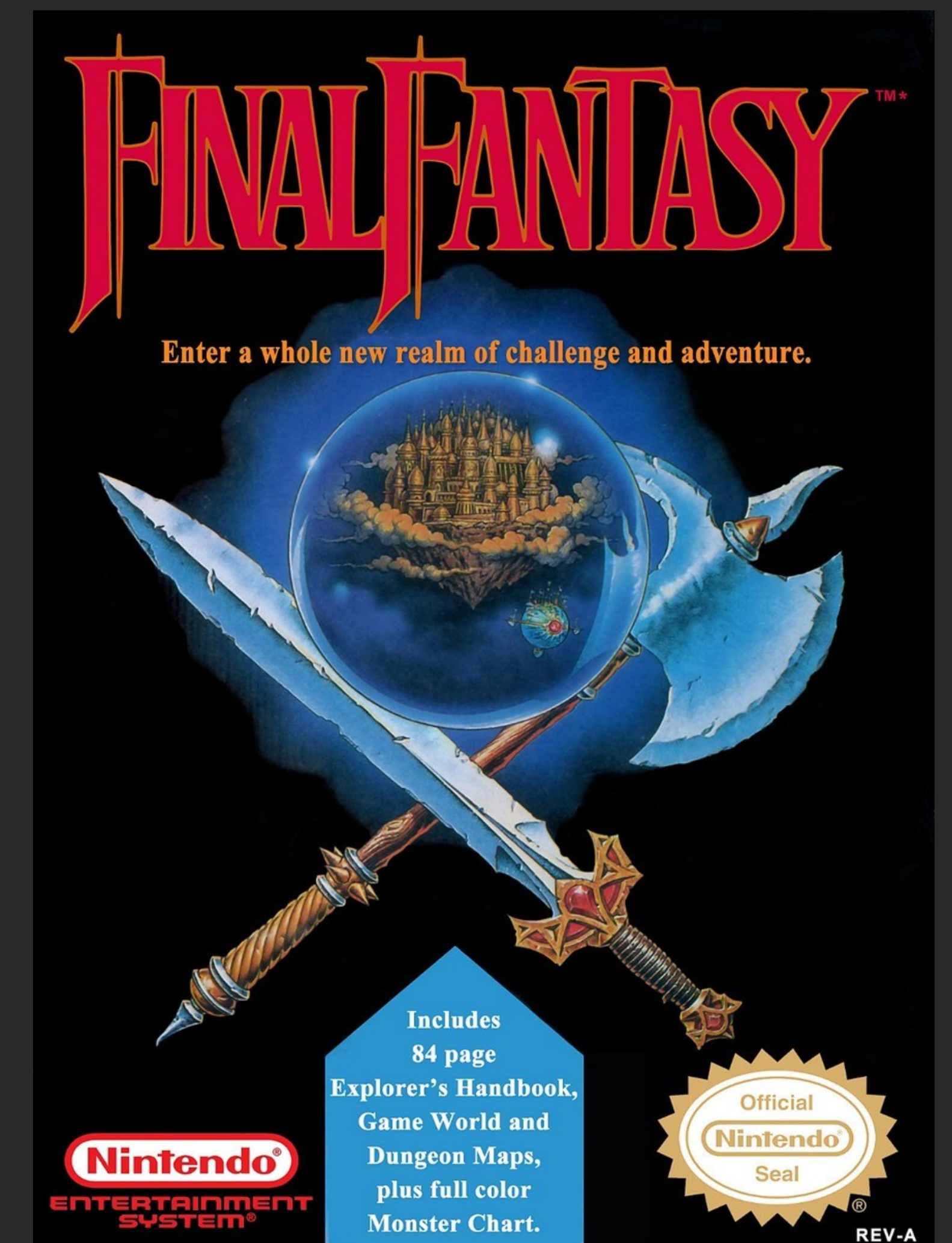


The original Final Fantasy is so familiar to me that replaying it feels as comforting as a hot chocolate on a chilly winter's day. After selecting a party of four (highly recommend a party that includes at least a fighter, black mage and white mage for first timers) the party begins in the Kingdom of Cornelia with the fate of the world on their shoulders. Four prophesied Warriors of Light are looked upon to restore the four crystals that represent the elements that make up the world: Earth, Fire, Water and Wind. The king requests the Warriors of Light rescue his daughter from the clutches of a traitorous knight as proof of their ability to save the world. The task also doubles as a perfect tutorial to get acquainted with the world and battle system.

The NES classic is the quintessential example of an RPG in its most pure form. The battle system is a no-nonsense fight-magic-item-run turn-based delight that is very easy to master without the need of a manual or guide. Later versions of the game (Pixel Remaster) make it even more intuitive and easy to use with better descriptions of items and a built-in system to automatically equip the best weapons and armor. The quest to rescue Princess Sara from the clutches of the evil knight Garland gives the player a contained space to get used to the combat system and allows for a little bit of exploring into the world.

The original Final Fantasy does a fairly good job of putting up sign posts to lead the party along their journey. The Warriors of Light travel from crystal to crystal with some pit stops along the way. The overall feel to the game is one of a personal journey. The party members don't talk so the feeling of accomplishment comes from defeating the next fiend and bringing light to another crystal. Along each step of the way, new challenges are presented. Whether it's trying to survive a dungeon crawl through the Marsh Cave, or finding the new piece of loot that unlocks the door to the next fiend. With the exception of one sequence break, the path from beginning to end is mostly the same for everyone.

The original Final Fantasy remains timeless to this day because it's a fulfilling personal journey. Nothing beats that moment of almost defeating a boss and having to dust yourself off and figure out what small change is required for victory.



HOW LONG TO BEAT

~ 10 HOURS

DEVELOPER

SQUARE

RELEASED

1987





HOW LONG TO BEAT

~ 15 HOURS

DEVELOPER

SQUARE

RELEASED

1988

The second Final Fantasy on the NES is not a game that someone new to the genre should attempt to tackle. The standard leveling up system that was familiar to so many was replaced with a much more opaque system that would later go on to inspire the SaGa franchise. That’s not to say the combat system isn’t enjoyable. Otherwise an entire franchise that’s still producing new titles wouldn’t exist today. It simply requires a much greater attention to detail, along with a good deal of luck.

Before getting too into the weeds on the combat and leveling system, some spotlight should be placed upon the much more elaborate story of Final Fantasy II. Instead of choosing your party members and embarking on what would resemble a D&D campaign in the first game, Final Fantasy II features named characters and an ongoing story full of exciting and memorable moments. The franchise is often criticized for following the Star Wars formula a little too closely, and the second entry is perhaps the biggest culprit.

The game begins with a group of four youths getting caught up in a skirmish as an Emperor leads a siege upon the world around him. Only three of the youths manage to escape the attack, leading the remaining youths to embrace a role within the rebellion against the empire while they search for their missing friend. The de facto leader of the group, Firion, is probably the most recognizable today as he’s often seen in later Final Fantasy spin-offs such as Dissidia and World of Final Fantasy. Maria acts as the moral compass for the group and Guy is a mostly silent warrior who will just randomly drop a hilarious one-liner when you least expect it.

The party spends most of the game reacting to the situations unfolding around them, picking up a different fourth party member as they travel to different regions around the world. The guest members are all memorable, from the white mage Minwu, who acts as a guardian for players finding their footing early in the game, to the pirate queen Leila, who steals the spotlight upon her arrival.

