

Ragtag misfits battle Stalin's fanclub, examine subculture

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set of abilities for another depending on the enemies and situations being faced. Transition is smooth and easy to use, although for a good portion of the game

game though, as *XIII* is extremely linear. The world does open up somewhat after the prologue, but only within the area the party currently inhabits.

As a culture, RPG gamers are a diverse bunch, complete with members who can make being an RPG fan difficult. John Hennessy says that "the obsession"

Rude, obsessive players are not the whole of RPG culture though, and Reaburn says, "Most of my fellow players are in this for the same reason I am - because they enjoy a good story." Hennessy enjoys "the choices" RPGs bring, citing *Might and Magic VI* as

an example, saying "any place you can take your party and not die is yours to explore. You have total control over where you go and what you do." On what he enjoys about RPG culture, Night says "the in-jokes and memes lend it its own flavor, and there are quite a few genuinely nice people."

Final Fantasy XIII is quite accessible to those who have not played an RPG before, but Boris Night also recommends "One of the Mario RPGs... Probably *Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door*." Hennessy suggests "*Final Fantasy VII*. Everyone loves it and every game wants to be it. It is fairly easy to play, has a fairly good plot, and the graphics are actually graphics. It is basically, for better or worse, the archetypal RPG of this gaming age... and it is easy enough to jump from there to anywhere." Lastly, Reaburn says "I would actually start with *Phantasy Star IV*. It is the high point of the *Phantasy Star* series... Either that or *Atelier Iris*:"

Final Fantasy XIII



Playstation 3 and Xbox 360
ESRB: T
MSRP: \$59.99



Lightning and Hope converse in a cut scene built with XIII's in-game graphics engine.

picture courtesy of FinalFantasy13game.com

the characters available will depend on the story, which can make for frustration when a character that would be able to defeat an enemy effortlessly is halfway around the world.

Other changes from earlier entries in the series to *XIII* include the removal of random battles, towns and an over-world map. Health is restored at the end of every battle, and every battle may be retried at any time. Given that at times *XIII* is brutally hard, this is a welcome addition. Those who prefer free roaming exploration may want to try another

frustrates him "the people who obsess over and love (or hate) a particular character," while Erina Donne is annoyed by players who insist on using nothing but the absolute best equipment in a game and says "some of us play games to have fun, and they should not tell us we are wrong because we do not use the best character/build/item combinations in the game." Reaburn says that "games do not need to be broken to be fun" and is annoyed by people who "denounce others because they did not buy the strategy guide."

Eternal Mana, which demonstrates that graphics do not make a game good, that romance does not have to be over the top and saccharine, that women can be awesome and still feminine, and that a plot can be older than the earth and still incredibly good because it is well-written and cheerful."

While *Final Fantasy XIII's* gameplay is good, its cast is the main reason to play the game, as is the case with many RPGs. As an introduction to the form, it is excellent, as a game it is quite good and as a world it is memorable. Overall, it is a wonderful game.

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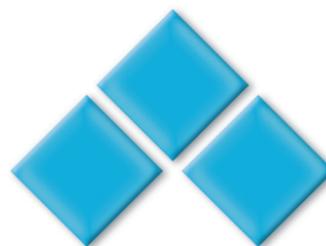
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