The Men Who Created *Final Fantasy VII*

Development Staff Roundtable

The four main staff members responsible for creating *Final Fantasy VII* have come together for the writing of this book. We present to you a round-table discussion loaded with interesting topics, from never-before-discussed production secrets to development plans for the future.

Seeing a boxing video game from overseas, he was convinced 3D was the future!

Interviewer: Eight years have passed since *Final Fantasy VII* was released to the world. Why do you think it continues to receive so much support from players?

Kitase: Well, that's certainly a tough question to lead with [laughs]. Back then, everyone was calling the PlayStation the next generation in consoles, and we were all very eager to make our first 3D game on it. Also, it was a period of firsts for everyone: it was Nojima's first time working on the *Final Fantasy* series; it was Naora's first time leading the background graphics team; and it was Nomura's first serious job as a character designer. That sort of mutual excitement and enthusiasm were instrumental, and we were able to produce a work that channeled that energy directly to the players, which could be a reason it's still received so well today.

Nomura: I definitely felt a strong desire to surpass all the previous *Final Fantasy* games. At least for me, the characters of *Final Fantasy IV* were much more iconic at that time, so I had this urge to make even better ones.

Nojima: At that time, with the PlayStation hitting the market, the landscape was changing in terms of which console was most powerful, and the world suddenly felt like a carnival of possibility. I think in some ways we were able to ride that wave of excitement.

Naora: Speaking from a design perspective, I think one of the reasons the game became so popular was that it gave players their first real experience with CG. Looking back on it now, there are still a few rough spots, but at the time, players regarded it as novel and innovative, and to that extent I think it left a lasting impression. Though, to tell the truth, I didn't want to work in 3D at first, and I was constantly getting into arguments with Sakaguchi [Hironobu Sakaguchi, *Final Fantasy VII*'s producer] and Kitase [laughs].

Interviewer: So, you were unexpectedly in the pro-2D camp?

Naora: I was at first, yes. They kept trying to persuade me: "Make the movements you were doing in 2D using 3D—it'll look good!" I thought there was no way I'd be swayed by the outcome, but when I actually saw the characters moving on the screen, I was like, "Wow, that's amazing!" I couldn't help but be surprised, like a total newbie [laughs]. I changed my mind, realizing it would be much more effective in 3D.

Kitase: Actually, at that time there was an overseas boxing game for PC called *4D Sports Boxing* [published by Electronic Arts] in which you control polygon characters. It looked super new and fresh, and I thought to myself, "This is the next generation of gaming!"

Naora: I remember now…. You were always trying relentlessly to promote that game at meetings [laughs].

Final Fantasy VII was going to be on a different system before the PlayStation version was created!?

Interviewer: Given that 3D graphics were part of the premise, was it your plan to release the game on the PlayStation from the beginning of the project?

Kitase: No… well… am I even allowed to say this? Actually, at the start we were planning to release the game on a different system. At the time, we were told this system would be getting a disc drive, and we tried to make the game with that in mind. In fact, up until roughly a month before the exhibition opened, we were working on making a demo video to be played at the product debut. It was a clip where Cloud and two party members fight monsters on the field map where we press the button to blow up Mako Reactor 1. However, at that time we'd seen neither hide nor hair of the promised disc drive, and we had to create the video using equipment that only guessed at the hardware.

Naora: Wasn't there a plan to release it on yet another system before that?

Kitase: In a manner of speaking. After *Final Fantasy VI*'s development was finished, we started on a project to make *Final Fantasy VII* for another different system. We held planning meetings and submitted ideas for characters, but in order to help with *Chrono Trigger*, the team was temporarily dissolved, and things got reset. Once *Chrono Trigger* was completed, the team reunited to make the disc drive version I mentioned earlier. However, there was a change in policy just before the product exhibition, and we ultimately decided to release the game on the PlayStation.

Nomura: I was involved with the project before it got reset by *Chrono Trigger*, and some of the ideas I came up with then can still be found in the PlayStation version of *Final Fantasy VII*. Conversely, one of the characters that didn't end up getting used actually shows up in *Final Fantasy VIII*.

