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Final Fantasy XI (X360)

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I Don't Want to Play Online
Xbox 360 version of Final Fantasy XI feels a bit dated.
by **Anoop Gantayat**

December 10, 2005 - My Xbox 360 launch day was ruined by a three year old PlayStation 2 title and its dated interface.

So, I arrive home Saturday morning following Microsoft's official Japanese launch event in Tokyo. I take hold of the slick Xbox 360 controller -- check! I navigate the slick new interface in 720p -- check! I log in to Xbox Live, get the system to locate and reactivate my two-year-old Live account without any effort on my part (I didn't even input my gamer tag!) and accept a month of free gold access -- double check! I put in Ridge Racer 6 and jump onto an Online server -- triple nitrus check!

Then, I open the wrapping for the **Final Fantasy XI** beta that Square Enix and Microsoft had bundled with the system for free. The vast world of Vana'diel, in high definition, using Xbox Live, the greatest thing for Online gaming since the internet? What could be better? Slipping the disk in, I attempt to log in.

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Wait... I'm still inputting my name using the exact same interface from the PS2 version. While going through this difficult process, I can't help but think back to a few minutes earlier when I'd input my personal information into the Xbox Live interface. I was smiling then, still on a high over the next generationness of it all. The smile -- and all my dreams and hopes -- have disappeared at this point.

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Wait... I'm still inputting my address using the exact same interface from the PS2 version. The thing wouldn't recognize the kanji combination for a part of my address, so I have to input individual kanji characters, which totally sucks considering that the Xbox Live interface had gone Online to access the details of my address after I'd simply inserted my postal code.

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Thirty minutes later, and I've at last gotten through the whole name and address thing, and even made it through a particularly trying process involving inputting a 20-digit registration code. But now they're making me input the username and password that I was just given. They're quizzing me to make sure that I wrote it down. Why don't they just e-mail it to the address I provided earlier?

And did I mention the happy jazz music they've got playing in the background during this lengthy process? It's a real insult to the ears, considering that this is a company known for its game soundtracks. How come they don't have Final Fantasy music playing in the background? Or Front Mission Online music? Have you heard the music from the Front Mission Online trailers? It really gets you pumped up to play the game. That would make for good background music (and incidentally, Square Enix, give us an Xbox 360 version of Front Mission Online now!).

Eventually, I managed to get through the trying initial setup procedure, but the nightmare was just beginning. This first setup phase, it turns out, was just for Play Online, which is sort of like a Square Enix version of Xbox Live, with friend lists, messaging and even your own e-mail address. Once that procedure is done, you still have to get FFXI up and running.

How does an hour long load process for FFXI sound? Not good? Well you're getting it! The Xbox 360 may be next generation and all, but based off the performance of the FFXI beta (and we'll remind you that it is an early version of the title -- there may be some improvements before the final), it's still pretty slow at copying data over from DVD to hard disk. FFXI takes up about five gigs of space on the hard disk, by the way, so you'll want to make sure that you've got enough space. The Japanese X360 has about 11 gigs left open in factory default state, which left me with an uncomfortable 6 gigs after FFXI had been installed.

And that still won't get you into the world of Vana'diel. To complete the registration process, you have to log on to Play Online, using an interface that wishes it had a mouse, work your way through a few menus, input your FFXI registration code (all 20 digits!) to get a Contents ID, and wait 15 minutes for another update before you can play for the first time.

As was the case with Play Online running on the PS2, the browser looks nice running on a television and loads up quickly through a high speed connection. It even displays everything in high resolution for the Xbox 360, although it cheats for 16x9 output by putting borders around the central interface.

So you're done. FFXI is installed and ready to go. Playing shouldn't be a problem from here on out, right? Not quite. Each time you want to play FFXI, you have to start up the Play Online browser. When you stick in your FFXI disk, Play Online is what automatically starts up, not FFXI. Get into the browser, and you need to log in. The browser prompts you to connect to your Xbox Live account -- silver or gold -- if you haven't done so already. Then, you need to select Final Fantasy XI from the list of games (the rest of the titles are for the PS2 and PC) and click through a couple of start-up messages, and at long last you can play. And then, of course, there's the nuisance of having to fully log-off in order to exit a game of FFXI.

If you've played FFXI previously, the process of going through Play Online to get into and out of a game session may seem familiar. On the PS2, which didn't have a complete Online solution like Xbox Live, Play Online's existence was justified and even welcomed. On Xbox 360... not so justified, and definitely not welcomed.

Play Online is a redundancy in the world of Xbox Live. Microsoft already gives Xbox Live players communication tools, friend lists and a unified billing environment. Now here's Square Enix giving us those same features, but not implemented nearly as well. The extra step of logging into and out of Play Online each time you want to play FFXI is annoying enough, but its made worse with the unfriendly Play Online interface and the added bonus of having a completely separate friend list to manage.

I'm sure Square Enix has its reasons for having Play Online running on the X360. But one would hope that some of the redundancies with Xbox Live could be eliminated, and some of Xbox Live's better features incorporated, before FFXI and the Play Online browser go final.

Game Details for Final Fantasy XI

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Published by: Square Enix
Developed by: Square Enix
Genre: Persistent Online RPG
Release Date:
US: May 2006
Japan: Unreleased

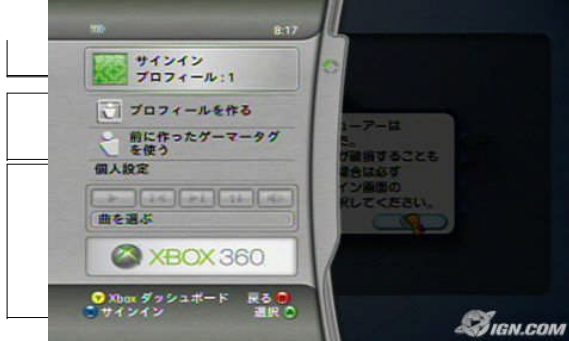**ESRB Content Descriptors:** Animated Blood, Violence

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Xbox Live running on top of Play Online.
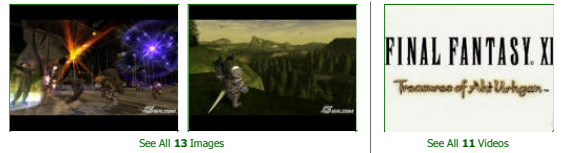Or maybe it's the other way around.

Get into the a play session of the beta version of X360 FFXI, and you'll find a dated game running on new hardware. In still shots, the game may look like it's been improved some over the PS2 title, but in motion, the changes don't make for a particularly attractive X360 showcase. The biggest culprit is frame rate, with the game chugging to keep up with large-scale environments and the large number of potential players, just like it did on the PS2. Character models and environmental detail are also too low for a reasonable next generation title.

If you don't have a means of playing FFXI outside of the Xbox 360 and you really want to play the game, you may want to keep an eye out for the new version as its release approaches. Personally, before testing the massively multiplayer Online RPG waters on Microsoft's next generation platform, I'll wait for a game that fixes the visual defects of current generation titles.

There's clearly a whole lot of "beta" to the beta version of Final Fantasy XI Xbox 360 at this point. The game's fonts, software keyboard and menus are so tiny that they're practically unreadable unless you're sitting right in front of your television. We presume this will be fixed for the final version, and we also hope that the visuals will see some updates.

But will Square Enix fix the game's biggest problem, its awkward, redundant Play Online interface? If not, then they ought to stop handing out free beta copies and souring the next generation taste for early Xbox 360 adopters.

If you're interested in this game, be sure to **add it to your wishlist**. *You can keep notes, rank games, get updates by email, and more.*

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