Hacktastic: Final Fantasy VI lives on with the help of modders

Note: This article was written around the release of RotDS 1.2.
By Brian Hamby, November 21, 2014
[Source](#)

A bit about me

When I was a young kid, I tried my best to limit my nerd level. It was futile, mind you—I was a total dweeb and should have simply owned it—but instead I would put up resistance to certain activities that I felt would put me too far over the line. For instance, I was into comic books, but refused to try Magic the Gathering. And I was mental about video games, but wouldn't even give RPG's a shot. It was all completely arbitrary. As if it made any freaking difference what type of game I was glued to all weekend.

Well luckily my RPGphobia came to an end when my fat little happy-go-lucky brother brought home Final Fantasy 3 from the video rental store one day. I was pissed. "That game is going to be sooooo boring," I told him. "Aww man, you can't even read! Mom's probably going to make me read all that lame dialog to you!" But my flaming ginger friend Mikey was game (wink wink) for anything, so the two of them plugged in the SNES and had at it, whereas I went in my room and probably smashed X-Men figures together while making explosion sounds, or something equally badass.

After a while I got up and got water and peeked in the door at the dummies playing the boring game, then went back to my room. A bit later I went to the bathroom and peeked in again. To my absolute chagrin as the know-it-all older brother, what I saw was beginning to look interesting. Later still, I stood in the doorway for no reason at all and watched and watched. Finally I couldn't help myself but swallow my pride, and play. And it was glorious. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is how I was introduced to my lifelong favorite game of all time, Final Fantasy VI (3 in America, but you knew that).

This story is only made more ridiculous by the sad fact that it happened almost exactly the same way a couple years later with an even nerdier game, Heroes of Might and Magic II, but that is a tale for another time.

If you've never played a Final Fantasy game before FF7, let me tell you this, they are 2D (pronounced "too-dee"), as in flat. Also the characters and monsters are all very polite and will only attack in single file. Oh, and there are no black people. Other than that it's the same. So since FF6 was the last "flat" game in the main line of Final Fantasies, it truly has the most detailed and beautiful sprites of nearly any game of the SNES era. And best music. And best writing. ANYWAY.

The Point

There are a lot of other people who have never let FF6 go from there memory, and perhaps cherish it even more than I do. Even to the point where they spend years of their lives working to tweak, rebuild, or otherwise completely remix and redesign the game from the basic building blocks of what defines it. These saintly people hang out at a place called ff6hacking.com and they sometimes even complete these labors of love.

The most recent project to clear the gate is Return of the Dark Sorcerer. RotDS is the brainchild of Gi Nattak (GN), but he was joined by his friends Angelo26, Madsiur, Pocoloco and dozens of other FF6 hacking fanatics he met online. The game just finished up its fourth beta cycle and has released version 1.1 after a 3 year development cycle. I had a chance to sit down and play the thing this weekend and was ultimately surprised—in the good way. I also go to speak to Gi Nattak about the FF6/SNES hack scene and the process of making the game:

The Interview

IR: *How were you first introduced to FF6? Why did you choose to hack that particular game?*

GN: *I was introduced to it by my friend Alex the year it came out. He was really into RPGs, Squaresoft of course, and I fell in love with FF6. His mother ran a day care service, and basically she didn't have to do anything because we would all play and watch FF6, as well as other great titles. FF6 was always my favorite SNES RPG, I love everything about it and it holds a very special place in my heart. I chose to hack it for that reason, and also because it is the most hack-friendly game there is, due to the amount of documentation and utilities and community.*

IR: *What's the FF6Hacking scene like as a whole? Is there any communication/collaboration with other hacking/mod scenes, or is it fairly encapsulated?*

GN: *In my opinion, I feel that it can be hit or miss... Meaning there is some collaboration when it comes to large projects, but it really depends on the scope of the project, and who is involved. We at ff6hacking have had a couple collaboration projects at one point or another, but the fact of the matter is, the vast majority of projects will never see the light of day. Making a hack of any kind is going to be time consuming, and the truth is that a lot of the more experienced hackers are not interested in assisting hands on with new, unknown projects. There are just so many new faces that show up on the scene with a grand project in mind, yet no real idea how hard it is, and they soon leave. So I feel*

that you must basically go it alone at first, ask questions and show initiative, and try to get others interested in hack. Overall, the community is very friendly, but there are always going to be some elitists out there.

IR: *As far as 16bit and down games are concerned, to your knowledge does FF6 have the largest/most active hack community?*

GN: *Yes, easily. But, there are some die hard FFIV hackers that seem to be increasing lately with some new utilities that have been brought to the table.*

IR: I'm sure there had to have been some lower productivity periods at times during the project. What kept you going through the years-long process?