Interviewer: Which character is that?

Nomura: Edea. Initially, I was considering making *Final Fantasy VII* a story about battling a witch. But after development was reworked the first time, Sakaguchi handed me a plot involving a mako city, and I gave up on making the witch story.

Kitase: At the beginning of development, you had an early plot Sakaguchi had written up, right?

Nomura: The very first plot was a story that started in New York, and the next plot I got after that was a story set in a mako city.

Kitase: We still hadn't come up with the name "Midgar" yet, but there was this image of skyscrapers illuminated by searchlights, and the setting for a mako city was emerging. Quite a

few alterations were made in the end, but the theme of the planet's life as well as Sakaguchi's initial plot become the basis for the final story.

Nojima: Weren't materia also Sakaguchi's idea?

Kitase: That's right. If I remember correctly, it was called the "Sphere System" at that time. But Sakaguchi said he wanted the term to give a clearer impression, so we settled on the name "materia."

Nomura: We still have illustrations of the first characters I drew based on Sakaguchi's early plot.

Kitase: Cloud wasn't around back then, was he?

Nomura: Cloud wasn't there, but there was a protagonist who served as his model.

Kitase: Wasn't he a train robber?

Nomura: No, I think he was supposed to blow something up. There was also a detective. And I remember drawing a character who was the protagonist's sidekick, named "Needle Nicholas."

Naora: Ah, right, I remember that name.

Kitase: So, Nicholas was Barret?

Nomura: No, Barret probably wasn't around yet back then. If memory serves, the protagonist and Needle Nicholas form a team and blow something up, and then they get chased by the detective. I think it was something like that.

Kitase and Nojima were also in charge of *Final Fantasy VII*'s motion design

Interviewer: What was your approach to creating *Final Fantasy VII*'s main scenario?

Kitase: At the beginning, Nomura and I looked at Sakaguchi's plot and came up with various different story components based on it, such as scenarios we'd like to try and scenes we'd like to put in. We then basically handed those components to Nojima and had him put them together. Of course, Nojima also had story ideas he wanted to implement, so he sort of mixed his concepts together with ours.

Nojima: Sometimes I included other people's story ideas, and other times I'd feign ignorance and disregard them [laughs].

Nomura: I had a totally different story in mind for Sephiroth at first. I believe I wrote a plot where Sephiroth and his companions get chased by Cloud's party. That ended up becoming the model for Jenova and the Reunion.

Nojima: I seem to remember everyone liked Sephiroth more than Cloud. There were times when Cloud's actions hadn't been decided yet, and the only thing we'd determined was what Sephiroth was going to do in that scene [laughs].

Kitase: Was it Nojima's idea to have that whole arc with Cloud searching for himself?

Nojima: Yeah, that was probably me. I thought a simplistic story about saving the world wouldn't be all that compelling. I've always liked stories where the protagonist has some kind of personal issue, so I wanted to make a tale like that.

Kitase: Along with creating those types of scenarios, different project leads were responsible for coming up with events at each location around the world. It's the same approach we've always taken with *Final Fantasy* games.

Interviewer: In other words, all these events designed by multiple different creators were then integrated into a single scenario?

Nojima: That's right. I had a rough idea about stuff like Cloud not actually being a SOLDIER and the things that transpired in Nibelheim, and then I sort of took the events happening in all the other places and combined them.

Kitase: I'm sure that for Nojima, making games like that is no sweat, though if I suddenly asked him to let me play around at the Gold Saucer, he wouldn't know what to do.

Nojima: True. When I know the event's content from the start, I can find some way to merge it with the main scenario, but field maps and ideas and other stuff that come up later don't fit easily into the premise, so I have a hard time with that. For example, I'd wonder, "What kind of guests would come visit the Gold Saucer at a time like this?" [laughs]. Which reminds me… Back then it was the planners [i.e., the event leads] who did the character motions, right?

