



• Make them mobs sparkle, boys.

PUBLISHER: Square Enix DEVELOPER: Square Enix GENRE: MMORPG AVAILABILITY: Retail ESRB RATING: Teen
 MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 800MHz CPU, 128MB RAM, 2GB hard drive space, Final Fantasy XI (gamepad recommended) MULTIPLAYER: Massive-scale VERSION REVIEWED: Retail Box

REVIEW

It seems like every *Final Fantasy XI* expansion is a reaction to the previous one. *Chains of Promathia* was a pain in the ass, and *Treasures of Aht Urhgan* was an overly generous cakewalk by comparison. But *Treasures* came with its own problems, such as a still-broken mass-scale conflict event called *Besieged*, which suffers from fun-destroying latency issues and overcrowding. *Wings of the Goddess* addresses this concern by taking the *Besieged* concept and spreading it out all over *FFXI*'s world of Vana'diel in an effort to make it more manageable. The expansion also provides an entirely new world for players to romp around in.

Detractors might say that *Wings*' contribution in opening up an anachronous 20-years-past version of Vana'diel allowed the developers to fashion a huge new playground while repurposing many already-existing assets—which somewhat blunts the impact and excitement of the “new” areas. Enthusiasts might say this provides players a deeper look at the mythology and the characters that *FFXI* veterans have come to know and love. Both arguments have merit, which leads us directly to the low quantity of available quests, missions, and activities available to players since the game's November 2007 launch. It seems like Square Enix was either: a) in a hurry to get this one out in time to make the fiscal report; or b) satisfied to release an unfinished product, with the intention of doling out the goods through giant patches. In the console world, this would be called “an unfinished game,” but in the PC world, it apparently means “boxed copy.” Unfortunately, in the case of *Wings*' multiplatform releases, both console and PC players receive the same so-so experience.

The good news: The aforementioned Campaign Battles (the new, ever-occurring, small-scale skirmishes against the game's Beastman armies) are incredibly fun, with tons of NPC allies to help round things out in case live players aren't gathered in your particular territory. Minibosses and a consistent flow of foot soldiers offer battle fodder, experience points, and reputation boosts. Battling these armies in Vana'diel's familiar-yet-weathered sights adds a weary gravity to the experience, in a good way.

CLASS CLOWNS

The two new job classes—Dancer and Scholar—are head-scratchingly uneven. The Dancer is a powerful solo and group support job that addresses the game's need for a new tank class, while the Scholar is a third-tier healer/nuker during everything but the game's highest levels. Future balancing might improve the Scholar's place in *FFXI*...but for now, it's the center-halfback of mage classes. Not the best nuker, not the best healer, but able to switch between both roles on the fly.

Wings of the Goddess' overall worth in the *FFXI* canon is a bit muddy; after clearing the game's mere handful of missions in the first day after release, I found the overall experience lacking. Square Enix ought to try shipping a more complete game the next time around. • James Mielke

VERDICT

❑ New jobs are fun; Campaign Battles make up for the last expansion's busted *Besieged* mode.

❑ No excuse for shipping an unfinished game.

5.5/10

AVERAGE

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