GN: *I'd like to think that I am one to finish something I start. It became a great hobby and I got to know a lot of really cool people that took lots of time out of their lives to help create and test this hack, and for those people doing that, I made damn sure that this hack would indeed be released eventually and not rushed. It's been a lot of fun!*

IR: *Was there ever any (perhaps small) disagreement as to the direction of the game, or as to what characters/elements from the original should remain in the mod?*

GN: *In terms of the new events, there was very little disagreement in terms of what should be done. Both Angelo and I (and later Poco Loco with some specific character events) both share similar ideas and were always on the same page tossing around ideas when we were in the planning stages. We both wanted to create some behind-the-scenes story elements to the original. And we rarely would shoot down each other's ideas. If he wanted to put an idea he had in I would be fine with that, regardless. I alone came up with the main radical story change that I will not divulge here, but luckily it seems to have been accepted well enough so that nobody thought it sucked bad enough to tell me to change it! The character choices are pretty random, and mostly again that was my decision from the start. I just went with it, so to speak.*

IR: *What would you say the biggest highlight of the whole experience of making RotDS was?*

GN: *Meeting and working with my buddies Poco Loco, Angelo26, and Madsiur, and everybody else that I had the pleasure of getting to know along the way. Learning the inside and out of FF6 and every possible detail the game has to discover would have to be a second.*

IR: *What other projects are you working on now?*

GN: *Getting a job! Seriously though, I've been wanting to get started on a Secret of Mana hack. But I'm still wrapped up with RotDS!*

Gi Nattak's rinky-dink site rotds.webs.com is down right now because of the influx of people trying to download the game, but you can download it here for now. It's free, so you should definitely play it yourself, but I can give you an idea of what you're getting into.
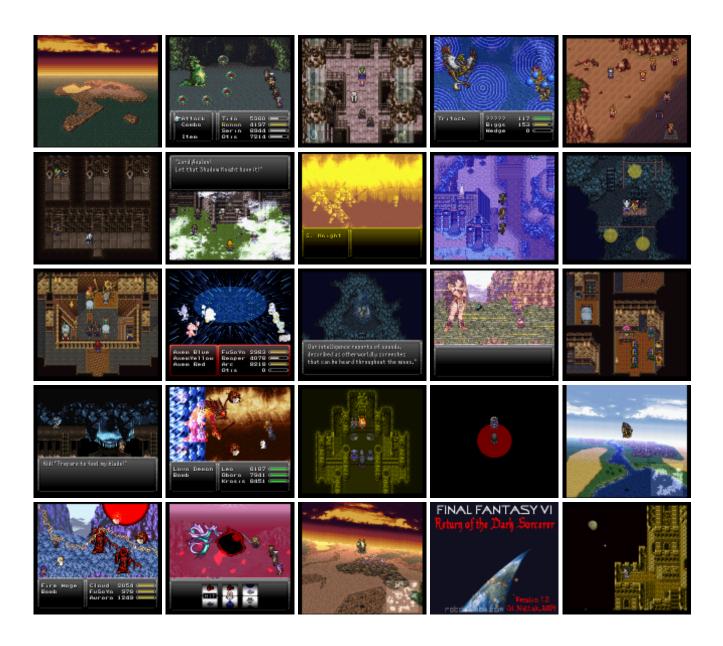
The Game

It starts with quite a long intro, so be prepared. Well, actually there is an option to skip it, but who does that? Going into the experience, I was under the assumption that the game was going to share

little except the spirit of its inspiration, but what I found is that it is really more of a remix/mashup of the original. Kefka still remains as the antagonist (thank good, er, badness). He has different hair and his laugh has changed pitch, but he is still a huge asshole (maybe even more so, if you can imagine). Cameos and references to other games are numerous. For instance, Professor Oak has taken over Cid's job as reluctant science lackey to Kefka; Metroids and Mr. Saturns float alongside espers in research tubes—but although the game is funny at times, it never dips too deep into parody. You will recognize both people and locations, yet they are… different. It most closely resembles a "parallel universe" situation, with threads of other games getting tangled in to this alternate timeline of events. The music is a mix of injections from other games, and original compositions which try hard to walk alongside the original tunage. Let's just say that it can't compete with Nobuo Uematsu's masterpiece, but that was to be expected of anyone, bar the next great game composer on the planet.

Overall the game is great, and is a must-play for any retro RPG fan out there.

Screenshots

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