The story also benefits from having a visible antagonist causing the party grief and providing hurdles that the heroes must overcome to achieve their goals. One such moment that really stands out is when the party arrives at the capital of the empire and is quickly trapped within the Colosseum, forced to do battle with Behemoth in order to rescue the princess of an occupied kingdom. The scene plays out much like when Luke has to fight the Rancor at the beginning of Return of the Jedi. Including a cutscene in a Famicom game in 1988 is quite the feat, and the moment still resonates today when the screen begins to shake with every step as the Behemoth makes its entrance.



So, the elephant in the room, that progression system. Instead of a simple “earn xp to level up” system, Final Fantasy II implements a “level up by usage” method of progression. In order for certain stats to increase, say attacking with a sword, each character must do the action to get the benefit. Attack goes up the more random battles are completed, HP goes up based on the damage each character receives. Intuitively, it makes sense. In practice, though, it can be a bit frustrating and confusing. Requiring the player to use the weapons they want to level up can restrict late game options. If Firion has been using a sword throughout the game he will have a higher sword ability. This means coming across a powerful axe is pointless unless you commit to now grinding the axe ability. The intent was to give players the agency to let the party members naturally become whatever type of warrior or mage they wanted to. However, it became more of a shoehorn if you just wanted to play through



HOW LONG TO BEAT

~ 15 HOURS

DEVELOPER

SQUARE

RELEASED

1990

The third, and arguably best of the NES trilogy is Final Fantasy III. Square took the knowledge gained from two previous entries and pushed the hardware to its limits with a large world to explore and a ton of job classes to choose from. That’s not to say that every decision made was the right one, but overall the third entry may just be the most playable for a modern audience.

Going back to its roots, Final Fantasy III begins with a random group of four Onion Knights who find themselves at the bottom of a cavern following an earthquake. While searching for an exit, the group stumbles upon the Crystal of Wind that provides them with the knowledge of job classes so that they may become the Warriors of Light and save the world from impending doom. The Warriors leave the cavern determined to find the cause of the world's destruction and put a stop to the growing darkness.

The experience is much more of a mix of open exploration with a scripted story involving a number of memorable characters. The player has a lot of freedom when it comes to how each Warrior of Light grows throughout the game but the foursome has a setup sequence of story points that need to be completed. The true scope of the game comes to light after the Warriors obtain an airship and discover that their home exists on a floating island. As they embark off the island, a new world to explore roughly five times the size of the island becomes available.

Final Fantasy III may lack a recognizable protagonist but makes up for it with a pretty solid antagonist in Xande.

Hints of a villain are provided early in the game and as the story progresses it’s made clear who the big bad is and why they seek the destruction of the world. This slow and deliberate pacing of the villain’s reveal makes the final boss encounter that much more satisfying when the Warriors finally come to blows with Xande.

It wouldn’t be a Final Fantasy game though if the obvious bad guy was the final boss. In true fashion, an even greater evil is revealed as the puppet master leading to a final battle that features one of the best boss themes in the franchise.

Square made the right decision to go back to a traditional leveling up system, understanding that Final Fantasy II was simply too confusing for a larger audience. Allowing the Warriors of Light the ability to switch jobs at any time gives the player enough freedom to tackle the game in a way they enjoy without having to resort to micromanagement. An argument can be made that a few of the job classes clearly outweigh the rest, but with some commitment to the grind, any of the jobs could get you to the end. Final Fantasy III has several points in the game that force the use of a particular job so the player is required to experiment whether they like it or not.

All three Final Fantasy games remain an enjoyable experience no matter which you decide to play. The NES versions are tougher to find, but provide the most authentic experience. The second and third entries never came over to the West on the NES, so you’d need to find the translation patch for each one. Don’t even consider the PlayStation version of II found on the Origins disc unless you don’t value your time. A 3D remake of the third game was made for the Nintendo DS and can typically be found for pretty cheap. For newcomers to the franchise, or someone not used to playing retro RPGs, the Pixel Remaster versions of these titles are the most accessible to find and have the most quality of life improvements. All have been rebalanced to remove most of the grinding that defines the NES era of RPGs and contain the ability, if you so choose, to provide additional experience boosts and random battle toggling. The inclusion of both the original soundtracks and an orchestral version of each one is reason enough to pick up these versions. No matter how you choose to play them, the NES Final Fantasy titles are timeless masterpieces that can be enjoyed by anyone regardless of their age.

MYTHOLOGICAL INSPO

THE PRESENCE OF DOGŪ IN VIDEO GAMES

BY PAIGE CHAMBERLAIN

Dogū are clay figurines made during the Jomon period in Japan, having been mostly recovered in Eastern Japan. The true purpose of these figurines are unknown but are suspected to be effigies or mother goddess representations due to the humanesque shape. The Shakōkidogū (or goggle eyed Dogū) are what most depictions in games and other media take after. Looking as if they have goggles on, with patterned bodies and wide hips. They are a very popular design in Japanese media not just for video games but of course they are quite popular in the monster collecting genre. Don't worry I'll eventually get away from Japanese specific mythical beings, even if I don't get away from JRPGs (they sure do love to use Norse and Hindu mythos).

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI

Arahabaki also known as **"THE MF THAT REFLECTS PHYSICAL"** except that trait is dependent on game with said trait being a more recent trend. The naming is based on a falsified document making claims about the history of the local region and religion. It purported the existence of a banned god called Arahabaki and that the Shakōkidogū were depictions of him.



DIGIMON

Shakkoumon is largely the usual Dogū design but with more holy angelic furnishings such as gold trim, angel wings and a hat not unlike a King piece from chess. In Digimon Story Time Stranger he is among the list of Digimon that you can ride on.



MEGAMAN ZXA

In Megaman ZXA for the Nintendo DS a dogū simply titled Dogū the Giant is a boss fight. This one is so giant in fact that the player character can stand on its floating fists for parts of the battle.



DARKSTALKERS



Huitzil is a playable character in the fighting game series Darkstalker. Visually taking after Dogū he's stated to be based around Mexico as is named after an Aztec deity named Huitzilōpōchtli. In Darkstalker Huitzil is just one of many who were designed to remove all life on Earth but upon being retrieved from the ground it malfunctions and instead protects a local boy who can be seen behind him during fights.

YOKAI WATCH



Maiden Ruin, whose Japanese name is merely Dogushakkō, is a boss from Yo-Kai Watch 3 exclusive to the BlastersT side mode. Instead of having the typical large hips she has a bell shaped bottom half looking a bit like a Dōtaku bronze bell, which are dated to be from a later time period than Dogū.

POKEMON

Thankfully this time around the two Pokemon based on dogu are from the same evolutionary line. The first one called Baltoy has the same eyes as a Shakōkidogū whereas Claydol has a more humanoid body. They are both ground/psychic types and levitate.

