

Final Fantasy XII: Ivalice Lost

A Retrospective review by: Jay “Jizzal” Ednor

On Christmas 2005, I discovered that my parents got me Dragon Quest VIII. I was very excited, not just because I was looking forward to a new RPG, but because it came with a demo disk for Final Fantasy XII. The very first video game I ever beat by myself was Final Fantasy IV, and I had memories of clumsily attempting to beat the original game on NES with a friend when we were even younger and stupider. This series means a lot to me, and it probably always will. Final Fantasy XI disappointed me, because even though I bought it along with some other nonsense for the PS2, I never got to actually play it. Our internet sucked and there were lots of complications, so it was lost to me. Final Fantasy VII and VI were probably my two favorites at that age, along with Final Fantasy Tactics, a game I still see as a masterpiece, but I had a lot of love for IX, X, and X-2. I can't express how excited I was for Final Fantasy XII.

I played the demo, read about people who played it in Playstation Magazine, had little debates with my friends, and when we heard there was a midnight release (in 2006 not everyone did this) we all got hype and went to the Gamestop or Gamecrazy or wherever it was. The store had a poster promoting FFXII, they said they would give it away to whoever could answer trivia about Final Fantasy X-2 the fastest, and of course correctly. I won the poster, got the game, went home, and played and played and played. I threw myself at this game; I wanted to experience everything from the journey to the characters to the gameplay. I stopped playing, several days later, but not because I had beaten the game, but because I felt I had suffered enough. There was nothing driving me, I simply lost interest and I never understood why.

As of now, Final Fantasy XII is the biggest disappointment I have ever played. It is a game with an avalanche of failings, ranging from gameplay, narrative, character, and I'm sure if this game had a scent it would smell bad. What are these you wonder? I am going to tell you now, in excruciating detail.

Let's start off with the gameplay, since it can make or break games.. The battle system for Final Fantasy XII starts off interesting, fun even, but after about two hours all whimsy and elation is sucked dry, as if ravaged by a hoard of dire bats lusting for joy to consume. There is a thing called the Gambit System in this game, in fact, the game revolves around the Gambit System, which ultimately means you have to program your characters to attack, steal, use magic or items, or do anything of that sort. “Jay, don't be foolish, the Gambit System is optional,” I hear one of you saying that right now. Well, you are wrong. If you refuse to use the Gambit System, all flow and synergy is gone

completely, because this game simply does not compute with manual inputs. Sure, you can use manual inputs, but for three characters, spanning a multitude of abilities, enemies, items, and all that jazz? It's fucking stupid and it will drive you insane having to tell each and every party member to do something through the awkward menu system again and again and again; for every enemy you will face. This isn't like in other games, where a fight begins and you are supposed to choose their actions, this is a different beast all together, it wears the cloak of a bastard and speaks with a fool's tone. If you like the idea of micromanaging people for the entire game, then by all means, you're free to, that just means you were never loved or embraced as a child and must be mad.

Why take such issue with this? Because the player is removed from the game, after they set the appropriate Gambits. Final Fantasy XII can be completed with great ease with only a handful of these programs set; at most, one will need to have Attack present along with a method of restoring health points and removing status alignments. That is all. Black Magick is useful in only a handful of situations but it is very underpowered and suffers from execution issues, while most of the other abilities share the same fate. All you do in this game is physically attack and heal yourself, ah but later on your characters can cast buffing spells, which then becomes a waiting game as they make sure to doll themselves up, much like a whore before turning their prepared bodies loose on the unsuspecting streets. Strategy is all but abandoned, though it can be implemented in some limited cases, but then what shall the player do? The player shall watch, or perhaps enjoy a nice wine or eat a pizza as they view the cast of this game flail about.

So yes, the Gambit System is garbage, but what about the battles themselves? Well, you fight a multitude of enemies in these fights, ranging from wolves, dinosaurs, tomatoes, all sorts of dangerous fiends that seek to destroy the party. Sometimes they are in groups, sometimes they are alone, but one thing to note is that they don't have to play by the same rules you do. Should you want to use the Attack command, you are required to wait, same with Magick (with a k so you know it's special) and other special abilities. Your foes are not the same, many of them have attacks that happen instantaneously, with no consent or homage paid to time or the cosmos, but just because they can. Enemies are free to break rules that you are forced to follow, and as such rather than feel like a challenge, it comes across as unfair and insulting. This will continue through the entire game, in fact, it will only worsen. As one progresses, their enemies will have the ability to choose not to wait for turns, simply ignore the evasion stat, double their level, raise their own stats considerably when near death, and outright break the very laws that the game has set in motion. That last point may sound

extreme or hyperbolized, but when you have successfully silenced an enemy, therefore rendering them incapable of casting magic, only to then watch them proceed to cast magic, not because silence wore off or because they cured it through other means, but because they wanted to, a part of your heart will break; mine still aches and the wound will not heal. If you were to attempt as such, I would deliver a swift blow to your face, as you would seek to ignore rules set in place in this series from its original installment. If you are silenced, you cannot cast magic, unless you are the enemy and you really, really want to.

Combine the fact that waiting for turns is passé, and sometimes wanting to cast magic violates the rules of the game with the notion that the enemies suffer no consequences whatsoever, should the adventurers choose to sally forth with bravado and reckless abandon, they shall find themselves overwhelmed and most likely activating one of the many traps laid about the world of Ivalice. Traps offer a wide multitude of negative consequences, should they be activated, but only if the player's avatars do so. This is very confusing. The traps seem to be like mines, therefore when weight is placed on them, they should/would activate, however they apparently have pledged their allegiance to the foul beasts the main cast does battle with. How is this? Why is this? Enemies can rush forward, or even hit you into traps, but you can do nothing more than suffer additional, negative consequences. "Jay, you fool, there are methods of avoiding the traps," once more, I hear this. Yes, there is an ability that lets you see the traps, however your AI companions will not take heed and will gleefully activate them, despite the red, glowing marker being an obvious symbol indicating one should turn away. There is an accessory available for sale, eventually, that lets you safely navigate past traps, but that takes up the ONLY accessory slot and you would need one for every character, and guests cannot equip them. Later in the game, the spell Float becomes available, therefore letting all characters safely navigate over all of the traps without activating them. There is the simple solution, merely set up a Gambit so that every character will have the Float status, for every second of the game. Oh my, I tremble with the excitement, for when Float wears off while standing over a trap, the ensuing confusion and sense of betrayal will be marvelous. I hope it is sold in bottles, so I might drink my fill of it. Why have these traps in the game when there is no method of disabling them? Generally, rouge-like characters are adept at deactivating traps in RPGs, but there is no such solution or creative method of dealing with them. You simply must suffer, suffer alone.

