

An Exclusive with the Main Staff!

The reveal of the latest *Final Fantasy VII* title has left gaming fans reeling. When and how did this marvelous project begin, and why is it being made into a cinematic work? The main staff peel back these mysteries, update us on the movie's production status, and share highlights from each scene! Don't miss this exclusive interview, brought to you by the indomitable tag-team that is Dreamaga and Mina-tan!

The Main Staff Working on *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* Come Together to Talk!

[Image caption:] Mina-tan can't hold back her excitement over this unexpected Final Fantasy VII title. Asked when the film will be finished, Nomura said he hopes to get it done by next summer.

[Image caption:] Remarks like "I can't believe it—it looks like a live-action movie!" and "Amazing!" flowed freely. Mina-tan uncovers answers from the illustrious members of the development staff!

[Image caption:] After the interview, she was deeply moved when each member of the staff gave her their signature.

[Image caption:] The new Final Fantasy VII project is in the hands of an incredible staff. This feature will crank your anticipation to an all-time high!

[Image caption:] Cloud looks so lifelike! Mina-tan couldn't help but rave: "The feel of his clothes, the texture of his skin and hair... It's like he's an actual person! He looks so cool!"

[Image caption:] She ended up with a signed illustration covered in enthusiastic messages from the main staff—one of only three in the world! If you'd like one of the others, be sure to contact us at the address below!

[Image caption:] Even within the company's walls, it's rare to see so many eminent staff members assembled in one place. They normally work on different floors—and it wasn't until today that they figured out which floors those are! The value of this interview can't be overstated!

She came away with a fine gift!

An ultra-rare photo to mark the occasion!

"I attacked without warning, delving into this surprising new topic!"

I'd heard of Nomura from *Kingdom Hearts Final Mix*, Kitase from *Final Fantasy X-2*, and Naora from *Unlimited Saga*, but I was shocked to find these stellar talents were not only joining forces again but working on an all-new *Final Fantasy VII* film! The music, scenario, and visuals are all being handled by top-notch staff! I made sure to drill each one for highlights about their role in the project!

Vol. 25

Visiting Company

Square Enix Holdings Co., Ltd.

Featured Title

Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children

Mina-tan investigates the game!

Profile: Minako Komukai. Born May 27, 1985, in Tokyo. Blood type: AB. Measurements: 156cm tall, B90, W58, H85. Minako's newest photo collection, *18 and Free*, is well reviewed and currently on sale! Also, her first starring role can be seen in *Chain*, out now on DVD to rave reviews, and available for rental!

Producer: Yoshinori Kitase

Took a planning position at [what was then] Square on April 1st, 1990, as a mid-career hire. After pitching in with *Final Fantasy Adventure* and the SNES version of *Romancing SaGa*, he helped make *Final Fantasy V* as an event lead. Following *Final Fantasy VI*, he worked on *Final Fantasy VII* as director. Since then, he's had a hand in *Final Fantasy VIII*, *X*, and *X-2*. As the head of Creative Business Unit I, Kitase oversees a team of over 150 staff members.

Kitase: After we finished development of *Final Fantasy VI* [1994], we launched a project to make *Final Fantasy VII* for the SNES. The first thing we did was gather everyone together to look over the project proposal, but just then work started up on *Chrono Trigger* [1995]. So the main *Final Fantasy* staff were assigned to help out with *Chrono Trigger*, and the *Final Fantasy VII* project was temporarily put on hold. And then after *Chrono Trigger* finished, along came the Satellaview [laughs]. Once that work was finished, we began creating an experimental next-gen CG video for Siggraph using members from *Final Fantasy VI*'s cast as placeholder 3D characters. Right after that, it was proposed that we use CG and make *Final Fantasy VII* for a next-gen platform. Although *Final Fantasy VII* ultimately came out on the PlayStation, during the initial planning phase, we were intending to make it for a different next-gen platform. However, due to timing issues and the general trend of that period, we decided to make *Final Fantasy VII* in 3D and target it for the PlayStation hardware.