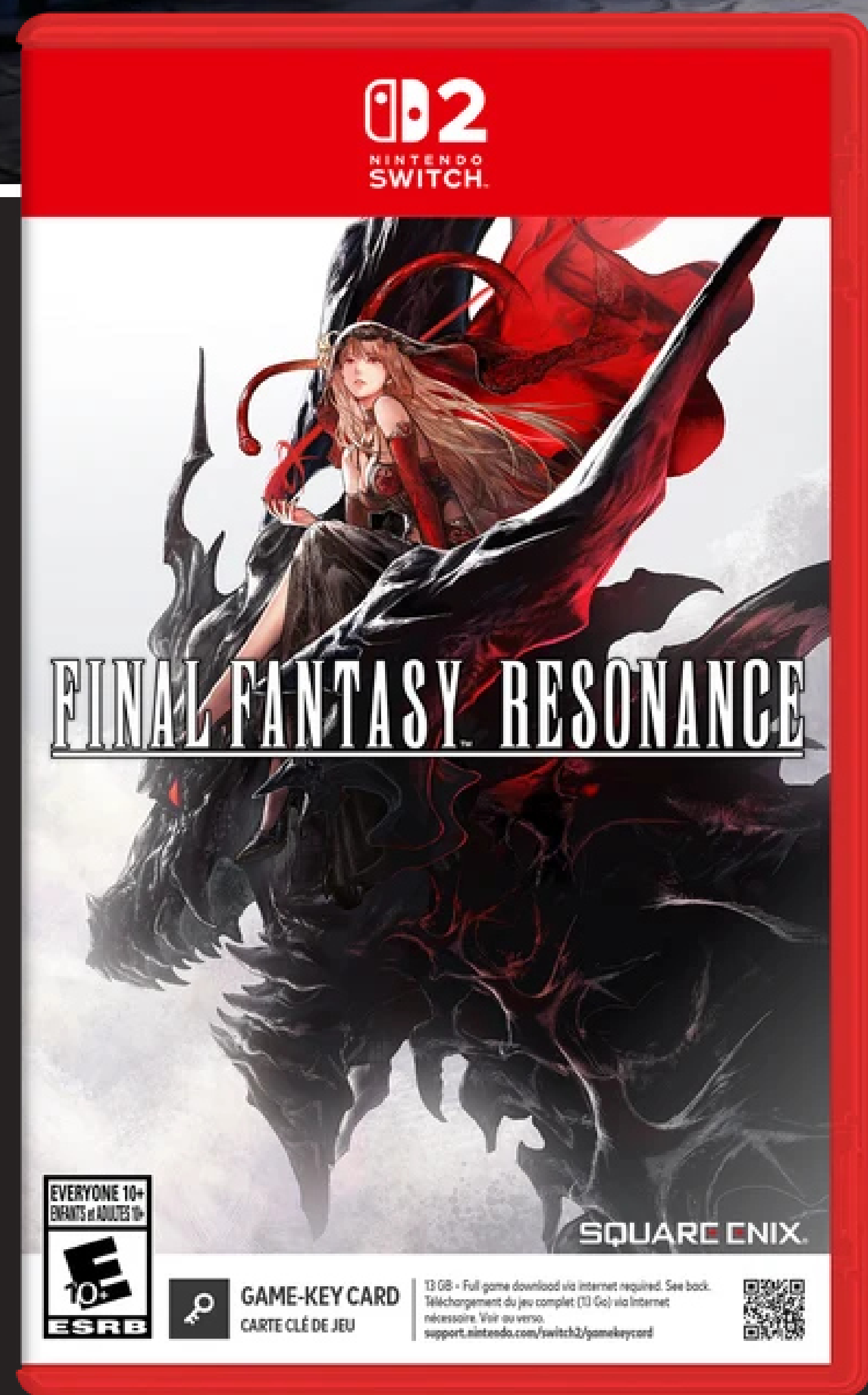


Although some of their Pokedex entries state that they were made by humans 20,000 years ago which is a fair bit older than the real life Jomon period.

There are obviously more examples particularly as enemies in games. Some commonalities between these various depictions are that they're usually still made of clay or are instead robots, and often have psychic kinetic powers although others are associated more with flame.

They are not to be confused with Haniwa, clay figures from a later period in Japan's history which are what the Animal Crossing Gyroid's are based on.





★ ★ ★
**GOTY
CONTENDER**



BY DAVID LLOYD

One of the beautiful things about a long-running franchise like Final Fantasy is that if you ask a group of fans to name their favourite title, you could hear dozens of different answers. Each amazing title throughout this storied franchise means something to someone, even the ones that many may consider “bottom tier”. Final Fantasy Resonance is not the first time that Square Enix has made a love letter to the series, that honour goes to Final Fantasy IX, but it is the experience that the fan base needs right now. While fans feverishly debate the future of the franchise, Square Enix quietly released one of the best Final Fantasy games in a generation, and perhaps a clue as to where the series will go from here.

HOW LONG TO BEAT

~ 40 HOURS

DEVELOPER

SQUARE ENIX

RELEASED

2026

Before getting too into the weeds, the elephant in the room must be addressed. Final Fantasy Resonance is in fact a “reimagining” of the 2016 mobile game, Brave Exvius. Incremental story progression and gacha pulling were part of my morning routine for a short period of time, but it only took a few weeks for my interest to wane and my finger to finally remove the app from my phone. Buried beneath mobile game sensibilities and heavy monetization hid the framework of a truly great game. Thankfully, someone at Square Enix thought so too. This isn’t the first instance of Square Enix taking a mobile game and expanding it into a full console-like experience. The success of Octopath Traveler 0 created both a framework to reimagine a mobile experience and prepare an audience to be accepting of that vision.

Looking past its mobile roots, Final Fantasy Resonance feels like the original developers that brought us the Pixel-Era of the franchise brought the band back together for a reunion tour. Not to simply relive the glory days by reusing assets and storylines, but a wholly original tale that really nails the Final Fantasy vibe. A pair of humble knights and a wayward sorceress suffering from amnesia are thrown into a world-saving adventure when their kingdom’s crystal is destroyed by an evil organization calling themselves the Sworn Six. It’s a plot description straight from the 1990s that feels both familiar and fresh at the same time. Along the way, they add more party members, take on side quests in each of the different kingdoms, and even form bonds with Espers, who then can be called upon in battle. If that wasn’t enough, crystals of light bestow the spirit of heroes from past games. These past heroes provide party members with unique abilities that can be learned over time, as well as a unique attack with a cinematic execution.

Some of the dialogue may be hit or miss, but overall the story is a wonderful mix of dramatic moments and perfectly timed levity. Each chapter is packed full with heart tugging moments between the party members as they try as best they can to defend the world from the evil deeds of the Sworn Six. Long time fans of the series will notice nods to past entries, both big and small. The sibling rivalry between Rain and Lasswell very much mirrors the relationship of Cecil and Kain from Final Fantasy IV. Smaller details can be found in the dialogue such as the Dwarves greeting everyone with a Lali-Ho, or even a travelling musician that refers to himself as a “Spoony Bard”. Whatever you think of the quality of the writing, what cannot be denied is that the development team clearly has a lot of knowledge and admiration for the franchise.

Not to be outdone, the visual design of Resonance went well beyond anything I could have imagined. Based upon the HD2D engine that has worked so well for the Octopath Traveler series, Resonance takes the engine a step further with some of the best visuals ever seen in a non-3D Final Fantasy title. Each time the party enters a new kingdom, some aspect of its environment completely blows you away. Flowing water and beautiful fountains adorn the landscapes of the Aquapolis while the capital city of Zoldaad is a visual delight of urban architecture. Resonance is packed full of incredibly impressive cinematic scenes, beginning with an opening sequence of Bahamut using Mega Flare. The cutscenes appear to be using a filter that gives the video a “pixel” shine to them, but they still manage to maintain that 2D aesthetic.





The most pleasant surprise of the game might just be the unique combat system that finds a happy medium between the traditional turn-based systems of the early years and the more complex system used in the Octopath Traveler series. As a fan of more complex systems, my main concern going into Resonance was that the battle system would feel stale fairly quickly. Thankfully, that proved not to be the case. The Visions, or heroes from games past, act as a sort of job system that can be applied to each of the different party members. An offensive character such as Rain can be paired with a white mage to add healing abilities, or become an offensive juggernaut by linking them with a soldier like Cloud Strife. Experimentation is encouraged through the fact that each of the party members can learn permanent abilities that can be equipped even after you've paired them up with a new vision. The system is simple enough for newcomers to turn-based combat not to feel overwhelmed, but also provides enough freedom to veterans to develop different strategies.

