

Final Fantasy X-2 (Console Game Review)

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Girlpower Fantasy

Gun-toting girls, scantily clad sorceresses and black leather abound in this sequel to Square Enix's hit game Final Fantasy X. This portrayal of female characters reveals that popular fantasy is still subject to a powerful masculine bias.

Released in North America in December 2001, Final Fantasy X went double platinum (two million copies sold) on 15 April 2003 (Square Enix, 2003). Final Fantasy X-2 was released in Japan in March 2003 and shipped approximately two million units in the first month of its release (Square Enix, 2003).

Final Fantasy X-2 features the first all female lead cast in a Final Fantasy game. The portrayal of women in previous Final Fantasy games hasn't always been so openly sexual, but the female characters have suffered under the influence of a male-oriented industry. In FFXIII and FFX, female characters are generally weak in physical combat (Rinoa Heartilly, Princess Garnet, Eiko, etc.). Final Fantasy X's secondary lead character, Yuna, is weak in physical attacks, but strong in magic attacks. Despite her meek appearance and gentle nature, Yuna is determined to live up to her father's fame in defeating the evil force 'Sin'. She has the special ability of summoning Aeons to fight in battles, making her possibly the most powerful party member.

Power without physical prowess seems to be a major aspect of Final Fantasy X-2. Promotional graphics show the girls in provocative stances, holding large guns or swords (phallic symbols). Someone with such pencil-thin limbs and Barbie™ physiques could never lift these weapons. This has been seen many times before, such as in the classic Tombr Raider series and the not-so-popular Drakan games.

The three girls in Final Fantasy X-2 are Yuna and Rikku from Final Fantasy X and, newcomer, Paine. On one promotional movie, Yuna is described as 'Caring but Lethal', Rikku is 'Tough yet Fun' and Paine is 'Silent but Deadly'; everything the gaming-male could wish for in a woman.

Yuna's default apparel consists of a white camisole, which is open by about three inches between her breasts. She is wearing pants that would be too short for Warwick Davis and a half-skirt that flutters around her left leg. Rikku's miniskirt is even tinier than Yuna's pants and her upper body is clad only in a yellow bikini-top. Paine is dressed in black leather pants and myriad belts and buckles (similar to Lulu in Final Fantasy X, but sexier). With bare hips, belly and shoulders, she is the most covered of the three.

The movement and behaviour of the girls is also stereotyped to represent ditzy teenage girls. Yuna's running style involves her arms flailing to the front and back respectively, with her palms pushed out. In cut scenes, Rikku is often seen bopping around or moving flirtatiously. In an early scene, Yuna, Rikku and Paine find a hot spring and strip down to bikinis and splash around for five or ten minutes. This sequence seems completely irrelevant to the plot.

The first nemesis in the game is a female character called Leblanc whose pink dress is open in a triangle from her shoulders to her belly, revealing most of her breasts. Amusingly, there is a large red heart tattooed in the centre of her chest. Despite a somewhat frivolous attitude, her fighting theme is love, and she spends cut scenes swooning over a male character called Nooj.

One of Leblanc's goons comments on Praetor Baralai saying he is a 'girly man' who wouldn't stand a chance without his escort (Square Enix, 2003a). Although a pathetic insult, this line is a prime example of masculine bias operating in this game. The inference is that Baralai is weak or inferior because he is a "girly man".

There is no denying the female characters in Final Fantasy X-2 are victims of the sex factor. They are objects of the male gaze, designed to visual perfection by the CGI geniuses at Square-Enix. Is it any coincidence that their ages are said to be 19, 17 and 18? (Hyper Game Guide, 2004).

While the Final Fantasy games are among the best RPGs I've played, I do not enjoy the ridiculous antics of the female characters or their silly outfits. At the very least, masculine innuendo should be reduced or eliminated. It is good to see an RPG with three female lead characters. However, in this situation, their portrayal becomes all the more significant. Sex sells, but it doesn't add anything to the substance of the game. It takes away a degree of credibility in the world of the game and produces dangerous messages to young people about how their bodies should be.

References

- Hyper Game Guide (2004) 'Your Expert Guide to Final Fantasy X-2' pages 11–13.
- Square Enix, (2003) Press Release for Final Fantasy X-2 (<http://www.square-enix-usa.com/seui/index.htm>).
- Square Enix (2003a) Final Fantasy X-2. Image copyrights: The author of this article considers the inclusion of these images to be fair use.