Combat itself is most tedious, even if Gambits are set up, you will watch time and time again as the characters fall in defeat. Perhaps they are ill-equipped? Perhaps they are not experienced enough to face the dangers ahead with confidence? Perhaps

this very game is incompetent and only seeks to inconvenience rather than challenge the player? Whatever it may be, escape is always an option...or well, one would like to hope it is. Fleeing is horribly clumsy and it can often spell the end for the party should fate decide as such, for fleeing turns off all Gambits, letting the characters focus purely on escape. During this time, the enemy can still target and attack, but as stated before there are several enemies equipped with moves that go against traditional rules, therefore the party is merely defenseless and can be barraged from multiple angles by an army of aggressors, depending on the location. They could also stumble over traps, or lose their way in some of the more poorly designed locations that lack a proper map, thus causing more harm than good in many situations. Few things are more frustrating than watching the party attempt to escape, only to see cheap shots implemented time and time again, draining the party's health since their actions are instantaneous. A flurry of sucker punches is hardly a suitable challenge, yet it is what one must defend against. Pray that the quickened steps do not activate traps, or that the clumsy level design does not lead one astray, for that would be devastating and most costly.

I will end my gripes with the battle system with these final thoughts: Right now, at this very moment, I am doing the Yiazmat fight. At the time of writing this section, the game is playing itself. This is not an exaggeration; I am typing this while my party flails about trying to beat up this big, stupid idiot. Why bother talking about this fight? Because it sums up just about everything I felt that was wrong with this battle system. For the uninitiated, let me tell you just what this Yiazmat thing is: a dragon with pointless destructo disks in random places, and a proud owner of 50 million health points. Yeah, that last bit is the big deal, but every complaint I've had thus far about the battle gameplay can just about be summed up here. "But Jay, everyone knows that is a super boss that is optional; you're stupid to complain about it." No, shut up. That is a stupid thing to say, how dare you? If they put it in the game, they thought it was a good idea; therefore I have a right to voice my disdain. Sure, it is optional, I'll give you that but it points out all the flaws of this gambit system nonsense.

I can sit here, on MS Word, typing away while in a Skype call, while also eating a Subway sandwich (Subway, eat fresh!) and it doesn't matter. All you do is set up the gambits and then let the game play itself. Oh, but that's not all, let's not forget the faux 'challenge' this game proudly flaunts. Why is this fight "hard"? A stupid amount of health points is only one of the problems. Halfway through the fight, your damage gets capped at 6999, for no other reason than because the game wants to. Never mind the fact Yiazmat doesn't have to wait to execute his actions, as in he doesn't have to wait for turns, or let his ATB bar fill up or whatever, he can and will sit there constantly attacking or using special moves or whatever with no punishment or drawback. This

goes against the rules you have to play by; therefore, the enemy is sitting on a multitude of unfair advantages. What can you do to combat this? Nothing. You can sit there and take the abuse while you constantly revive and heal your worthless characters. Never mind Yiazmat's stupid moves, or the 5% instant death, or the fact there's traps everywhere, or that you might fall asleep during this fight, it's that this game doesn't work as engaging interactive media. Oh you have the best armor and weapons? Who gives a damn? No matter what, this fight is going to be a long, worthless slog that is an absolute chore. It is artificially lengthened by inconveniencing YOU, the player, and forcing you to play within these guidelines to ensure you have to waste your fucking time.

This game is a perpetual inconvenience. If you're willing to give up your time, then yeah, you can 'accomplish' things. You won't feel proud, or intelligent, or super awesome, because your strategy and thoughts don't matter. All that matters is that you keep going, for an invisible reward, all for a game with a broken battle system that removes you, the player, from said game. There is no actual challenge in this game, only a set of tiresome hoops that you must leap through. Tactics and foresight or intelligence is rarely rewarded; at most you get a "Good job, kupo" and an invisible pat on the head. Congratulations, you are a faithful hound seeking an imperceptible reward from an abusive master.

Now then, not every creature found in the wilds is hostile. They are indicated as such by a green health bar, and the Gambits will not deem them as "foe" so the AI will not engage in battle with them. In the early portions of the game, the most dangerous docile creatures are known as Elementals, and their presence can be common, and their appearance would cause for alarm if they were hostile, for power wells within these floating wonders. Thankfully, they are docile...or well, they would be, because sometimes they change their mind. Targeting an elemental for abuse will have them turn incredibly hostile, as to be expected, but sometimes merely walking by an Elemental can trigger their rage to overflow and they seek to ravage you in retaliation for existing in the same space. Casting magic, of any sort, either on yourself or on other hostiles turns these beings against you as well, and given their high stats and multiple spells, the party will perish early on in the game should they attempt to fight back. Oddly enough, if the already aggressive enemies cast magic, they suffer no retaliation from the floating collection of magick energy; in fact often the Elementals choose to cast buffing spells on the hostile enemies. Why is this? You could argue that beings of floating energy choose to support nature, rather than the hume characters, but the Elementals also offer their assistance to the undead and artificial life, which are sins against nature by existing at all. These floating balls of magick are more prone to

assaulting the party, regardless of their actions it seems, than the massive, predatory dinosaur found in the Dalmasca Westersand. That beast is docile, as noted by a green health bar, and it won't turn hostile until the player chooses to assault it...so where does the alliance of enemies rest? Or is it just a foolish excuse to create an enemy there to punish the player for simply playing the game? I would vote for the latter. It only exists to break any flow you might have and force you to retreat rather than fight the foes around them.

The standard game, as in playing without the optional quests (which are primarily fighting enemies that "break the rules" of the game), is incredibly simple. As stated earlier, setting the party to hit things until they die is the most effective, with the occasional healing spell or whatever, it requires very little effort or thought. One thing to keep in mind however is that this game is very linear and it will remind you of such very firmly. What's that? Final Fantasy XIII is the most linear game ever and therefore bad? Yes, XIII is very linear, but XII pretends that it is non-linear, it pretends to give the player choices and routes and other paths. The way that this game is designed, it wishes to be explored, oh how fun, you can go anywhere...but if you try to go anywhere out of the accepted order the player is punished severely. You are instructed to go from Point A directly to Point B, and if you stray and go to Point D or F expect to suffer harsh consequences, and potentially a game over thanks to the awkward and clunky nature of the fleeing option. You /can/ stray from the linear progression of the game, but not without being assaulted by enemies you have little to no chance of beating, unless you go to this place when you are 'allowed' or when you have obtained equipment only available later in the game or have gained multiple levels, or all of the above. Your explorative nature will be beaten out of you as early as the beginning of the game, for if you explore the Southern Plains of Giza and try to travel further south past some giant wolf dudes, they will destroy you in one hit, but if you manage to slip by then the next area of enemies will certainly finish the job of killing you. Although the game is not as claustrophobic or constraining as "Hallway XIII", Final Fantasy XII deceives the player with choice, but in truth they are trapped in a far more harshly constructed cage that clips the wings of any would be soaring adventurer. I seem to notice a pattern where the game keeps punishing its player...