The release of Final Fantasy Resonance couldn't have come at a better time. Coming off the disappointing release of Final Fantasy XVI, the franchise is at a crossroads of sorts. Square Enix continues to chase trends as they have so far been adamant that the larger audience demands an action-RPG.

This assessment may be out of date, as shortly after release, Resonance set a Square Enix record for most concurrent Steam players even beating out flagship title, Final Fantasy VII Rebirth. Taking into consideration this renewed interest in classic Final Fantasy, along with the success of other turn-based RPGs such as Expedition 33, Square Enix may now be reconsidering the future of the franchise. And they definitely should, because Resonance is one of the best Final Fantasy games that I've played in two decades.



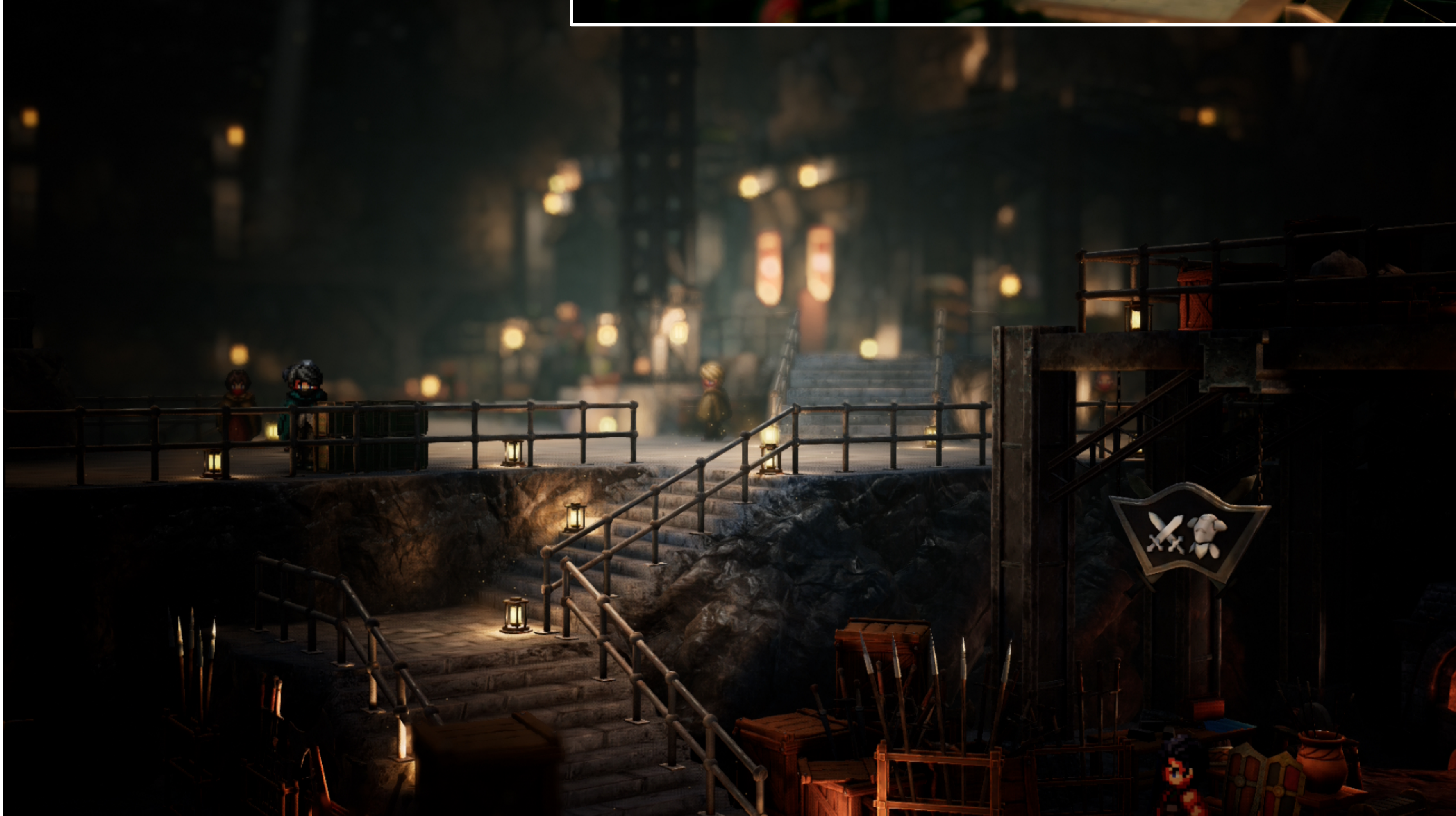
EPISODE #345

IS THE FUTURE OF THE FINAL FANTASY FRANCHISE A RETURN TO ITS PAST?

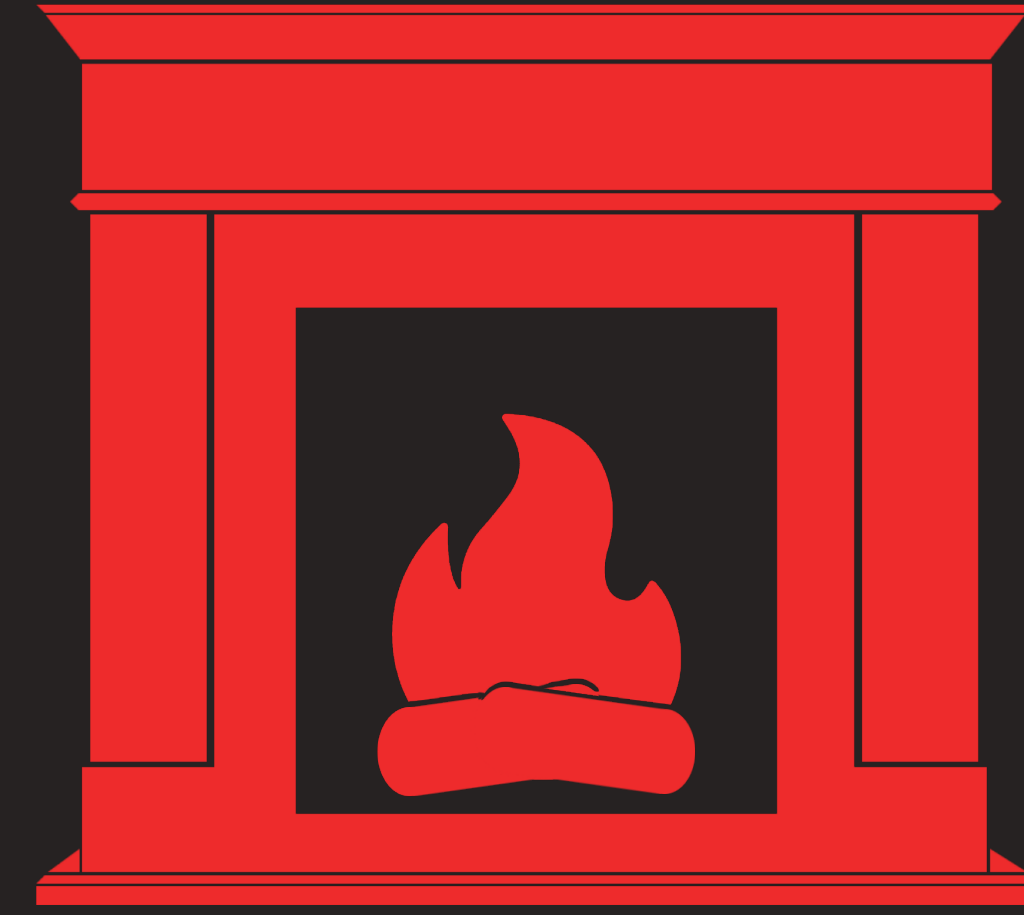
David and Jordan discuss what the future may hold for the numbered games of the Square Enix flagship series. Will the success of Resonance and a new Golden Age of turn-based video games be enough to convince the executive team that a return to its roots will provide the best return on their investment.