Kitase: Yeah, that's right. Back in the SNES days, we had various graphics prepared for us to use in the animations, and we planners created the movements. For example, we'd have a designer [i.e., a graphics lead] draw pictures of a hand being raised and a hand being lowered, and then a planner would display them in an alternating pattern to make the hand pump up and down. It was the designer's job to draw the original animation pictures, and the planner's job to decide how characters should move. *Final Fantasy VII* continued using that approach: the designers would create the characters' polygon models and we would apply them to create "motions" [animations for the polygon models].

Nomura: Back then, my work booth was next to Kitase's, and I would hear him exhale—"Haah…"—from time to time. When Kitase concentrates he stops breathing [laughs]. One time he was working on the scene where Barret's yelling in the elevator on the way to blow up the mako reactor, and when I saw Barret's hand trembling with rage, I thought to myself, "Wow, that's incredible. So this is the sort of thing we can make."

Naora: The way 3D allowed us to do dramatic scenes with the camera focusing above the waist was a really big deal.

Interviewer: So that motion Barret makes was done by Mr. Kitase, correct?

Kitase: That's right. I just booted up the CG software and put the motion together. But later on in development we had a dedicated motion designer take charge of all that.

Nojima: Speaking of which, I remember Kitase giving a wry sort of smile when he saw the animation for the scene where Tifa's locked in the gas chamber and trying to escape.

Kitase: Yeah, I was thinking, "It sure looks different when a specialist does it" [laughs].

Interviewer: Did you also create motions, Mr. Nojima?

Nojima: Well, sort of. The motions I made were so different from the specialist's that almost all of them had to be remade. So all the motions for the scenes I was in charge of should look pretty good [laughs].

Kitase: Nojima, where were the events you did?

Nojima: Let's see… I think there was the church where Aerith and Cloud meet, the Northern Cave, and also the Nibelheim stuff. Since the main scenario wasn't quite finished, the events for the narratively important locations kept getting put off, and eventually I ended up in charge of them….

Kitase: I use that technique quite a bit, don't I? If I put myself in charge of the events in important places for the scenario, then it's okay if the main story lags behind a little [laughs].

Nojima: The result was that nobody knew how all the plot threads we'd woven so far would connect until the last stages of development.

Kitase: Only Nojima knew.

Nojima: That's right. A lot of people came up to me asking about it, but I didn't want to say anything reckless since it was still just a scramble in my head and hadn't taken on any real shape.

Naora: And so back then, everyone was making their own wild guess about what would happen [laughs].

Interviewer: Mr. Nojima, this game was the first time you worked on the *Final Fantasy* series, right?

Nojima: That's correct. When the *Final Fantasy VII* project was starting up, I was still working on the *Bahamut Lagoon* project, but then Sakaguchi said to me, "Why not work on *Final Fantasy VII* next?" At that time, I was planning to take some time off after *Bahamut Lagoon* was finished. So I asked Kitase, "What should I do about taking time off?" and he said, "The sooner you can join us the better, but personally I think you should have a rest." And I thought, "Well, which one is it?" [laughs].

Kitase: What did you end up doing?

Nojima: I took a break and then joined the project right after. I was thinking to myself, "Final Fantasy is a blockbuster franchise. Surely they'll hold proper meetings and decide on content in an organized fashion." Imagine my surprise when I learned content was decided on while we all stood around talking in hallways or smoke areas or bathrooms [laughs].

Kitase: Before Nojima joined Square [now Square Enix], he'd helped create games like *Glory of Heracles III* [a Greek mythology–inspired RPG for the SNES, published by Data East], so we knew he was someone who could write interesting scenarios, and I think Sakaguchi in particular wanted him to join the *Final Fantasy* team. Despite the fact he already had a job in the game industry, Nojima came in and interviewed at our company like everyone else.

Nojima: But even then I used my connections. I didn't present a game proposal or do any of the other stuff specified by the application guidelines in the magazine—I only brought my resume [laughs].

The plot of *Final Fantasy V*'s ending changed Nomura's destiny?