Interviewer: Was it decided from the beginning that the scenario would have a modern setting?

Kitase: As with previous *Final Fantasy* games, [Hironobu] Sakaguchi wrote out the initial base plot for the story. Based on that, the staff then brainstormed various ideas and worked them in. With *VII*, I remember that the prototype for a city called Midgar was already there in that very first plot Sakaguchi wrote. But the characters were completely different from the ones we have now [laughs]. It was right around then that [Kazushige] Nojima signed on with Square and joined in to help the *Final Fantasy VII* team with the scenario. [Tetsuya] Nomura and I would basically write whatever we wanted and then leave it to Nojima to make sense of our gibberish [laughs]. That approach has barely changed over the years [laughs]. But I vividly remember that Nojima's arrival transformed the way we wrote *Final Fantasy* scenarios. Up until *Final Fantasy VI*, I feel like Sakaguchi had this sort of type he preferred—an elegant, chivalrous heroine along the lines of Nausicaä. But with *Final Fantasy VII*, the way we portrayed characters changed quite a bit thanks to Nojima. Likewise with the ending. *V* and *VI* had these overblown happily-ever-after endings that tried to keep drawing out players' feelings, so for *Final Fantasy VII* I wanted to change up our approach a little. You suddenly go right to the credits, and then you're shown the world 500 years later, making it clear the planet was saved. However, I thought it would be best not to provide too much detail about what happened in between.

Interviewer: What are your thoughts on depicting a story that takes place two years after the events of *Final Fantasy VII*.

Kitase: When I first saw the video we'd compiled, I was incredibly moved. We're still very much in the middle of production, so I hope you'll all stay excited as things progress. What we have now is neither a short feature nor a full-length one-and-a-half- or two-hour theatrical movie, but I think the story is satisfying both in terms of content and volume. When you hear talk of a *Final Fantasy* film, some may be reminded of a previously released *Final Fantasy* movie that made its way to theaters. However, while that work's main goal was to produce CG that could be mistaken for live-action footage, our objective this time is to make a film that extends the world we created seven years ago with *Final Fantasy VII*. I feel confident in saying this will be a work everyone can look forward to seeing, including fans of *Final Fantasy VII*.

Interviewer: Maybe I'm reading into things here, but it sounds as though you're saying you'd like to create another *Final Fantasy VII* game.

Kitase: That's what folks at the company are telling me as well [laughs]. Obviously you have people inside the company saying they'd like to make a new game, but at this point we're not making any moves to produce another game based on *Final Fantasy VII*. The aim of this project is to take on the challenge of a cinematic work. As for *Final Fantasy VII* itself, fans have become more and more passionate about it over time. Seeing as this movie depicts what comes after it, I think that I and the rest of the staff need to treat what we do very seriously. The trend with *Final Fantasy* is to shuffle around the staff with each new entry in the series, but this time we've gone ahead and assembled the same team to work on the project as we did back then. I hope everyone will look forward to it.

On creating the latest *Final Fantasy VII* title

I'd always felt the urge to produce *Final Fantasy VII* in some other form, but the thought of meddling with its world and lore was too scary. I wanted to do it, but I couldn't pull the trigger. But then I had a breakthrough: we could make it into a film. Making a movie is a big challenge in and of itself. We've taken on the task of creating not just a cinematic work but a sequel to a game to which fans are strongly attached. Those two challenges are reflected in this work. Initially, we were hoping to make a 20- to 30-minute film that we'd release by the end of this year, but it's now slated to be around 60 minutes. Though it isn't long enough to be a feature film, it's certainly something worth watching. I hope you're all excited for it. -Kitase

How will the heroine Aerith be depicted?

Before the game's end, the heroine Aerith is cut down by Sephiroth and meets a tragic demise. This unexpected development caused quite a reaction among fans. "Aerith... She'll no longer talk... no longer laugh or cry or get angry.... What am I supposed to do? My fingertips are tingling. My mouth is dry. My eyes are burning!" Cloud's cries and heartbroken rage stirred the emotions of many a player. Will we get to see Aerith smile again with the latest in CG visuals?