I will end the gameplay complaints, for the moment, with the examination of two more primary problems: The Loot system and the treasure chests, as they are embodiments of the same inherent problem. Now, in idea alone, the Loot system is brilliant and would have been an entertaining addition to the game. When engaging enemies, they all have random drops, as in other RPGs, but certain creatures or species will drop items only they have access to, which is often described as Loot,

which can be sold to any merchant in exchange for gil, the currency. That is not all, but when certain Loot is sold, special items will become available for sale, as there are 'recipes' that reward the player for stealing or picking up these items and then selling them. An excellent idea, but with one major flaw: the player is blind and once more the game punishes said player. There is no list of sold Loot saved to a menu or screen, allowing the player to see what they have already obtained, there are no in game 'recipes' to obtain in order to determine which combination gives you what, and there is no indication that when you sell loot and buy an item created thanks to said loot that it vanishes from the log of sold items. Let me explain this more clearly, let us say that a sword can be made from selling 3 sturdy bones and 2 iron ores, and you have obtained 20 sturdy bones and 10 iron ores. You have not looked at FAQs or walkthroughs, and you sell all of your loot, because why not? The game alerts you that a sword is now for sale in the bazaar, it is a rare item for a cheap price, so you buy it. The extra materials you have sold are gone, they no longer exist, even if the recipe only called for a handful of items, they are all gone. This would not be troublesome if not for overlapping recipes, for if another item required 9 sturdy bones and 5 rubber bands, you will need to obtain the sturdy bones all over again. The game does not tell you that when something is purchased through the loot/bazaar system that all of said loot is lost and a good deal of loot is difficult to obtain, especially for more rare items, but you are not privy to this information. You are meant to guess and wander around in the dark...unless of course you have a strategy guide or walkthrough, convenient.

The treasure chests are also an utter joke. They are often placed randomly due to random spawn chances and the contents within are usually random as well, or there is a set percentage you can obtain x or y depending on z with another slice of random. You can venture into the deepest depths of a hostile environment and receive a Knot of Rust for your troubles, because the RNG did not wish to give you the rare item you could have received instead. This is frustrating, and of course the player will never know unless they have outside information once again. There is an accessory that 'increases' the value of items found in treasure chests, but often that will remove any chance of other rare items to appear in said chests, so it is equipped at the risk of losing out. Either way, unless there is outside information, the player will not know. But perhaps the most infamous treasure chests of all are the ones that I imagine the vast majority of players opened on their first playthroughs, and in doing so locked themselves out of obtaining one of the best weapons in the game. Ah yes, the Zodiac Spear, perhaps one of the worst betrayals in all of gaming history. This is the only item in the game that can be taken away from the player because they opened up other treasure chests. Early in the game, when the party has next to no resources, wouldn't they be encouraged to explore and open treasure chests they find? No, for at the

beginning of the game there are 3 treasure chests, each in a different location, and if they are opened then the Zodiac Spear is nearly lost forever. Later in the game, there is another section with I believe 16 treasure chests in a clustered heap, also linked to the previously mentioned treasure and will sacrifice the Zodiac Spear as a result. All of these treasure boxes look the exact same, there is no in game hint that opening them will punish you, and there is only one item, the one with the highest attack power, that will be lost without the player's knowledge. Many restarted the game, after reading of this in the forums or heard from friends, either because they were completionists or because they were angry, I was both. This is bad design, it is bad programming, it is once again punishing the player for seemingly no reason and with no warning. The game can be completed without the Zodiac Spear, of course, but why include something that requires people to go against their instincts to obtain? Why punish the player so early in the game and without warning? Why put one of these marked treasure chests on screen behind the player during a dialogue scene? Why show it off if we are meant to keep away from it? Why can the player often gain 99 of certain incredibly rare items, should they want to waste their lives doing so, but the Zodiac Spear is forsaken the moment a Potion is obtained, and with no indication that this has happened? Ah, forgive me. The Zodiac Spear is not lost forever, for it can be found again in another location, hidden much further in the game, and with an obtain rate of 0.01%. I wish I was exaggerating, happy hunting if you made the mistake of opening worthless treasure chests.

Why? Why? Why? Final Fantasy wasn't always this cryptic; it wouldn't punish the player for not being part of the development team. It wouldn't punish players if they didn't have Nintendo Power, Playstation Magazine, Brady Game strategy guides (for more hints and tips, check out PlayOnline.com!) or regularly went to Game FAQs, but Final Fantasy XII gives the player an overwhelming number of middle fingers while it withholds information. No in game hints, no riddles or questions or puzzles, just another method to frustrate and punish with no rhyme or reason. Using resources, exploring, experimenting, and being crafty and creative? No, you are not allowed, this game does not let you and if you step out of line the gameplay will chastise you accordingly. It simply is not fair. These were games where you had to think, but not this one, it makes you read, look up maps, look up charts, graphs, and loot recipes, or tell you where you can or cannot stand, because if you are forced through this much trial and error, why bother playing at all? What is the reward? Nothing.

Still, many would argue that an RPG is judged by its story and characters, so gameplay could be forgiven in the case of an enthralling world and a memorable cast. As to be expected, Final Fantasy XII completely and utterly fails once again. Although

the spoilers will be brief, should that matter, I will be mentioning certain aspects of characters and the story that could be spoiler-y by their very nature.

First, I will start with the main characters, and the game's protagonist: Vaan. He is a 17 year old, blonde, vaguely Caucasian male who is mentioned briefly by his older brother Reks, who is the first avatar the player gets to control through the battle tutorial. Introduced as street smart with nimble fingers and with a hatred for the empire, Vaan has dreams of being a Sky Pirate, he dreams of adventure and freedom. It is a shame that young Vaan is an utter waste of space, and when the party has all 6 playable characters gathered, it is apparent that even the game has no idea of what to do with him, his existence is superfluous at best and simply grating at worst due to how out of place and awkward he is. You do not see his growth as a character, he does not go through the "Hero's Journey" like in film or literature, he is simply there, standing and watching stuff happen, most of which he doesn't understand. Perhaps he is there for the player's sake? No, because Vaan already understands the world of Ivalice and very little is explained to him, save for the occasional 'witty banter'. The narrative is desperate to make Vaan involved, but after the Tomb of Raithwall, still fairly early in the game, one would notice that the protagonist is almost the most obviously alienated character from the main plot, or even subplots. At one point another character asks, "What are you looking for, Vaan?" in regards to why our protagonist stays with the rest of the main cast, and the response is, "Ah, well, you know..." almost verbatim, and then the scene ends.