Interviewer: Mr. Nomura, your character design for *Final Fantasy VII* catapulted you to fame, didn't it?

Nomura: Believe it or not, the first time I took a hand in character design was with *Final Fantasy VI*. *Final Fantasy VI* was announced with these sideways chibi character illustrations, and I was the one who drew the basis for those.

Interviewer: Compared with previous *Final Fantasy* games, the [more realistic character proportions] in *Final Fantasy VII* made quite an impression.

Nomura: Yes, they did. From the start Sakaguchi directed me to increase [the proportional height of the characters]. Though, even then, I was told they should only be four or five heads tall at first. Then, as I continued drawing, their [proportional height] slowly grew.

Interviewer: In addition to character design, you were also quite involved with [character] premises, correct?

Nomura: That's right. Back when I worked on *Final Fantasy VI*, I thought up the premises for the characters Setzer and Shadow, and with *Final Fantasy VII* I was able to continue working on that type of thing.

Kitase: Starting with *Final Fantasy VI*, Nomura would use characters as a jumping-off point and come to me with plot pitches, saying, "I've got this idea for the story—what do you think?" With *Final Fantasy VII* there was a sort of escalation of that.

Nomura [to Kitase]: Do you mind if I get a little candid here today?

Kitase: Well… about what?

Nomura: About how the ending of *Final Fantasy V* was originally…

Kitase: Looks like he's already started [laughs].

Nomura: The plot of *Final Fantasy V*'s ending had already been completed, but I really disliked the way the story wrapped up, so without thinking I went to Kitase and told him I'd like to change it a bit. I just wasn't satisfied with the goofy, slapstick feel it had, so I came up with an alternative.

Kitase: Oh, right, right—I remember.

Nomura: And so I got them to change the ending for *Final Fantasy V*'s commercial release. Since then I've been bringing a whole bunch of different ideas to the table.

Interviewer: So, Mr. Nojima and Mr. Nomura came up with *Final Fantasy VII*'s characters as a pair?

Kitase: Nomura took a visual approach, while Nojima took more of a narrative approach.

Nojima: Now that I think about it, I'd hardly ever spoken to Tetsu-san [Nomura] when we started.

Nomura: That's true.

Kitase: Huh? Why's that?

Nojima: Because we sat so far apart. Also, I probably wouldn't have been able to match Tetsu-san's name to his face. I would have been like, "Is this guy Tetsu-san…?"

Nomura: It was the same for me. Since Nojima hadn't been around at the company for very long, I didn't know him all that well.

Kitase: Is that right? How did you have meetings with each other?

Nojima: We did them through Kitase [laughs]. Well, even though we didn't have verbal exchanges, Tetsu-san went ahead and created the premise for each character—stuff like their birthday, how old they were, and their personality.

Interviewer: Didn't you two ever discuss the scenario together?

Nomura: Hmm… I don't remember discussing it much when we were working on *Final Fantasy VII*.

Nojima: I don't think we were absolutely uncommunicative with each other. It's just that we didn't do it very frequently.

Nomura: As always, I put out a lot of ideas during the initial phase where we were trying to figure out what kind of game to make, but when the time came for Nojima to write the scenario, I left everything up to him and more or less kept my hands off.

Nojima: I remember I'd come into work and find a copy of a new character illustration on my desk.

Nomura: Back then, whenever I finished a new one I'd make copies and place them at everyone's spots.

Kitase: I see—so you were always crossing paths without meeting one another [laughs].

The color scheme for the town of Zozo in *Final Fantasy VI* is what clinched Naora's promotion

Interviewer: Mr. Naora, were you involved with the *Final Fantasy VII* project from the time of its inception?

Naora: Yes, I was. I joined Square Enix partway through *Final Fantasy VI*, so *Final Fantasy VII* was the first time I participated from the start of a project.

Kitase: Back during *Final Fantasy VI*, I was in charge of the events for the town of Zozo, and Naora came on as the designer for that area. And he used colors like blue and purple to create a field map that looked more like a Western game than a Japanese one.