[Image caption:] Many fans were saddened by the destiny Aerith had to shoulder. Later on, she was depicted during her event with Cloud at the end of Kingdom Hearts Final Mix. Will she appear in any scenes this time?

[Image caption:] "I think... I want to be forgiven. More than anything." What might Cloud be thinking and feeling as he utters these words?

Director: Tetsuya Nomura

Not only handled all of *Final Fantasy VII*'s character design but helped out with a wide range of other duties, including monster design, summon attack storyboards, and the limit break system. Since that time, Nomura's charming character portraits for the *Final Fantasy* series have earned him widespread popularity. He's also acclaimed for giving birth to the *Kingdom Hearts* series.

Nomura's ring is the latest in *Final Fantasy VII* merch

Nomura's finger already bears a silver ring in the shape of Cloud's new wolf crest! Will new products keep coming out in addition to the Shinra merchandise mentioned earlier?

Interviewer: Why did you choose film as the medium for this new *Final Fantasy VII* title?

Nomura: At the beginning of the project, the folks at Visual Works—the company that always produces the movies for our games—came to me and said they were interested in making a cinematic title. That was about a year ago. But at that time there was no mention of making it about *Final Fantasy VII*; the discussion was solely about making some sort of filmic work. And then after that we dropped the subject for a little while. When talk once again rose about making

a sequel to *Final Fantasy VII*, I was assigned to lend a hand. And so the initial project didn't originate with the idea of making a sequel to *VII*; rather, discussions began around a simple desire to create a cinematic work. Before long that conversation combined with talks of wanting to do a continuation of *Final Fantasy VII*, which ultimately led to the current project.

Interviewer: The character designs look both realistic and full of personality.

Nomura: At first I worried about what I should do. I wondered if I should commit to making them super realistic. [The visuals this time] may look realistic, but compared to something like *Final Fantasy X*'s movies, the characters are actually more cartoonish. Initially, I figured a realistic character wouldn't be able to pull off Cloud's spiky hair, so I went for a very cartoonish-looking character, but before long I was able to get his pointy head looking right [laughs]. We're already on the nth iteration of Cloud's model right now and still making improvements, so what you're seeing isn't the final version. Also, with this title, I'm constantly trying to improve the sense of texture and atmosphere you get from the movie. I've put a lot of emphasis on depicting those things. I think that's the reason the visuals look so realistic despite the characters themselves being cartoonish.

Interviewer: That motorcycle scene is really something, isn't it?

Nomura: We got Takayuki Takeya¹ to design that motorcycle, and he came up with a totally novel design for us. I asked him to make a full 3D model for the motorcycle. We then did the CG modeling while looking at what he'd made, which I think gives you an idea of our commitment to detail. This new motorcycle gives a similar impression to the one in the original game.

Interviewer: Speaking of Takeya, does that mean there will also be creatures?

Nomura: Well, of course there will be creatures that make an appearance. But I can't show you any today [laughs].

Interviewer: Do the visuals make use of motion capture?

Nomura: We're using motion capture not only for action sequences but in ordinary, low-key drama scenes.

Interviewer: What can you tell us of the character in the wheelchair covered by a cloth?

Nomura: The cloth draped over them indicates they're in no state to be seen currently. Perhaps they're injured or ill.

Interviewer: Were you responsible for designing the outfits this time?

Nomura: Yes, I was. Recently, the trend has been to tack on all sorts of baubles and accessories, but this time I've tried to keep things simple overall, with black as the base color.

Interviewer: I can't wait to hear more news. How has the reaction been so far?

Nomura: Before it was unveiled at the game show, we actually hadn't shown what we had to nearly anyone in the company. When they saw it, people sent us some very enthusiastic emails like the one Uematsu wrote [laughs]. I have a feeling we'll once again be able to create that exceptional sense of excitement people felt during the days of *Final Fantasy VII*. It's rare to get messages like that when you're just making a normal game, but now we've even got people inside the company telling us how much they're looking forward to this new *Final Fantasy VII*

title [laughs]. I'm hoping we can produce a film that differs from both the games and movies we've made up to this point. I want to make something that will meet fans' high expectations.

