

## Whatever Happened to Mistwalker, and What is it Making Now?

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### Mistwalker's Origins

The origins of development studio Mistwalker are ultimately rooted in the “demise” of Square – if one wants to call it that. Riding on an unprecedented high after the release of *Final Fantasy VII*, the JRPG giant seemed as though it could do no wrong, and it was within this backdrop that Square Pictures and *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* happened.

Part of the inevitable fallout of that grand failure was Hironobu Sakaguchi's departure from Square after twenty years, a tenure that began with the company's formation. Over the twenty years since, much has been made of that departure, and it doesn't bear repeating here.

When Sakaguchi-san struck out on his own with Mistwalker, he did so with an eye on returning to what he did best: actually making games, as opposed to the executive duties he was tasked with in his senior position at Square.

## The Early Years of Mistwalker

The early years of Mistwalker saw a return to form for the *Final Fantasy* creator and his team. Mistwalker's first two projects – both Xbox 360 JRPGs – led to what are now considered cult classics: *Lost Odyssey* and *Blue Dragon*. It's these two titles that Mistwalker is best known for to this day. A third Xbox 360 RPG to be titled *Cry On* was to carry on some of the same design philosophy as *Lost Odyssey* but ultimately canceled.



Cover art for *Lost Odyssey* and *Blue Dragon*

But to say that Mistwalker created these games doesn't really tell the whole tale. Rather, in its early years, Mistwalker was a concept studio of about twenty staff members that oversaw production in collaboration with more traditional game studios. *Blue Dragon* was developed in tandem with Artoon (of *Blinx* fame); *Lost Odyssey* was co-developed with the help of Feelplus, a studio formed by Microsoft for the sole purpose of assisting Mistwalker.

Mistwalker's next big title would be *The Last Story*, co-developed with AQ Interactive and released for the Nintendo Wii in 2011. It marked the first time that Sakaguchi served as game director since *Final Fantasy V*. The project was largely a collaboration with Nintendo, whose influence on the action-RPG was strong. The end result was another role playing classic for Mistwalker.

## After The Last Story Was Told

Following *The Last Story*, Mistwalker would do a major about-face in the way it operates. The studio's next game would be...a surfing sim for iOS and Android titled *Party Wave*. This unassuming mobile title marked the beginning of a new era for Mistwalker, and gone were the days of the epic role playing console games for which the studio and its leader were known. Sakaguchi has always cited a desire to work with a smaller team as the reasoning for this change. Of course, mobile game development is generally be more accommodating for smaller teams, hence Mistwalker's shift toward making mobile games.

Over the last decade Mistwalker has mostly focused on its mobile *Terra Battle* tactical card battle/role playing franchise. And in 2021, Mistwalker released *Fantasian*, a mobile RPG that largely emulates old-school JRPG design. Sakaguchi was inspired to make the game after replaying *Final Fantasy VI* with his former Square colleagues.





Hironobu Sakaguchi | Source: LinkedIn

While many thought *Fantasian* might be Sakaguchi's last hurrah, in late 2022 the gaming icon revealed that he has "started writing the scenario for an unannounced dark fantasy game which is now in development."

Sakaguchi has stated that *Fantasian* was a return to his roots, and that for the remainder of his career he wants to be really honest with himself about making the games he wants to make. Could he be preparing for one last console-sized grand role playing adventure for his swan song? Only time will tell.

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