Naora: That was right at the time I was really into French comics.

Kitase: I saw that design and initially thought, "Naora's probably not going to go very far" [laughs].

Naora: I was thinking the same thing [laughs].

Kitase: At that time, vibrant color schemes were the norm with SNES games, but the field map Naora created was totally different. I worried about whether his color scheme would work out, but it ended up leaving quite an impression.

Naora: Well, that was on purpose. Most of the other maps had this bold, clearly defined color scheme, so I thought there should be at least one location with a different visual feel. And being a town full of criminals, I gave it an impression of darkness.

Interviewer: With your next work, you took a step up and became the art director, didn't you?

Naora: I was surprised when my turn came so suddenly. Why on earth was I the one who got picked?

Kitase: I talked about *4D Sports Boxing* at the beginning [of the interview]. At that time, 3D was starting to be used in games overseas, so I had a feeling that if we made *Final Fantasy VII* in 3D, we'd probably have to compete with all those other titles. And that got me wondering if the time had come for games with a Western-style color scheme like the one in Zozo [laughs]. Another reason was that Takahashi [Tetsuya Takahashi, who later directed *Xenogears*], the graphics director for *Final Fantasy VI*, wanted to move in a different direction from *Final Fantasy*, so I thought I'd try leaving *Final Fantasy* in Naora's hands.

Naora: That reminds me… Before I started working on *Final Fantasy VII*, I was talking with Taka-san [Takahashi], and he was saying, "I'd like to try doing things using backgrounds with an anime touch," and, "Well, how about we use those kinds of graphics next time?" Then, before I knew it, Taka-san was working on *Xenogears*, and I thought to myself, "Wait a minute—he wasn't talking about *Final Fantasy*?" [laughs].

Kitase: Personally, I've never been able to forget those dreary-feeling building walls in Zozo.

Naora: That was me trying to incorporate some new approaches to lighting. I wanted to experiment a little and see what appearance I could achieve with the lighting instead of just using clear-cut color tones. In the same vein, with *Final Fantasy VII* making the jump to 3D, I was hoping to take things further with the lighting.

Kitase: By the way, what field maps did you do for *Final Fantasy VI* other than Zozo?

Naora: I did the Floating Continent and the overworld. And I did a few of the dungeons. At the time, I was told the paths in the dungeons were hard to see, and I struggled with that a little. And then again with *Final Fantasy VII* there were sections of field maps where it was hard to tell where the character was—so that was clearly an area for me to improve upon. In an attempt to mitigate that problem, I made it so a cursor would appear [above the character] when you pressed the select button.

The Avalanche Fusion!? Johnny's true reason for setting out!?

Interviewer: Were there any ideas, regardless of how memorable they were, that never made it into the game?

Nomura: As far as the things I remember… There was an idea I had when we were trying to make the game for that other system with the disk drive. I was considering a feature that would use the analogue sticks in the middle of the controller.

Interviewer: What were the particulars of that idea?

Nomura: To put it simply, it was a sort of dungeon exploration feature. The idea was that before entering a dungeon yourself, you'd be able to send some object or other into its depths and see what was waiting inside.

Nojima: What I remember is the Honeybee Inn stuff. The events there were created by Toriyama [Motomu Toriyama, director of *Final Fantasy X-2*], but at first the content was even more extreme, and everyone was saying it was overkill.

Kitase: Was it really that over the top?

Nojima: Pretty much… For example, Palmer would emerge from the inn saying, "Ah, that was refreshing!" [laughs].

Kitase: Toriyama would often come up with these surprising—or maybe I should say problematic—events, which had to be fixed on many occasions. For instance, there was this scene on the station platform where Biggs, Jessie, and Wedge from Avalanche would face each other and try with all their might to fuse together.

Naora: Ah, right, there was that.