FINAL FANTASY RESONANCE

BEAUTIFUL LOCATIONS



RATE MY FIREPLACE



For centuries, the fireplace was required in every home in the northern hemisphere to keep its occupants warm during the winter. Even though they are less common in homes today, we still see them in countless video games.

For every developer, it's a battle between form and function and in this fun feature, we rank how well they got it right.



FIELDS OF MISTRIA



9 / 10

Not only is the masonry work beautiful, but from a glance it appears that all local building code guidelines have been followed. The fireplace is clearly the focal point of the entire room.



7 / 10

It seems that most building codes were followed, though we can't see a proper flue was installed. This fireplace is clearly more for function than form as it's big enough to accommodate a large stewing pot.

TALES of ARISE



6 / 10

The masonry work is quite good, but points have been deducted for the poor lighting of the room. A grate in front of the fire is recommended, especially if someone with a large dress is likely to walk by.



5 / 10

Again, we can't fault the mason for going all in on safety, but why is the fire so far into the wall? Heat rises, so without a fan it's unlikely the fire is heating that room adequately.



8 / 10

Carving a heart from a boulder is a pretty impressive feat. The fireplace seems safe enough with the guard on the front and all rock design, but what is with the candles on the wall?! Someone call the Fire Marshal!



3 / 10

This fireplace looks like a disaster waiting to happen. Where's the flue? Why are there candles burning on top of the wooden mantel? Not to mention the whole room is flammable objects... Fire Marshal required.



1 / 10

Very similar to the previous entry, this whole room is a fire hazard. Candles are dangerously placed throughout the whole room and is that alcohol in every corner?



5 / 10

It's clear that whoever lives here has a death wish. Again, we must ask where is the flue? Why so many unattended candles when the building clearly has electricity? There's a fridge for Pete's sake!