Vaan has no agency in this story. What is he fighting for? Well, one could say early on he wants to cause trouble, then he wants to save his childhood friend, and then he...has no reason to do anything. Many said that he fights to avenge his brother, Reks, but that is hardly the case, as Vaan mentions him perhaps a total of 4 times throughout the entire game, and the game can be quite long. At first Vaan nearly exclaims he has no idea why he is involved, but later on he states that he just "Wanted to run away" from his brother's death, but in the same scene he states that isn't true he just wants to help. Our protagonist, this teenager with little to no experience, just wants to help, so he does. We see most of the game from Vaan's perspective, but he would have been just as effective as a silent protagonist, because otherwise he is clunky and out of place when standing next to the other characters. He is there because the story wants him there, not because he is needed, or that he feels he is needed, he just wants to hang out because he's bored. Our main character is disconnected and offers very little to the plot, even when the game tries to make him important. He does grab a sword and hit someone at the end, easily his highest moment in the game. Congrats, Vaan. Another thing to note is Vaan's language, which is very modern despite nearly

every other character, save for one more, speaks with an Olde English sort of speak, yet Vaan speaks as if he was just some other douche you went to high school with and talked about getting out of this dead end town and being somebody.

Next up is the self-proclaimed leading man, Balthier. Many comment that of the playable cast, he is their favorite character, and I can see why. Balthier is witty, sarcastic, and seems to roll his eyes so hard he might strain something when dealing with idiots. He is a Sky Pirate, seemingly very capable and experienced, but oh what is this? He has a checkered past...how mysterious. Balthier is 22 years old, yet this would be more believable if he was 32, but I can't purely fault this game for the young age of the 'dashing rogue' because Japanese media in general believes that people become old and die after they turn 25. I still think it's utterly ridiculous, but I digress. Balthier acts as a mentor to Vaan, in perhaps maybe three scenes, so their relationship is next to non-existent despite how the narrative tries to frame that they, or anyone for that matter, are close friends and comrades. He joins the story early, for nothing other than convenience and coincidence, bumps into Vaan and because of their actions they end up with a magic stone and tossed in jail, which they break out of because that's easy to do, and then he joins up to help with a rescue and then he hangs out more because it turns out Balthier is the character with daddy issues this time around. His dad turns out to be an evil-mad scientist named Dr. Cid, oh how quaint.

Balthier is at least well emerged in the world and narrative, he ends up interacting with the cast, much more than Vaan, but he still has little agency other than "I want to stop my Dad". The fact that he is running away from his past falls flat on me however, he was born into privilege in a rich part of the Empire, ends up at the highest rank of military, and then runs off, all before he's old enough to rent a car. It is so much we have heard and seen before, riches to rags, wants to prove to the world and himself that he can tough it out without his advantages, plus he's so charismatic and capable that he can get away with most things. He is interesting, but he still isn't that involved, even the more dramatic and heavy scenes involving his father have him saying short quips rather than actual character development, but at least he reacts to his bad guy dad's eventual death, but then never thinks of it ever again. They never quite explain what a Sky Pirate is in this game, it just seems to be like the pirates in One Piece, except you never see or meet any 'evil' ones, they're all just mercenaries or whatever with airships who hang out and have fun. Balthier's cameo in the remake of Final Fantasy Tactics for the PSP is excellent, even if he says he's used to babysitting children...never mind that Ramza is probably one year younger than him at that point in the game, but then again I can't blame Final Fantasy for a problem that exists in so many other franchises and series. As for playable characters go, he is easily my

favorite, even if he too seems too uninvolved with the plot for good stretches of the game.

Our next character is Fran, who is Balthier's partner in crime. She is a tall, dark skinned, demi-rabbit sort of person, called a Viera, but that's just Ivalice's way of saying Elf. Think of every elf stereotype, and bam, you have the Viera. Love nature? Check. Say that mankind is too blah blah? Check. Magical qualities? Check. Bow and arrow? Check. Live a long time yet are ignorant to the world outside of their society? Check. Think they're better than everyone else? Check. Ears that make them stand out? Of course. Fran is the character who speaks most about mysticism and prophecy, by being dark and mysterious about certain things. The fact she is in high-heels and bondage gear infuriates me, because why go out on missions dressed so impractically? She's not going to the freaking club to dance with her girls and forget about men for the night; she is an experienced and capable warrior in a metallic thong for some ungodly reason. All the same, the fact she is for all intents and purposes designed after a black woman, I am impressed, because before Fran all we had was Rafa, who shares more of the heritage and culture of the Arabic sort, but still Fran is "less than human" in a similar way Barrett of Final Fantasy VII is. Still, she is loyal to Balthier and otherwise has little to do with the plot, save for when she breaks stuff or passes out because of magic mist stuff or something. She offers exposition, translation, and sometimes is allowed to interact with other characters in short bursts.

Fran is decent overall, but she still feels incomplete. She is there because Balthier is there. Sure, she could be curious about the Nethecite and the war and all that, but it barely comes across as such. She's there because of her man, strong and independent she ain't, but to the game's credit they refer to each other as partner and their relationship is built on trust and respect without wavering once. Fran gets the job done as being the elf of the party, and her relationship with Balthier is shown rather than told, but it doesn't help that the pair of Sky Pirates are only marginally attached to the events taking place around them.

The fourth character is easily the one with the most squandered potential: Basch. Yes, that Basch, the infamously awkward "I am THE Basch Fon Ronsenburg" mini-game Basch. He is a stalwart knight, loyal, strong, courageous, and the game begins in true when he seemingly murders Vaan's brother and the King of Dalmasca. Afterwards he was reportedly executed, so when the party finds him alive and in chains, it raises a lot of questions from both the characters and the audience. It starts off as a story of intrigue and deception and the quest for redemption...that goes absolutely nowhere. Basch's story alone could have made for a game, a great game even, but

after he joins the party proper, the fact that he was framed for murdering his king is almost never brought up again, nor is it a plot point, and it receives a truly lazy and awful resolution at near the very end of the game. One of the villains basically says “It was me who did that” during his Bond villain speech, to which Basch does not react, instead Vaan makes a pouty face at the camera.

A conflict between brothers, both who watched their homeland be destroyed...one joins Dalmasca, the other the Empire, their clash is inevitable...yeah that isn't interesting enough to carry a story, obviously. Basch was supposed to be the protagonist of this game, long ago, but reportedly people felt that the video game audience wouldn't want to play as a character with experience, skill, and a reason to fight, so they went with Vaan instead. Basch is polite to all the characters, he sees Balthier and Fran as trustworthy companions, he has one almost funny scene with Vaan and the other young character, and he is the whipping boy of the other party member. He is often the voice of reason, but every character does that for the most part. Only once, maybe twice does he mention that he regrets not saving the prince, or that he is haunted by his past, or sees his failure when he watches people still fighting a war that should have ended two years ago, he just more or less hangs out, along with the rest of the cast. Basch stands around and exists, then fades into the background and into obscurity, sometime says something enlightened, but his connection to the plot is purely to assist another character...