Kitase: When an event begins in *Final Fantasy VII*, there's a sequence where the party members split off from Cloud's model and they become three separate people. Conversely, when the event is over, the members merge and Cloud once again becomes the sole character you control. In essence that's just how the game's set up, but Toriyama was parodying that. The Avalanche trio would say something like, "Let's fuse, too!" and come together with a bang—they'd smack into each other without merging and mutter, "I guess we still don't have enough practice" [laughs].

Nojima: He even went to the trouble of making dedicated motions for them [laughs].

Kitase: That's right. He prepared motions where the three of them would bump together and all fall down, and he even went ahead and got it running on an actual PlayStation. As you can guess, people said it would be tactless to have a scene like that parodying one of the game's mechanics, so we ended up scrapping it.

Nojima: Well, it may actually have just been a subterfuge to hide something more egregious [laughs]. Sometimes in the events Toriyama created, when Cloud was close up in the middle of the screen delivering his lines, there'd be a character back in the corner messing around.

Kitase: If I remember correctly, Toriyama was the one who did Johnny's story arc.

Nojima: Yeah, he was. All of the field maps where Johnny appears after setting out from the Midgar slums were locations Toriyama was in charge of. The locations Toriyama was in charge of were geographically distant from one another, so in order for Johnny to show up in all of them, we had to establish this journey he goes on, and for that reason his story just kept getting bigger and bigger.

Interviewer: Thinking back on it, you can see how the colorful energy of the Honeybee Inn served as a model for *Final Fantasy X-2*, which Mr. Toriyama worked on as director.

Kitase: Though, as you can see, he kept himself in check when it came to *Final Fantasy X-2*. I wonder if he was exercising restraint in his capacity as director.

Nojima: Like, "I guess I'm the one who has to take responsibility here" [laughs].

Interviewer: Mr. Nojima, you started off working with Mr. Toriyama on *Bahamut Lagoon*, correct?

Nojima: Toriyama taught me all sorts of things back when I joined Square.

Naora: Ah, he did, did he?

Nojima: … Like where I should go when I slacked off from work [laughs]. In those days there was a park behind the office. He taught me that if you were in a smoking area, the higher ups might come around and you'd get in trouble, but if you were at the park, no one would come and bother you for a while [laughs]. With *Bahamut Lagoon*, the story had been divided into

individual chapters, and Toriyama and I were working on rewriting the contents of each chapter into an overarching scenario. We both had a general idea of how everything should flow, but Toriyama would end up making these big changes to the content we'd initially discussed. And I remember always keeping a close eye on him to make sure the story threads and foreshadowing came together neatly [laughs].

Interviewer: In the early days of *Final Fantasy X*'s development, you and Mr. Toriyama also wrote your own different scenarios, right? Do you feel like the two of you have been friendly rivals ever since *Bahamut Lagoon*?

Nojima: No… Although, when you phrase it like that, it sounds pretty cool [laughs].

The *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* and continuing the series with a remake of the original

Interviewer: What prompted you to start the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* project, which began with *Before Crisis: Final Fantasy VII*?

Nomura: The first thing we started with was *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*, but after that I was asked by the Mobile Operations Division [the company department that develops software for cell phones] to work on something together with them. At that point I'd decided that Reno and Rude from *Advent Children* would play an active role in the game, and because the notion of receiving orders sent via email to a cell phone suited the Turks so well, I made up my mind that *Before Crisis* would be a story about the Turks. The next title we decided on was *Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII*. Shortly after the *Before Crisis* project got off the ground, I heard about a first-person shooter project from Kitase. He asked me which character from a previous *Final Fantasy* game I'd suggest using in it, and I said, "If [it's an FPS game], Vincent would be a good choice."

Interviewer: Mr. Kitase, you have such an attachment to shooters that you even created one as a minigame for *Final Fantasy X-2*, is that right?

Kitase: It's not so much an attachment as a simple fondness for them. Actually, ever since *Final Fantasy X-2*, I've secretly been aiming to make an FPS game.

Naora: For some reason it's often mild-mannered people who take a surprising liking to FPS games [laughs].