1. Takayuki Takeya. Born 1963 in Hokkaido. Graduated from Asagaya College of Art and Design and began freelancing in 1986. Famous for prototyping resin kits and toys. Takeya was responsible for modeling *Final Fantasy* summons and monsters for the premium "Final Fantasy Creatures" toy series, which earned him quite a reputation. Tetsuya Nomura has complete faith in him and his prototype work.

[Image caption:] The overall polygon count of characters is apparently lower than that of the characters in X-2's movies, but more emphasis has been placed on things like building a sense of atmosphere.

On creating the latest *Final Fantasy VII* title

The film's subtitle was originally something different, but after some back and forth I settled on what you see now—"Advent Children." I wanted to include a word that meant something like "again," and because "children" is a keyword for this story, I decided to go with this title. "Advent" means "second coming," but what that implies you'll have to wait and see. Although only three characters have appeared in footage so far, the main cast has already been decided. Roughly 20 major characters will show up during the film, so there's a good chance any characters you want to see will make an appearance [laughs]. I hope you'll all stay excited.
-Nomura

Roughly 20 characters will appear. Are these ones shoo-ins?

The upcoming film will evidently feature 20 or so characters in all. Nomura has expressed his hope that fans who played *Final Fantasy VII* will watch it. We can't wait to see who shows up. What are your predictions?

Tifa, Yuffie

[Image caption:] The three heroines who shared a somewhat romantic branching event with Cloud are naturally highly anticipated to reprise their roles. Will Tifa, Yuffie, and Aerith—the latter two of whom also made an appearance in Kingdom Hearts—show up this time as well? And can we also expect Avalanche boss Barret, Red XIII, and Vincent?

Turks

[Image caption:] Members of Shinra's elite Turks unit, including Elena (leftmost), Reno (rightmost), and Rude (second from right), ought still to be alive after the original game. Will they have a "second coming" as well?

[Image caption:] According to Nomura, the person Cloud is facing off with is “an enemy [laughs].” We’ll be on the lookout for future news about Cloud and the actor set to voice him.

Composer: Nobuo Uematsu

Born March 21st, 1959, in Kōchi Prefecture. Blood type: O. Uematsu graduated from Kanagawa University and worked in commercial music production before joining [what was then] Square on April 1st, 1986. Excluding *X-2*, he’s been responsible for all compositions in the *Final Fantasy* series, all the way from *I* to *X*. Next spring, he plans to host an orchestral *Final Fantasy* concert tour in Japan’s six largest cities: Hokkaido, Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya, Osaka, and Fukuoka.

Uematsu: Even though *Final Fantasy VII* came out on CD-ROM for the PlayStation, we still used the built-in sound source to generate the audio. But I actually didn’t begin helping out with *Final Fantasy VII* until pretty late in the project. I was still busy with stuff like the Satellaview [laughs]. So I was late to the party, and by the time I joined in, they’d already begun making the opening movie with Midgar. So I remember the very first song I made was the music for the opening cinematic.

Interviewer: Did *Final Fantasy VII*’s shift to the PlayStation cause you to change how you made the music?

Uematsu: The new visuals were really a huge step up from what you had in the SNES days. Even just comparing the opening to *Final Fantasy VI*, you could see *Final Fantasy VII* was on a whole different plane. So I worried that if I kept making the music the same way I had before, it might not be up to snuff. Therefore, I was incredibly nervous about letting people hear the opening music I’d made. I went to Kitase and asked him for his opinion, thinking I could start by having him listen, but he immediately went and fetched [Hironobu] Sakaguchi [laughs]. The two of them came right into my office, and after listening to the song all the way through, Sakaguchi said to me, “Very good!”—just like that, in English for some reason [laughs]. After that single remark, he then got up and left [laughs]. I remember thinking, “Alright, I guess I can keep going with this approach.”