Ashe is a bitch. She is unlikeable, quick to anger, and has a lot of baggage; she's also the next one in line for the crown of Dalmasca after the murder of her father. She is Queen, or well 'Princess' because queen sounds old, but then again she hasn't properly ascended to the throne because prior to the start of the game, it is said that she committed suicide when her husband, Prince Rassler died in battle. She joins, or rather helps create the resistance, seeking to remove the Empire from her country and regain her birthright. When she meets Vaan, they immediately form a strong bond, as in they exchange a few words without vomiting on one another. At the very least, the game tells you what Ashe is fighting for; it just isn't a very compelling reason. She wants vengeance for her father, her husband...and her country, and for the people of Dalmasca too I guess. On its own, revenge is a poor reason and hard to get behind, because it makes Ashe look like she wants the war to resume because someone must be punished for purely personal reasons. Despite the fact that much to my surprise, the Empire isn't described or even shown as being utterly evil, they are simply shown as the other side of the conflict (even if their leaders are basically super evil dictator levels of awful). When she gets a weapon of mass destruction, she wants to use it, even after the whole party says no, NPCs tell her don't, and she gets to see the end result of using

such a weapon, which is pretty horrible, but hey some magic ghost thing insists her to use it, as do the antagonists. She is easily manipulated by everyone save for the party members who encourage her to do the right thing, but of course in the end she chooses to not do the stupid thing, at the last possible second. That hanging thread only exists for faux tension in the penultimate exposition dump the plot forces you to swallow and accept at face value.

From a narrative standpoint, Ashe would have made for a great protagonist. The player would be able to see her change from a brash, angry person who had been robbed of everything fight to obtain her dignity along with the parts of her personality she lost to war. It could have been about her redemption as well as Basch's, together growing and moving forward to do what they feel is right. Instead, Ashe hardly learns anything throughout the entire game. She barely trusts Balthier, who to be fair doesn't treat her like royalty but still goes out of his way for her constantly, she hates Basch at first but then shrugs it off without a big scene involving the two about how the former knight explaining things to his Queen and how they both will fight to understand the truth. She doesn't care about the truth, she has little interest in the common people from what we /see/, but she says that she fights for them, when all she wants is power to fight back, even when she has foreign powers and nobles and diplomats wanting peace and to see Dalmasca restored. Then again, she can't be fully blamed due to how schizophrenic and unbelievable the antagonists are. Still, Ashe does the most, learns the most, and she could have been the main character, though then again her clouded anger and desire to get back at people for killing her husband (her father is hardly mentioned) seems to be another trope of popular media.

Oh, there's also Penelo, she is another character.

I could just leave it at that, but it would be mean.

Childhood friend of Vaan, street smart and compassionate, she is only in the party because, well, Vaan is there, making her the most unnecessary character of the six. Honestly, her addition to the cast is purely for convenient narrative purposes early on, but afterwards? She's there because Vaan is there, and I already discussed how little connection he has to the plot or even the other characters. After the plot uses her, in a typical girl is kidnapped plot, she hangs out because there's nothing better to do. She connects to every member of the party (except for Ashe and Fran really), usually by saying something nice to them, once, maybe twice, otherwise her interactions are limited. There isn't a big scene where everyone is discouraged and Penelo shows her optimism for the future and the faith she has in her friends, she's just a cardboard box

with a smiley face drawn on it. Oh, she held the Manufacted Nethecite for that one scene, big whoop anyone could have done that. Penelo's identity and character do not matter, she could have been anyone or anything and it wouldn't be any different as a result.

I don't hate Penelo, I just feel sorry for her, because like Vaan she is out of place, but at least Vaan sees a ghost that one time and then hits a bad guy with a sword at the end, she just becomes a background character like everyone else, save for Ashe, but she does it the fastest and is the least relevant. The game sets her up as becoming Vaan's partner, for when he becomes a Sky Pirate, so they can be the next generation of Balthier and Fran (and by generation I mean 5 years apart). She respects Vaan, but still acts like an older sister instead of a love interest, and she gets along with everyone, even if she cries and it bothers her kidnappers. It's wasted potential, but there was barely any there to begin with. Penelo simply does not matter.

Now then, it's time for the antagonists, and the main adversary for Final Fantasy XII is none other than Vayne Solidor, a character the party never exchanges words with until the last fight of the game. He is introduced as noble and capable, a high ranking man of the Empire, yet he shares no love for war and he wants the defeated Dalmascan people to only give him a chance as he rules over them. Surprisingly, despite his high birth he is sociable and friendly to 'common folk' in one scene; afterwards he becomes insanely evil because the plot says so. Another victim of wasted potential, Vayne would have worked better as a red herring instead of what was given. There are rumors of how evil and bloodthirsty he is, then again he deals with a senate run by self-serving jerks who do nothing but complain (insert joke about the Republicans in the American Congress here) and attempt to usurp the throne. He could have been one of those characters where you hear one thing but see another, and the player decides for themselves that his actions speak louder than words...but no, he wants to use magic stones to destroy Dalmasca because he wants to see nuclear war happen. Never mind the fact he apparently started another war a decade before the game takes place, all for the sake of testing and obtaining more knowledge about magic stones of doom and death. He wants to see stuff go boom, because reigns of history in the hands of man or something.

As I mentioned before, the party never even meets Vayne properly until the very, very end of the game. This is not inherently bad, but at the same time they have almost no connection to him, yet they talk like they know everything about all things Vayne. He might as well have been Chaos, or Dark Cloud, or Zemus, or Necron...okay, maybe not /that/ bad, but the bridge isn't there. It isn't like ExDeath/Exodus, Kefka,

Sephiroth/Jenovah, Kuja, Sin, Barthandelus, or other antagonists, he is someone they don't meet or interact with, they only know of what he does because someone else tells them. They never see his actions or even speak to him until the story is at its close. I understand that politicians aren't always out on the front lines, but he is a pivotal character and involved with most of the conflict that occurs, or he at least orders it. The main party gets angry at him, say how he is manipulative and war-hungry, but at the same time they never even speak with him. His motivation for nuclear war is incredibly cloudy, it's implied he is doing it for his brother, but that isn't completely true since he cockblocks his brother at least twice. He should have been more than this, or at least handled properly, since the creative effort on Vayne is utterly wasted as proof of the last boss fight. Spoiler alert, he transforms into a hyper muscular black guy with magic mist sucker punch powers. Riveting.

Probably Vayne's second in command is Dr. Cid, Balthier's father and brilliant mad-scientist. He is unremarkable, in every way, save for his voice actor who seems to be having fun delivering his lines complete with evil bad guy laughter. Dr. Cid is smug, arrogant, and wants to see history written by man, instead of by...time? His reasoning is weak, but he wants magic stones to make a nuclear war and to test the limits of destruction, or something. At the same time, he is hanging out with an evil magic-ghost, his friend of many years, who also wants mankind to blow each other up with magic stones, because he's bored. Dr. Cid gives a big exposition dump before, during, and after the first fight with him, then once more during the second encounter. He is a caricature, a would be James Bond villain complete with sassy one liners, and the few scenes he is in gives you little to care about. The ghost he is with, Venat, is just a jerk who helps people with the magic nuclear power, he is not worth mention, though he apparently encourages both Dr. Cid and Vayne to wage war and they say sure, why not? At first you assume there are ulterior motives, but Venat just seems to float around wanting to cause trouble for funsies.