Nomura: And so with that we'd completed three titles related to *Final Fantasy VII*, and we agreed we may as well consolidate them and develop the whole thing as a compilation.

Interviewer: It's become an unprecedentedly huge project as far as the *Final Fantasy* series goes.

Nomura: Well, I guess that's sort of just how it turned out. We didn't start out thinking, "Let's make this and this and this and then call it a compilation." Rather, the timing just happened to match up, and those *Final Fantasy VII* titles ended up being released to the public at the same time.

Interviewer: However, isn't it true that the reason these projects came about was because you all shared a desire from the beginning to expand the world of *Final Fantasy VII*?

Nomura: I can't really say.

Kitase: Well, in all honesty, I didn't feel that way right after we finished making *Final Fantasy VII*. That's why I didn't start working on a sequel until now. But when I decided to help make *Advent Children* and saw it start to take shape as a sequel of sorts, I gradually became more and more excited. Of course, creating a sequel to *Final Fantasy VII* requires a great deal of preparation and determination. When *Advent Children*'s development started to gather steam, I thought that here was a chance to create a title that would finally put [*Final Fantasy VII*'s] world to use.

Interviewer: Mr. Naora, you're the art director for *Advent Children*. What was your reaction when you first heard about the compilation?

Naora: My approach was to expand on things as much as possible—on the creation of the towns, on how things appeared after [Meteor]. My initial impression was that the plot for the scenario was quite expansive, so I decided to prepare pictures that would meet that expectation. In the end, I think I was able to come up with something that surprised even myself. Also, when I saw titles like *Before Crisis* and *Dirge of Cerberus* come along and increase the depth of the world, I once again realized that *Final Fantasy VII* is still a moldable resource with the potential to be developed in that way. I feel like it's actually a good thing the world and setting of *Final Fantasy VII* weren't developed drum-tight, but instead left a reasonable margin for flexibility.

Interviewer: And how about you, Mr. Nojima?

Nojima: If it had been one or two years after *Final Fantasy VII* was released, I probably would have thought, "Not happening," but it's been fun to take on the challenge after so much time has passed. It gives me a sort of superiority complex knowing more than anyone else in the world about how the compilation titles connect, how the characters who appear in them are related—that kind of thing [laughs].

Interviewer: At any rate, with the compilation titles building momentum like this, fans are anticipating the long-rumored remake of the original *Final Fantasy VII*….

Kitase: The remake, huh? Well… how exactly should I respond?

Nomura: I answered that question in a foreign interview the other day—did you know? Kitase told me, "Tetsu, you do it."

Kitase: You don't have to broadcast it to the whole world [laughs].

Nomura: He said, "If you want to do a remake, do it with your own team." He said he didn't have enough time to do it himself right now.

Interviewer: At E3 [the world's largest gaming expo, held in the United States], the opening of *Final Fantasy VII* was played as a demo clip for the PS3. Was that supposed to serve as a preliminary announcement for something?

Kitase: No. Please think of that simply as a demo. The production period we had for that clip was quite short, and we created the *Final Fantasy VII* opening because it was the easiest for us to envision in its finished form. There was no particularly deep meaning to it beyond that.

Interviewer: In that case, instead of a remake, what about a sequel-type game like *Final Fantasy X-2*?

Kitase: But again, if we decided to make that we'd struggle with the same problems as a remake. Who would do it? Would there be space in the schedule? That kind of thing.

Nomura: To tell the truth, Kitase and I have half-jokingly talked about a remake or a *Final Fantasy VII-2*, but the workload seemed so daunting and we kept ceding it to each other's team [laughs]. But if you think about it carefully, our *Kingdom Hearts* team has the most original members who helped with *Final Fantasy VII*'s development. So, if by some chance it actually happens, I think our team should be the one to do it. Because, after all, if it does get made, it should be worked on by people who were involved with the original *Final Fantasy VII*. However, we truly don't have the time to do it right now. Even if, for argument's sake, we started development right away, we probably wouldn't complete it for quite some time.

Kitase: No matter how you look at it, I don't think it would be possible to pull it off in less than five years.