HOW LONG TO BEAT

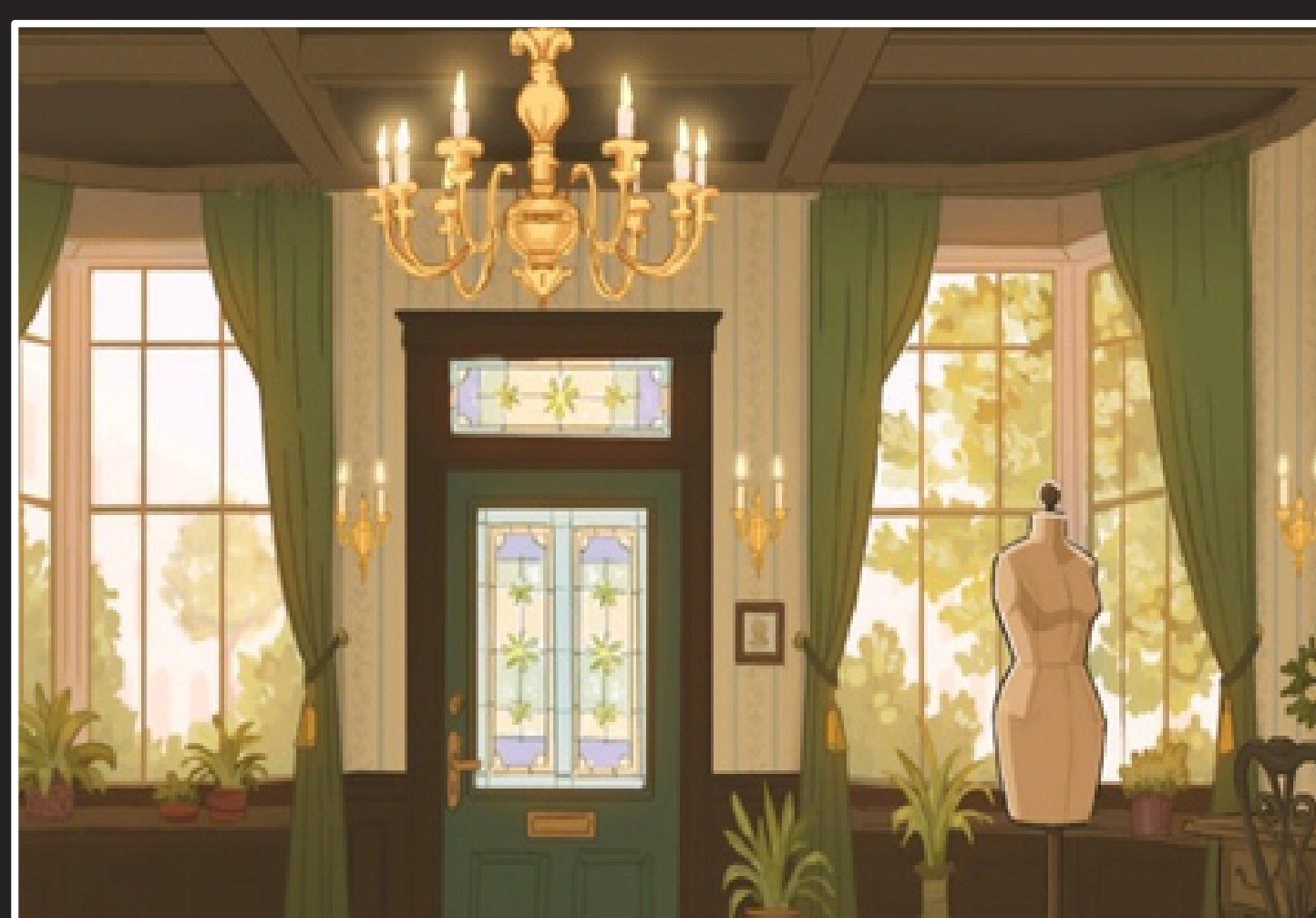
~15 HOURS

DEVELOPER

COZY LIVES

RELEASED

2026



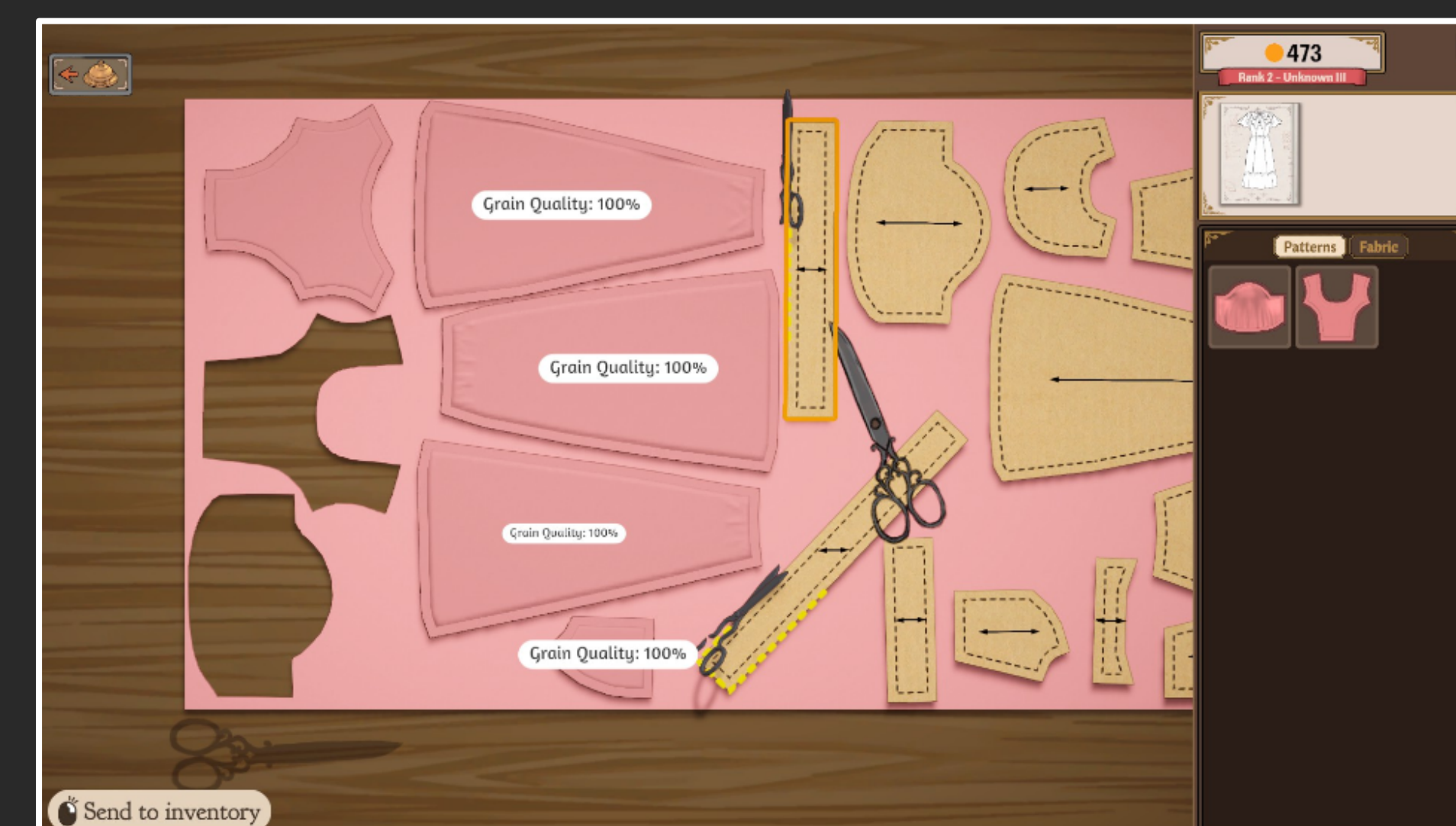
BY PAIGE CHAMBERLAIN

Dressmaker is the latest hit game on Steam right now, it's developed by Cozy Lives which is an internal team within Free Lives, known for Bro Force. In it, you play as a dressmaker taking commissions in a little town filled with drama, aristocracy and some suspiciously inhuman characters.



While it initially seems incredibly involved, it lacks a lot of technicality. You start out making a dress by picking the design from some parts, and then trying to get it within the parameters the client wants. The fabric choice also adds to this, so if there's any issues making something good enough to meet the "Gothic" or some other category you just have to pick a fabric that fits it. Once you're happy with your design, you have the patterns ready to cut out over the fabric that you buy per the meter. You should also probably pay attention to the cost so you don't run out of money. The pattern pieces will tell you their alignment; most want to be straight across with the fabric while others will want to be on the bias. Similar to real life you'll try to make the most of the material you have and put pattern pieces around like it's a puzzle. Then you'll arrange the pattern pieces onto a mannequin that will just magically float there and don't have to be painstakingly pinned. It obviously has that cosy focus taking out most of the tension when it comes to real dress making, helping to not make it too tedious. I've had a glitch with setting the mannequin size correctly a couple of times but it doesn't seem the client cares if the dress can't actually fit them.

When it comes to sewing, the fabric is as stiff as a cardboard; probably because creating realistic cloth physics would be both incredibly difficult to program but also to play with. It's perhaps the most simplest step as you follow along the lines with your sewing machine using the space bar like a pedal. I had just played a side quest in which I had to unpick parts of the dress and do such a bad job sewing because the quality of the dress was too high. Before you've finished sewing the fabric you can restart without having to unpick if you're having the opposite problem.



You don't need to change the thread which is basically always red unless you're using red fabric, as this doesn't show on the garments. There's no need to create zippers, and buttons are purely decorative. In fact you don't sew on the trims and trappings, you just pin them. I did encounter much finagling to be involved in trying to get a scrap of lace to wrap around a sleeve.

Dressmaker is in a lovely illustrated style whilst the dresses are all 3D models which prevents the clients from being shown in their clothes but does make for better seamstressing. I'm not sure if the soundtrack is custom or royalty free but one of the classical style tracks gets on my nerves while another sounds quite similar to something out of a CD-ROM Barbie game.



There are even optional dress commissions you can make to increase friendship with clients. Hitting a new friendship level will give you a few more pattern shapes like a different type of bodice and sleeves. Levelling up in general just gives you a larger scope of fabrics and haberdashery to purchase. Outside of commissions you can gift dresses to increase your relationship meter with clients, or create dresses to sell as is letting you make what you want without any more than a budgetary restriction. Whereas I go for making the minimum in what a client wants I see online plenty of over the top designs, using sequins as brushstrokes. It really reminds me that the joy I get out of these kinds of games is quite different from how some others play. And that there's a reason I clean toilets for a living. This is a game that's incredibly, extremely, immensely easy to just go "ah I'll make one more dress" and that's how I spent four hours playing the game the first time I opened it. Then another hour when I was just writing this up to check some details.



★ ★ ★
**GOTY
CONTENDER**



HOW LONG TO BEAT

~ 60 HOURS

DEVELOPER

NIHON FALCOM

RELEASED

2026

BY DAVID LLOYD

Some context might be helpful going into this review: Trails in the Sky 1st Chapter was my Game of the Year for 2025. In addition to that, the original Trails in the Sky SC was one of my top three video games of all time. I use the past tense because a new game has usurped that honour. It's the same game that I've been waiting almost a full year to play. It's the same game that I held sky high expectations that I never for a moment believed could be met. The game that has met those lofty expectations and is now one of my top three games of all time is Trails in the Sky 2nd Chapter.

For those non-super fans among us that haven't memorized all the lore of the Legend of Heroes series, 2nd Chapter begins with a short movie summarizing the events of the 1st Chapter. Enough details are provided to refresh the memories of those who played through the first game, but it won't be very helpful for someone new to the series. 2nd Chapter really feels like a continuation of the first game, picking up moments after the finale of its predecessor and immediately dealing with the consequences. Following the disappearance of Joshua Bright, the girl who shines as brightly as the sun takes a moment to collect herself and begin a journey to become a senior bracer and find the love of her life.

2nd Chapter is where Estelle Bright takes centre stage and truly establishes herself as one of the greatest heroines in video games. The first half of the game is solely focused on her growth as a Bracer as she travels across the cities of Liberl once again solving local issues and attempting to thwart the plans of a shadowy organization, Ouroboros. The second half of the game is a satisfyingly heart warming conclusion to a story brilliantly told over the course of a pair of best games that should be considered two of the best JRPGs ever made.