Gabranth is next, and as Basch's twin brother you would think that is a big deal, it is not. He kills the king at the beginning, along with Reks, apparently because he changed his hair even if the two are distinctly different and their voices are obviously not the same. He is a Judge, a high ranking official, another part time weaksauce villain and possible racist given his line to Balthier's lizardman boyfriend, and of course he too is a waste of a character. Gabranth is angry because the Empire destroyed his homeland, but for some reason he blames his brother more so because he failed to single handedly defend said homeland from an obviously larger army. If that isn't stupid enough, he loyally follows Vayne for nearly the entire game, save for once, again, at the very end, and the party meets him then where he explains in Bond villain fashion that he

is responsible for the war continuing and all that nonsense. He is supposed to be loyal to Vayne's younger brother, but he betrays him and goes behind his back, but then of course at the end he finds true friendship and turns on Vayne, eventually. This is after he was already given a fake death scene at the hands of Dr. Cid, where he was also fired from his job as being a Judge, but it didn't matter. As mentioned before, he gives exposition dumps when he is rearing up for a fight, and Basch barely responds, but in the second one he at least talks back instead of Vaan, but it is far too little, far too late. It simply is not connected nor does it give any of the characters meaning or hook to the story at large, or even to other characters. It is a puzzle missing most of its pieces, yet it expects to be treated like a completed work.

Now, enough of the antagonists, there are some other supporting characters in this mockery of theatre. Larsa, Vayne's younger brother, is ambitious, courageous, compassionate, and surprisingly intelligent despite being only about 12 or so years old. In all fairness, out of anyone, Larsa should be the main character. This story should have been about how a young noble, living in an Empire he doesn't see as being run by gleefully evil magic ghosts, goes out, becomes enlightened of the situation and seeks to better the world in full. He could meet with other nation's leaders and sue for peace, perhaps even try to aid Ashe claiming her crown proper, since after all Larsa is next in line for the throne for the Empire, not Vayne, and with his aging father he would be king in only a few years. Fun fact, Larsa does most of this in the game, therefore being a more active and involved character with the main events than anyone from the main cast. Larsa is only a party guest, yet he has more foresight than Ashe and wants peace far more than she does, because he doesn't want to see another worthless war that ends in tragedy. Adding magic nukes to the equation and his efforts become even more impressive, but he is sadly, only a guest character. He investigates the Manufacted Nethecite, he travels past the Giza Plains, he insists they go to the Gran Kiltias, he is responsible for a good deal of major plot points. Never mind the fact he is polite and considerate to the entire party, but when he finds out that his father, the king of his country, has been murdered, Larsa is absolutely devastated by the news, and what do our main characters do? They all walk past him, not even bothering to give a single word or acknowledge him with a glance. He is their friend, their companion, and they all heard of the death of his father, and no one spends a single moment to care. I imagine Larsa would at the very least offer his condolences to his comrades if they suffered tragedy, he's a nice kid.

Despite Larsa's efforts, he is little more than naïve and optimistic regardless of how active he is in the narrative, not so with the other two guests of the party, Vossler and Reddas. Vossler is a knight, much like Basch, but he betrays the party so Ashe can

get to her throne and there won't be war, against her will, because she fears she will be too easy to manipulate or that the Empire will not keep their word, and then the party leaves him to die. Reddas is another former Judge turned Sky Pirate, much like Balthier, but his checkered past includes detonating the last weapon of mass destruction, killing thousands most likely and destroying a nation with a single blast. He feels very bad about this, because he says so in the same scene where he sacrifices himself to make sure no one gets to use magic nukes ever again, save for the artificially created ones. He's okay I guess, but still surprisingly brief in the game and very forgettable.

The rest of the cast is just whatever, they hardly matter, but I do have some almost sincere honorable mentions. Migelo, the tubby lizard man, and foster father for Vaan and Penelo is rather endearing, though his importance ends once he tells Balthier to help rescue said Penelo. Judge Drace, the only female Judge ever seen, and the only one who is /not/ pure evil, she supports Larsa sincerely, as opposed to Gabranth's pretend support, and is killed because it is super obvious that Vayne killed his dad and she calls him out on it. Montblanc, the moogles, who is an uncaring asshole in this game (though I am told he's nice in Final Fantasy Tactics Advance), but I think that a moogles running the super-secret mercenary clan is awesome and hints that he is badass, purely an optional character however. There are a few interesting folks across Ivalice, to be fair, like Jovvy the seeq or the fops in Arcadia, but this game is not about them, it is about the unholy clusterfuck of the story that takes place.

I will be brief in regards to the actual plot of Final Fantasy XII, since the character section covers some of the grievances already and how things are done simply because they needed to be done and not because characters are motivated. The game sets the stage for political intrigue, backstabbing, war, manipulation, weird magic stuff, all of which I adore, after all Final Fantasy Tactics is one of my favorite games EVER. While there is political intrigue and all that other fun stuff, it is conveyed through a dirtied lens and goes hand in hand with the characters either being barely relevant idiots or Saturday morning cartoon bad guys. All momentum and interest that the early game builds up, which it does fairly competently, starts to fall apart immediately around the events of Raithwall's Tomb, where the party goes to get another magic rock to prove Ashe is royalty. Afterwards, it is a slide downward, gradually getting worse, and by the time Reddas joins, near the end of the game, all motivation is completely lost as the player is just as disconnected from the events as the main party is.

Vayne, Dr. Cid, and their ghost pal want to see a war fought with magical nukes, and their judges are all power hungry assholes who also want war, save for Judge

Drace and I think one other guy who is barely relevant. Gabranth, despite being presented as loyal to Larsa when shown to the audience, does whatever Vayne says, while Larsa spends the game discovering that more weapons are being produced and that Ashe is still alive. The resistance, manned by Ondore (Think Lando from Star Trek then remove everything that made him likeable and interesting) after Ashe joins the party, is poised to attack at any time, full well knowing that magical nukes were used previously, and their forces are never actually seen until the end as well, but are eager for a war they will lose all the same. Meanwhile, Vayne kills his father and blames it on the senate who were waiting for the king to die anyway so they can manipulate Larsa into being their puppet ruler, but Larsa was already aware of this and he's too intelligent to fall for a ploy like that, so it becomes moot. As Larsa tries to get Ashe crowned as queen, who is hesitant all the while, it turns out that won't work because everyone wants to kill each other in war anyway even though she just got a magic stone to prove her identity, and afterwards the Empire commits a war crime by assaulting and murdering the Pope. No one cares about the Pope murder though, they all shrug it off, but Ashe finds a sword that can destroy the magic stones, so hooray. Still, the fake ghost of her dead husband leads to another sword that will make more magic stones, because it is one of the magic ghost's plans to see mankind wield weapons of mass destruction for funsies.