Interviewer: Considering the scale of the project, it sounds like you'd have to choose between producing a brand new *Final Fantasy* title or making *Final Fantasy VII-2*.

Nomura: If that's the choice, I'd most likely go with the new title.

Kitase: When I think about it, *Final Fantasy VII*'s compilation really came together quite well, didn't it?

Nomura: Thanks to all those different time windows just happening to line up.

Interviewer: Well, let's all pray the timing works out again so a remake or *Final Fantasy VII-2* can be released [laughs].

(Held on August 8th, 2005, at Square Enix)

Yoshinori Kitase (Director)
Compilation Involvement - *Before Crisis*: Co-Producer; *Advent Children*, *Dirge of Cerberus*, *Crisis Core*: Producer
"I'm grateful to everyone who's supported us all these years."
"*Final Fantasy VII* prompted major changes in the way we created subsequent titles and what direction we aimed to take the series in. In that sense, I think *Final Fantasy VII* is a sort of starting point that determined the identity of *Final Fantasy* as it is today, and in that capacity it's a work we're all strongly attached to. Therefore, it makes me extremely happy to be able to create compilation titles that serve as sequels and stories about what happened to the characters after [the events of the original game]. This all came to fruition thanks to fans who've supported *Final Fantasy VII* ever since it first hit shelves. I'm truly grateful to all of you. After *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* and up to and including *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII*, there's still a long period of content I think you'll enjoy, so please stay excited as you wait for it."

Kazushige Nojima (Scenario Writer)
Compilation Involvement - *Before Crisis*: Scenario Supervisor; *Advent Children*: Scenario Writer

"Compared to my previous jobs, working on *Final Fantasy VII* felt like stepping onto a huge ship for the first time. Of course, just because the ship was big didn't mean I felt at ease—it was a rather difficult voyage, but I was able to see things with a broader perspective. In terms of technique, it was my first time crafting a story where the protagonist speaks, and served as a source of invaluable personal experience. Thanks to my involvement with it, I also got to travel to Venice [laughs]. I'm immensely grateful to the many players who've supported us for so long. We'll continue from here on out to do work that rivals the quality of *Final Fantasy VII*, so please don't go anywhere. 'No matter where I am or what I'm working on, my heart lies ever with *Final Fantasy VII*' [laughs]."

Tetsuya Nomura (Character Designer)
Compilation Involvement - *Before Crisis*, *Crisis Core*: Concept and Character Design; *Dirge of Cerberus*: Character Design; *Advent Children*: Director
"I'm carefully considering how the compilation will conclude."
"*Final Fantasy VII* is of course extremely important to me, but at the same time, it's the kind of work I've always had a strong, compulsive goal of surpassing. I think that, until the release of the compilation titles, *Final Fantasy VII* was slumbering in players' hearts as a game resigned to history, but now it's awakened and is shining brilliantly once again. Things will continue for another year or so, so please bear with us for a little while longer. By the way, I'm always thinking about how to wrap up the ending to the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII*. What will come next? How will the ending bring things to a close? I'll consider these things carefully as we continue with production, so please look forward to it."

Yūsuke Naora (Art Director)
Compilation Involvement - *Advent Children*: Art Director; *Dirge of Cerberus*: Art Supervisor
"I'd like to repay everyone's kindness in whatever way I can."
"Creating *Final Fantasy VII* in part determined the trajectory for our subsequent work. I think it's because we were able to deliver a break-through product with the intent of surpassing previous *Final Fantasy* games that we now have the opportunity to expand on it the way we're doing with the compilation titles. Lately, when I speak with people around me, I can sense they have very high expectations regarding *Final Fantasy VII*. Despite the amount of time that's passed, it still hasn't lost its appeal. On the contrary, anticipation for it is growing, and I'm feeling pressure in the best sense possible. To all our players, I'd like to thank you for continuing to play the game for so long and sending us so much feedback. My hope is that I can continue making games that repay, in whatever small way possible, all the kindness you've shown us."