Beyond the superb story, excellent writing and terrific voice acting, Trails in the Sky 2nd Chapter also features one of the best battle systems ever designed. The Legend of Heroes series has always featured incredible combat mechanics, but the more recent entries have really become bloated. 2nd Chapter goes back to the basics, putting much more focus on using Arts and Crafts to emphasize the importance of positioning and the timing of when to use specific moves. No Brave Orders to worry about, nor does one need to hoard CP in order to hit multiple S-Crafts in order to brute force your way through a boss.

A few of the boss fights will likely take a couple tries, but none feel cheap and all of the end chapter boss fights provide the perfect amount of difficulty to make it feel like you earned that victory.



Balance seems to be a running theme throughout Trails in the Sky 2nd Chapter. The cast of characters that you can choose to use throughout your adventures grows large but not enough to feel crowded, or that any particular character doesn't get enough spotlight. The variety of quartz is big enough to allow players to really tailor their fighting style but never feels unmanageable. Plenty of side-quests are included for those who want an extra reason to explore Liberl but at no point do they distract you from the main story. Nihon Falcom has delivered a remake that strikes the perfect balance of maintaining the iconic spirit of the original for the existing fans while updating the game with 3D visuals and full voice acting to bring in new fans with a much more modern experience.

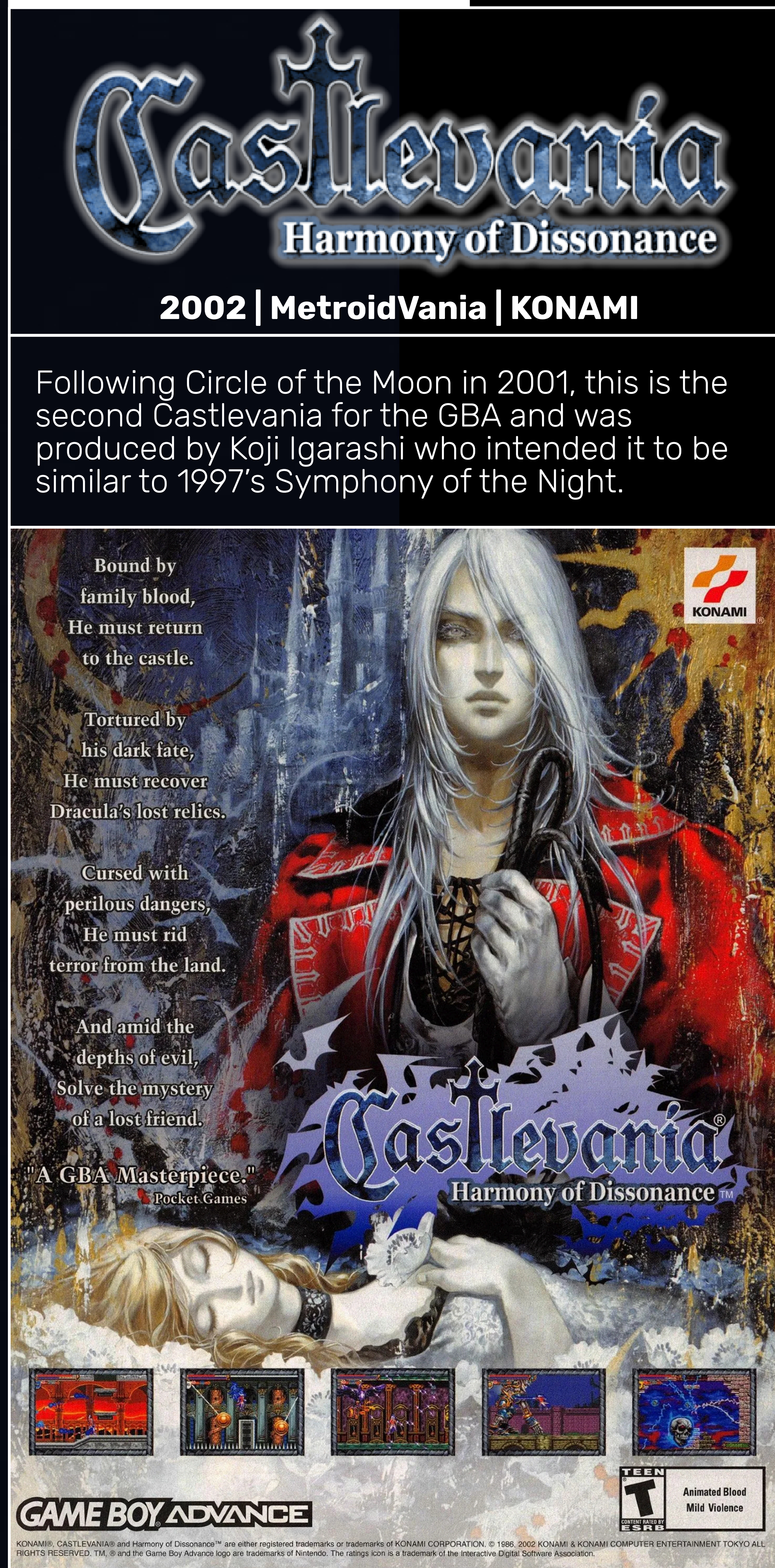
The biggest compliment that I can give Trails in the Sky 2nd Chapter is that it's the most fun I've had playing a video game. The story is pure and wholesome with plenty of hilarious moments and a lovable cast of characters. The unbridled enthusiasm and positivity of Estelle Bright is enough to warm the heart of even the most cynical of doomscrollers. The sheer number of titles within the Legend of Heroes series has scared off more than a few people based on the amount of time one would have to devote to get through a dozen titles of the long running story. To those people I would say, commit to playing the remakes of both Trails in the Sky 1st and 2nd Chapter. These two games are now both the best that the franchise has to offer, but also the absolute best way to get one foot into the door of one the longest running storylines in video games.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

DUNGEONBUSTER RECOMMENDATIONS

We love retro games, but sometimes we need help finding those diamonds in the rough. Thankfully, we found an account on Bluesky called DungeonBuster that specializes in finding lesser-known and forgotten RPGs.