The plot boils down to; both sides are being manipulated by magic ghosts who want to see explosions, while the resistance is just looking for a fight with the Empire that they cannot win. Venat encourages Dr. Cid and Vayne, while the other magic ghosts encourage Ashe to murder everyone, but eventually Ashe says no thank you and Reddas dies stopping all magic stones forever. Everyone else in the game is just caught up in the cross fire of these very few actions, as the most interesting stuff happens before the story begins or never gets any attention. Dalmasca, Ashe's kingdom, is occupied by the Empire because her father was killed before the peace treaty could be signed, the only one who knew who killed the king was Vaan's brother, Reks, who sees Gabranth doing an amazing Basch impersonation through unknown means. Reks dies shortly afterwards, he says that Basch is a traitor, but instead of tying up that loose end they leave Basch in jail, which he escapes thanks to Vaan, Balthier, and Fran early on in the game. Basch's escape is never a plot point, Ashe's fake suicide /is/ however, because everyone says she is dead and Dalmasca has no leader, so the resistance is eager to fight...even though Ashe was part of said resistance, but I guess none of the Dalmascan loyalists recognized their rightful ruler because she went by the name Amalia instead.

It is flimsy to say that Ashe couldn't ascend the throne, especially with the

support of the Rozarian nation, one that Larsa (and not Ashe) persuades to come to the treaty table, as they too are poised to engage in the war. Al-Cid, a Rozarian noble knows that Ashe is the proper Queen, but also agrees she can't declare her throne and opt for peace, because then Vayne will say she isn't the real Queen and then Ondore will send the resistance on a death march. Is all of this making sense? I will admit I am rambling, but the twists and turns don't get the lip service they need, and ultimately this story isn't held together. The game is about Ashe proving her royal blood, but all it needs is someone saying, "Nope, it's not her," and then the apocalypse begins as a result. The resistance, the empire, and the Rozarians want the war to happen, when everyone knows that the empire is packing a super death weapon, since it wiped out Nabudis (some other country) just a few years ago. Vayne's actions are done to encourage Ashe to get more magic stones so that everyone can have some and then the country can get nuked, just to see what happens, basically, for either the sake of these magic ghosts or his own curiosity. It just simply does not work, this is not a well-crafted story of deception and politics, it is a he said she said, and if someone says it everyone hits the end the world button at once.

One more note, I get incredibly angry when people tell me that Final Fantasy XII is simply Star Wars IV: A New Hope. Let me say that you are stupid and wrong, as a few connections does not warrant such an assessment. Yes, Vaan lives in the desert, is (mostly) white, and wants to go on an adventure someday, somewhat similar to Luke Skywalker. He does not get droids, instead he breaks into the palace like an idiot and finds a magic nuke stone, where he meets Balthier and Fran, who people call the Han Solo and Chewbacca (because they're racists), and they are accompanied by Basch (Who I guess is Obi-Wan? Even though Balthier mentors Vaan and neither of them die) and they break out of prison and rescue Penelo and Ashe at the same time, because you know how women are, always getting kidnapped. I guess Ashe is supposed to be Princess Leia, and just like in Star Wars the movie is about her proving her status and wanting to nuke the world because her husband died. Penelo just hangs out, maybe she's R2D2, oh and Ondore is Lando because he fake betrays everyone and has a sky city. And Vossler is...I dunno, and Larsa and Reddas are, dudes who hang out, and Balthier's angry lizard man crush is Bobba Fett, hired by no one to kill Balthier for no reason that is ever explained. Okay, I get it, a few tropes make their appearances known. Yes, I know that Square-Enix likes Star Wars, but the connections are all best said sarcastically instead of in earnest, or better yet, not said at all. The Hero's Journey is as old as stories, but while Luke Skywalker goes through the Hero's Journey, Vaan does /not/, for the most part; perhaps this is why Luke works as a protagonist and Vaan stands around awkwardly with little to no motivation to do anything. We, the audience, struggle to care for Vaan because he hardly does or says anything of value.

It is a shame that the story is in shambles, that the characters are disconnected, and that the gameplay is horrid, because there is a lot that I like about the game. The world of Ivalice is wonderful, and Final Fantasy XII easily has the best cities out of /any/ videogame I have ever played. Each one is diverse, some even have their own dialects, but the best part is that every city feels LIVED in. There are tons of people, most you can't talk to, and lots of buildings, most you can't access, and overall the world seems massive and populated, this story only takes place in two, almost three countries while the rest of the world is doing their own business. It is not like other games where you get an airship and can circle the globe in a few seconds, this world is massive and it is populated. I would comment about the locations visited, but in retrospect due to the fact I actually like geography, nothing in Dalmasca makes any sense, as there is a lush jungle immediately adjacent to a desert and frozen mountains. I understand that Ivalice is not Earth, but that still just felt like a bit much to accept. The diverse species of intelligent life is also very appreciated, since that sort of universe appeals to me (obviously), and it offers much needed variety. Instead of everyone being white people, there are colorful lizards, orc-pig things, moogles, black-elf ladies, and some other stuff hanging about, integrated into society. Then again, with such a rich world with diversity, why are five of six playable characters white humes and the last one is just a token elf who is all strong and independent? All of the guests are white, save for Reddas who is quite tan, or potentially some other ethnicity, and Al-Cid is a smooth talking Spanish lady's man, because Don Flamenco and Vega needed someone to relate to in that corner of Spanish stereotype land.

The use of language is almost brilliant, but then again I am a sucker for 'olde' English speak, which allows for colorful quips and descriptions. Then again, Vaan and Penelo are seemingly the only two characters with speaking roles who talk with modern language, while the rest of the country seems to have the appropriate dialect. You could argue that because they're poor orphans and no one taught them how to speak proper, but their foster dad uses the same word choice and flow as the rest of the characters do. It's strange is all, but otherwise is probably why Balthier has some of the best lines in the game. The voice acting I found to be entertaining for the most part, even if Vaan has little to no emotion because the script doesn't call for it, same with others in the main cast, but it isn't outright bad, and hey Phil Lamar voices Reddas, so you know that is going to be fun. The music is fine, nothing overly enthralling, but it has nice moments, it's just nothing that makes me want to add it to a playlist, and the sound effects are adequate.

