



CRYSTAL-CLEAR D*iff*ERENCE

*Think you know Final Fantasy and Crystal Chronicles?
Think Again. Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: The
Crystal Bearers for Wii is the franchise's most innovative
and captivating installment in years.*

The development cycle for Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: The Crystal Bearer has been an unusual one. When Square Enix unveiled the game more than three years ago at E3 2006, it looked impressive, sure, with all indications pointing to a typical multiplayer Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles game, albeit now on the Wii system. But little information about the game followed; other Crystal Chronicles titles came and went, but news about The Crystal Bearer was nil. At one point the game was rumored to be canceled. But earlier this year the developers proved that that was not the case. The Crystal Bearer re-emerged, and it was unlike any Final Fantasy we'd seen before. The game sported a new look, a new single-player focus, a new hero, a new emphasis on stylish motion-controlled action, even a dynamic new logo. Nintendo Power recently had a chance to delve even deeper into the world of The Crystal Bearer, and after spending a few hours there, we have no qualms declaring that this is one of the most exciting Final Fantasy games in ages.

The changes start with the outlook of the Crystal Chronicles world. In past games in the series, the population was made up primarily of four distinct but essentially equal races: humanlike Clavats, crafty and rugged Selkies, stout but powerful Lilties, and lanky, magic-wielding Yukes. But 1,000 years have passed since the story of the original Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles on GameCube, and in that time there's been tremendous conflict and loss. In

an event known as the Great War, the Lilties destroyed the Yuke Crystal, apparently wiping the Yukes from existence. The Lilties enjoyed newfound prosperity, became the world's dominant race, and ushered in a new age of science and reason. Lower on the social ladder are the Clavats, who

mostly live as peaceful farmers or servants, and the Selkies, who have become a class of carefree outlaws who tend to rebel against Lilty rule. Though the world is now more or less at peace, there are underlying themes of racial oppression and genocide—not exactly lighthearted stuff.

"It is a strangely distorted world—one that was supposed to be lush with nature and in a pre-industrialized state, with each race living within the boundaries of their distinct cultures," comments director Toshiyuki Itahana. "Instead, one of the races suddenly acquires a technology far more advanced than the others, and gains power. Players will witness some exciting scenes that portray this sort of distortion, like one in which a luxury airship, flying with an air of superiority, soars over a

field of chocobo-riding people."

To match the aged-up tone, The Crystal Bearer features a more mature look; the cutesy, superdeformed designs of previous Crystal Chronicles titles are replaced by more-realistically proportioned characters. While still sporting a sense of playful whimsy, the intricately detailed visuals are now more in step with what you'd expect from the recent mainline Final Fantasy titles.

SPELL BINDING

Magic is forbidden in the new Lilty-controlled era of technology, yet there are those who can freely wield its arcane powers—the so-called crystal bearers. Evidently, crystal bearers have used their abilities with disastrous results in the past, so the general populace avoids and fears them with good reason. And that, not surprisingly, is where you come in—straight into the shoes of Layle, a 21-year-old free-spirited crystal bearer for hire who can use the power of telekinesis.

"Layle has always been prone to becoming 'involved in the mess' because of his special powers, and has tackled many adventures in his time," explains Itahana. "The events of this game are just another episode in his hectic life,



[Above] The relationship between Layle and Belle promises to be one of the most entertaining aspects of The Crystal Bearer.

so in designing him we didn't want to include aspects of a young boy that would suggest a coming development. We wanted to create more of a 'completed' young man. His jacket (complete with chainmail!) has a weathered, broken-in look worthy of one that has survived

many a dangerous scene."

Indeed, Layle seems drawn to trouble—or trouble is drawn to him. In the game's opening scenes, Layle is working as an escort for the airship *Alexis II* when it's attacked by a group of purple winged beasts. Confident in his power, Layle throws himself into the wild blue yonder and, while in freefall, uses his abilities to telekinetically wield a massive gun with which he dispatches his foes.

Immediately afterward, Layle finds himself on the airship's deck, face-to-helmet with a Yuke that emerges from a portal. For someone who's supposed to be extinct, the Yuke seems pretty healthy (read: strong), and a fantastically choreographed fight breaks out between it and Layle. The clash ends with the Yuke—named Amidatellion—getting the upper hand and draining the airship's engine power into a crystal idol. With the ship losing altitude, Amidatellion flees on one of his winged creatures, leaving Layle

to use his telekinesis to keep the airship aloft while steering it safely to the capital city of Alftaria.

GIRL TROUBLE

Layle ends up in more hot water not long after entering the city, when he gets caught up in a pursuit between the city guards and an alluring Selkie named Belle. Despite Layle's earlier heroics, the guards, predictably, turn their attention toward him for using magic. Layle and Belle escape the city by crashing through a window,

and though Belle tries to sneak off by using Layle as a decoy, Layle keeps her duplicity in check long enough to allow them both to race away on a chocobo-pulled cart, the guards close behind.

"[Belle] is the troublemaker of this story, as well as a key individual responsible for getting Layle mixed up in the drama," Itahana says. "She is extremely good at sneaking into places, and finds her way on to the luxury airship that appears at the beginning of the game, calling herself a photog-