GAME BOY ADVANCE



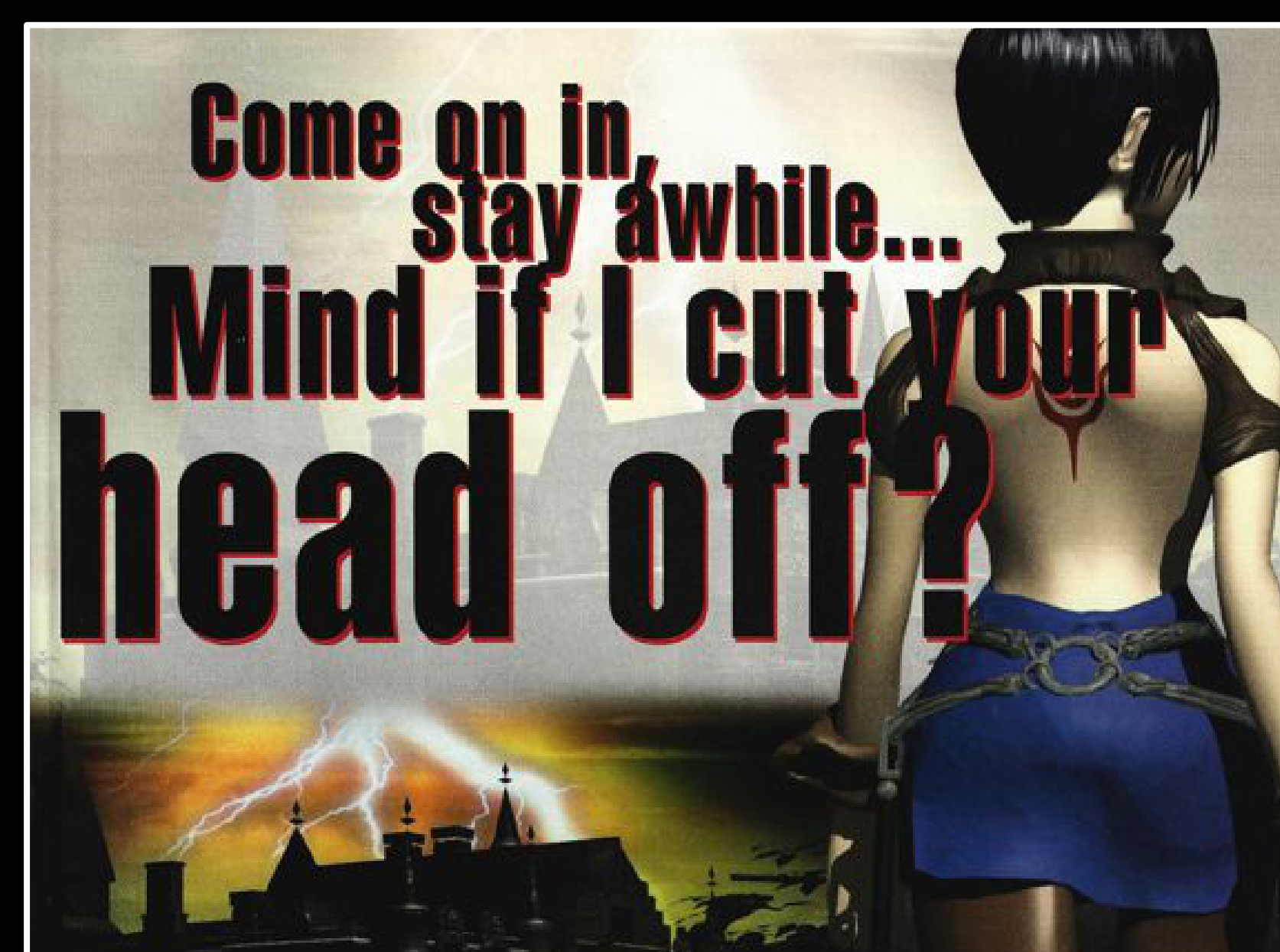
Art by Ayami Kojima

PLAYSTATION



1998 | Tactical RPG | TECMO

Assigned by your adoptive, immortal mom to protect a castle from dangerous home invaders, you call upon an arsenal of traps to fend them off in this unusual RPG. Answering questions as awkwardly as possible is also a bonus.

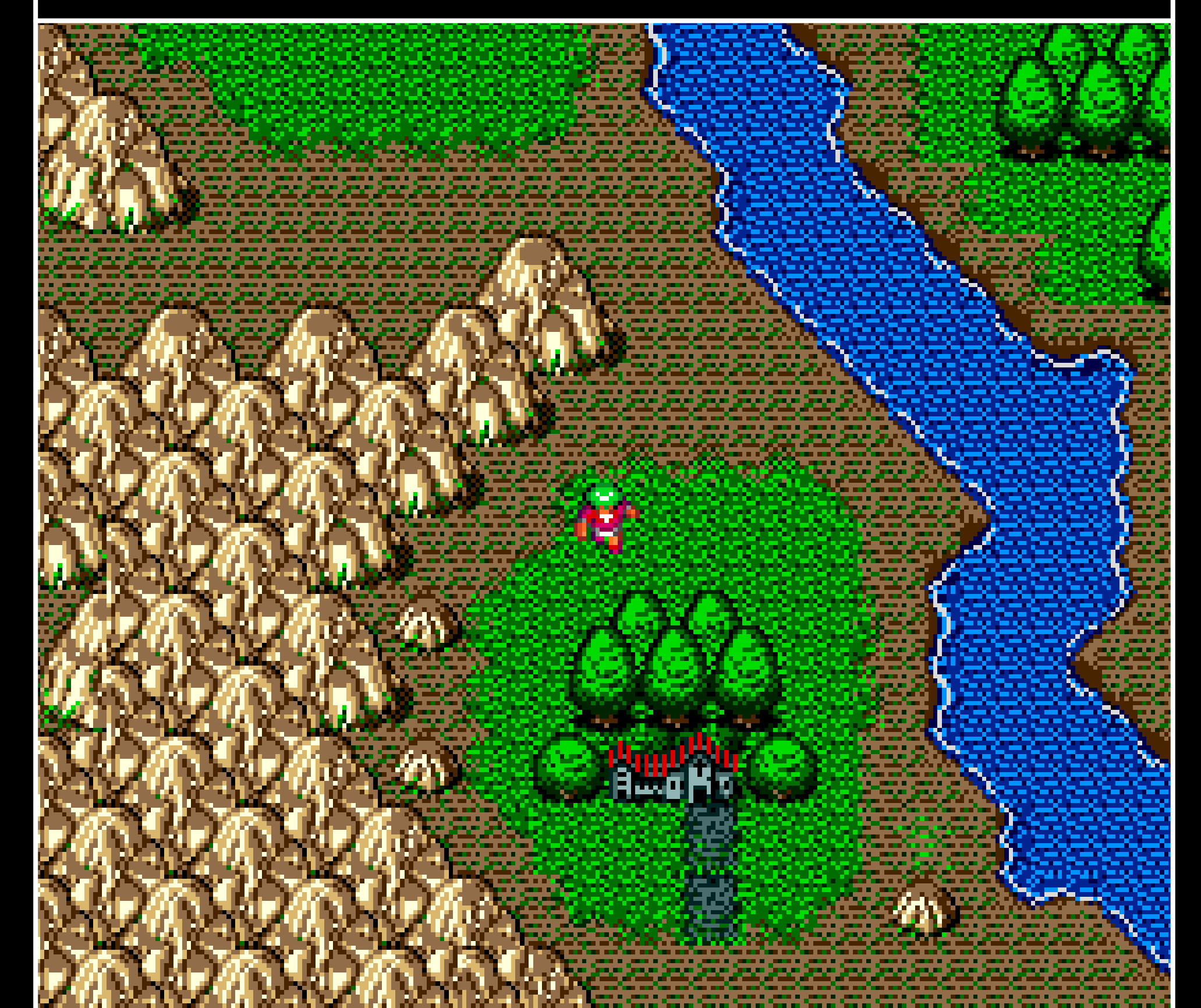


PC ENGINE



1987 | Action-RPG | Victor Music Industries

An action RPG released in Japan for the MSX2 and later ported to the PC Engine. As Lila, a member of S-SWAT, you head to the town of Chaney's Hills to investigate an outbreak of horrifying monsters.



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NEXT ISSUE*



BACKLOGS ARE MADE TO BE IGNORED

Please Understand... We make plans and intend to stick with them, but then, a playthrough of the original Final Fantasy turns into a playthrough of the entire NES trilogy. Stuff happens. No matter what, next issue we'll have a lot of games to share with something interesting to say about them.

In the meantime, if you made it this far, maybe let a friend or two know about this great new magazine. Or if you really enjoyed it and want to ensure more get made, consider supporting us at Patreon.com/TheThirstyMage.

See you next issue!
- David

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