Unlike others, the idea of the license board, a gameplay element, was interesting

at first, since it is similar to the Sphere Grid from Final Fantasy X, but it allows for more customization and requires licenses to equip all of the weapons and armor in the game, as well as cast the spells and the like. It is interesting, as when I play I 'choose' a class for the main characters and have them focus on certain skills and lines of equipment, but eventually everyone learns everything and their unique factors are lost, far faster than they were in Final Fantasy X. Most of the skills I found were useless, but I can appreciate that they tried, I suppose. The diversity of weapons and armor I found to be a lot of fun to play around with, especially since I am a fan of weapon variety and the like, even if late game the only thing anyone will have reason to use are two handed swords and the Zodiac Spear, should they have it that is. Some of the side quests were interesting, gave more life to the world, and the hunt quests, while some being beyond infuriating due to my gameplay gripes were fun or at least marginally creative or had a neat subplot to go with it, but nearly every single higher ranking one abandons all strategy and just becomes a chore. Also, this game has my favorite design of chocobos, they are in their prime here, and Gilgamesh's appearance and personality is hilariously reminiscent of the Final Fantasy V character, even if the second half of fighting him has all of the same cheap tactics I have complained about already.

What else is there to mention? Well, just random gripes I suppose I had no room for otherwise. When the party engages in battle they pause to draw their weapons, which leaves them vulnerable for attack, and they always put their weapons away one second too soon after the action has died down, breaking the flow of battle repeatedly. This can also bite back when trying to retreat, as if you need to switch in another character, they will stand there for 3 seconds to draw their weapon only to put it away once more and probably be killed in the process, not allowing you to escape. Another issue is magic, mostly black magic as often spells are forced to 'queue' later on, leaving the party standing there not doing anything as the game tries to catch up with its thoughts. This is incredibly detrimental since you can get your ass kicked despite the fact there's nothing you can do but wait, even when the action bar is filled, action will not take place if certain situations, usually high tension ones. Way too many enemies, mostly optional ones, become invulnerable to physical and/or magical damage to make fights last longer, which is awful on its own, but you also aren't allowed to steal from them during these parts either, and stealing rare things is completely horrid. You can and will miss the Genji equipment, which is a staple of the series, unless you know about the two fights (both fought against the same enemy), the only two in the entire game has things you can steal depending on how much health points he has, and you are never told this. The loot is set up as an alternative to wolves and dragons dropping money, like in other games, they even poke fun at the idea...too bad animals drop rare equipment, ranging from crossbows to full suits of armor, so much for that bit of

'realism'. The mini-games early on are out of place and awkward, mostly Vaan shouting to get people's attention. In one of the optional dungeons, the game outright removes the map, requiring you to stumble blind in the actual dark, fighting enemies who constantly cheap shot you, but the worst thing about it is that one of the strongest enemies in the game, the Magick Pot, is a non-hostile that the Gambit System perceives as hostile and will immediately attack it, causing your party to take horrific amounts of damage in the process unless you already know what is coming and run the hell away.

Every Esper obtained in the game is worthless when it really counts. They are incredibly underpowered and unsuitable for the vast majority of random encounters, boss fights, and optional hunt marks, which is surprising since they are beings of pure power, but due to the battle system they are an utter waste. When you fight them, they have 'neat' gimmicks during said fights, but they all employ the same sucker punching cheap shot nonsense that keeps them at an advantage to draw out the fight longer and longer while all you can do is sit there and accept the abuse. Quickenings, special moves unique to each character, kinda like limit breaks, make no sense in the story and are never really explained, plus the only way they do damage is to chain multiple ones together with a little shuffle race against the clock timer sort of deal. Early game they can end troublesome boss fights more quickly, even with the spike in stats that the enemies get, but late game they are completely forgotten and simply a waste. The damage limit is returned to 9999, while the game offers an enemy with 50,000,000 health points and decides to change the damage limit to 6999 when he gets bored. Yeah I brought it up already, and it's still stupid.

Why does Vaan see the ghost in Raithwall's Tomb, but then doesn't at any other point in the game until when everyone sees it? Why again is Baganman after Balthier, what did he do to get a bounty that only ONE bounty hunter seems to care about? Why is Fran in heels, seriously? Why is Basch kept alive, so Gabranth can tease him once every two years? Why does Ashe fake her death instead of sign the treaty that would have ended the war and prevented the deaths of thousands? Why is Penelo so nonchalant about everything? How did the Judge not notice the magic stone Vaan was holding in his hands, after said hands were cuffed together? Why doesn't Montblanc help in the Yiazmat fight, despite his desire to see it killed? Why does Balthier trust Jules even though it was obvious he would steal the chops due to being a shifty asshole Balthier knows not to trust? Why are most of the techniques garbage? Why does the game expect you to have a strategy guide instead of actually giving you a chance, or rather encouraging you to figure things out on your own? Why is a group of bats potentially the most deadly random encounter? Why aren't there actual puzzles and

instead the game has you be a slave to trial and error? Why is the Great Crystal perhaps the worst thing ever? Why bother making so many rules that the enemy AI is allowed to violate? Why doesn't Larsa speak out against his brother, even though he knows he wants to nuke the resistance, until the last possible second despite being shown as proactive and engaged in the plot thus far? Why does Gabranth hate Basch and blame it on the fact Basch has the nerve to have honor despite losing some war or something? Why didn't anyone know, besides Vayne apparently, that Basch's twin brother was a high ranking member of his elite task force? Why do you need chops again? Why are all the Viera only seen as female, do they reproduce asexually? Why are all the bird dudes only seen as male, do they reproduce asexually? Why did a dessert turn into a flan monster and steal a key? Why is an optional fight inspired by Ultros a stupid flan thing instead of a pun loving octopus? Why is Vaan wearing an open metal vest that barely covers half of his abdomen?

If you like this game, then by all means, enjoy it. I honestly envy you, because I wish I could like this. I understand there is the international version of the game that changes...very little gameplay wise, and nothing story or character wise, but I figure that will be released eventually stateside probably as an HD re-master (which seems to be all the rage these days) and I will buy it, perhaps giving the gameplay another chance for nothing better than boredom. Still, Final Fantasy XII to me is akin to sweeping the kitchen floor while watching someone you do not like constantly leaving crumbs wherever you clean. Every so often, this person will throw crumbs in your eyes and kick the broom out of your hands, but you can pick the broom up and sweep some more, if you want. Sure it isn't fun or challenging or engaging, but it can and will pass the time.

For now, I stay my words though the bile I conjured with them has no doubt have slickened the floor. If you find grievance with my thoughts, by all means, I would hear your rebuttal, but being obligated to respond to you I am not. My heart is heavy, I weep for Final Fantasy XII, an experience I thought would enlighten as well as entertain me, but instead I am left more angry and bitter than before. Why did I partake on this fool's errand when my initial venture ended with such disdain? I felt that with more wizened eyes I could find value, perhaps even pity this attempt at interactive media...but instead I am made the fool, performing as a mummer to the tune of a choir unable to hear their own mediocrity. Where is my justice? Have the gods left me to starve? Whatever providence has decided, I scribed these experiences in tempered steel and laid the seal with my own spilt blood and tears of regret. Still, do not mourn for me, instead feel remorse and shame for Final Fantasy XII, for with its inception; Ivalice is indeed lost to us all.

