

Final Fantasy 6: Return of the Dark Sorcerer Hack

Note: This review was written around the release of RotDS 1.2.

By chuckro, December 18, 2014

[Source](#)

2,000 years ago, the War of the Magi happened. Now, Ghestal's Black Orchid corporate scientists are trying to harness magitek for evil aims. While the events of FF6 are largely familiar, names and faces are changed; several guest stars from FF7 and FF4 appear; cameo appearances from other games series abound; and the difficulty is cranked up to 11.

A full hack of FF3 US that rearranges the plot, adds a bunch of new characters and events, and ramps up the difficulty (because don't they all?). I think there were several design impulses that went into the creation of this, and I both have varied opinions on the effectiveness of each one and concerns about how well they blend together.

1. Someone clearly wanted to enhance parts of FF6 with extended cutscenes, building out the story. I thought this was great, and you can see it from the very beginning: The intro is an extended version of the original, with more screen time for Biggs and Wedge, and an early introduction to Kefka and the Magitek facility and a mysterious woman who's spying on it (Tifa/Celes). This, however, conflicts with...

2. The desire to create a new story using the new characters they've created. I REALLY liked that Arc was totally not Gau, and had a completely different backstory and extra scenes. Ditto for the entire Reaper storyline with Avalon. The problem was that the hack was locked into most of the FF6 cutscenes, event flags and story progression, so even characters set up to be different (such as Avalon vs. Cyan) end up acting like the original characters for the majority of their appearances. The idea that Ghestal was running a "corporation" was abandoned very early on, as he's called "emperor" and he's clearly running an empire, not a business. There's also the problem of...

3. Cameo appearances of Cloud, Tifa, Aerith, FuSoYa and Golbez. This felt like a design decision that was fighting against the desire to create original characters and a new storyline, by integrating older characters and their plotlines in instead. It didn't help that, from his introduction until the end of the Floating Continent, FuSoYa basically becomes the main character. But in either case, the seriousness of the integrated plotlines is wrecked by...

4. The addition of characters from a dozen other media sources as comic cameos. Half of the monsters are re-sprited as Mana series enemies, or Mario Brother enemies, or Mega Man enemies. Siegfried is randomly a Mana character whose story is never expanded on and never goes anywhere. Characters from Adventure Time pop up repeatedly, which makes me wonder if the sprite hacker just liked the way they came out so he kept putting them places. The Magitek facility has a metroid and a Mr. Saturn floating in the tanks. Dr. Oak replaces Cid. One of the Narshe ("Fraust") battles is against Prinnies (and how much prinnies hate moogles becomes a running gag). How nasty a battle was going to be could never be determined by how scary a monster looked, but that wasn't a big deal, because...

5. They obviously wanted to create a "hard mode" of the game, even more so than the last hack I played. On one hand, I give them immense credit for actually working within the system of the game to give enemies new attack patterns, varied weaknesses, and interesting strategies for you to figure out. They were trying hard to make battles interesting, versus other hard mode hackers that just make bosses immune to everything with a mountain of HP you need to chip away at. But they still

went way too far—you were obviously supposed to die repeatedly against bosses until you figured out their gimmicks, grind for stat-up tabs, make multiple trips to each World of Ruin area to fight harder monsters (the optional chest monsters were reliably harder than the required bosses), and trade around your best equipment to even have a prayer in Kefka's Tower. It's basically: Did you like the Dragon's Den bonus dungeon in FF6 Advance? Here's LOTS OF THAT!

As a related note, I had a hell of a time getting this to run. You need a headered v1.0 FF3 US rom, which I eventually had to use SNESTool to create, and even then, the patched rom would only run in the latest version of Z-SNES.

And by the time I reached Mt. Kolts, I already put the game into "tourist mode" by using cheat codes to level my characters, periodically make them invincible, and sometimes turn off random encounters. I'd never have made it through this honestly, nor would I actually have wanted to. I was in it to get a good sense of the hard work the hackers put into it, not to bang my head against a wall of impossible battles.

I'm thinking I'll put up my raw notes as a separate post, so anyone who wants to read all the way through them and see the edits and commentary can do so. Though I'll note that there were a couple of loose threads I couldn't find, that I'd love to hear someone more knowledgeable weigh in on: I never found FuSoYa in the World of Ruin, which meant I never got into Ebot's Rock. I couldn't get a reaction out of the Queen's Statue in the Ancient Castle. I missed a dragon somewhere (the earth dragon seems the likely culprit, as I couldn't find the Opera House) so I don't know what happens when you beat them all. I never found the Dream Stone that is referenced in the developer's room. And I couldn't even scratch the Omega Mk. 4 bonus boss in Fraust.

Overall: Did you like the Dragon's Den bonus dungeon in FF6 Advance? Gameplay-wise, it's a whole game full of that. Story wise, they made some very good attempts at hacking in new scenes and changing characters, but the differing design impulses means they never came together as a coherent whole. I'd really love to see a much shorter game with fewer characters that hacks up the event flags and puts the original characters in the spotlight—basically, if you're going to go so off the original script, then jump off the cliff and make a Prophet's Guile / Crimson Echoes style hack.

From:
<https://www.ff6hacking.com/wiki/> - **ff6hacking.com wiki**

Permanent link:
<https://www.ff6hacking.com/wiki/doku.php?id=ff3:ff3us:hacks:rotds:reviews:chuck>

Last update: **2019/02/12 09:57**