Interviewer: Amazing [laughs]. So what was the on-site production situation actually like back then?

Uematsu: The release date ended up getting pushed back a bit, didn’t it? I remember going to ask a fortune teller about it. I said, “Will *Final Fantasy VII* be finished in time?” and they said “No, it won’t!” [laughs]. They said, “It won’t be finished in time, but it will definitely be an epoch-making game!” But they made it very clear we wouldn’t make the deadline [laughs]. But it really is an amazing success story, selling 3.9 million units like that in Japan. And then there’s the 5 million units it sold overseas. I think that really shows how it was riding the momentum of everything else going on at the time. You had the jump to the new PlayStation hardware, this sudden improvement in graphics thanks to CG, plus a big surge in interest in video games. I think *Final Fantasy VII* was riding the crest of that collective wave.

Interviewer: What are your thoughts on being a part of this newest *Final Fantasy VII* title?

Uematsu: Well, when I first got the email from Tetsu [Nomura], I wondered if I'd even be able to contribute, since I already had so much work on my plate. But in the end the timing lined up nicely and I managed to pitch in. However, work was already underway, and we weren't able to put any new music in the video we showed off at the game show. You know that "Sephiroth" chorus in the clip we showed at the expo? That's actually the song from the last battle of [the PlayStation version of] *Final Fantasy VII*. I was like, "What do you know? I guess this works just fine, too" [laughs].

Interviewer: With the upcoming title being a film, how do you plan to approach the music this time?

Uematsu: All I'm aiming for is to write good music. I'm really feeling motivated to create some good tracks. *Final Fantasy VII* has quite a few songs I like: "Aerith's Theme," the world map music, and Sephiroth's battle track, to name a few. And so this time, I want to write songs that will stand up to those. In that sense, I'm definitely paying some attention to the image and feel of the previous game's music, though I wouldn't say I'm being overly conscious about the fact this new title will be a film.

Interviewer: Is there any chance you'll put in some sort of lyrical song for the opening or ending?

Uematsu: I'm sure we'll be adding one in. It is a movie, after all. But as far as a theme song goes, if we'd chosen one I'd share it with you. We still have yet to decide, though.

Although—and I know this will sound selfish—I'd like it if we made use of a chorus. The chorus we used in the previous game made for one of my favorite tracks.

Interviewer: That sounds quite promising.

Uematsu: I think so, too. At any rate, this time I'm once again working with the spectacular crew behind the original *Final Fantasy VII*. I'm confident we'll be able to make something that will really hit home. I'll do my part and make some good music, so please look forward to it.

On creating the latest *Final Fantasy VII* title

Final Fantasy games just keep on coming out like some force of nature. We keep on climbing up this ladder like it's the only natural thing to do. The *Final Fantasy* series is of course a special one to us, but when you take an opportunity like this to reflect back, you realize how extraordinary *Final Fantasy VII* is out of all the other games in the series. It was the best match for us in all our time making games, both in terms of what we were capable of and the general mood of the times. It once again reminds you what a rare product we managed to make back then—something seldom seen since. I'll be sure to deliver the best music possible for this upcoming film, so please stay excited. -Uematsu

"The instant I saw the video, I was totally blown away."

Uematsu recounts the impact he felt after first watching the recent clip. “The instant I saw the video, I started to get goosebumps. I was so blown away, I had to send Tetsu an email about it [laughs]. I was like, ‘This is incredible!’” The track used at the game show was from the original PlayStation version of *Final Fantasy VII*. Will the music in the final release be even more amazing?

[Image caption:] Apart from the chorus from the final battle with Sephiroth, what connection does this mysterious character—shown fighting toe-to-toe with Cloud—bear to Sephiroth? All his footage had us on tenterhooks, including this intense motorcycle scene.

[Image caption:] Due to memory constraints at the time, the chorus in Sephiroth’s seven-minute song from Final Fantasy VII had to be split into multiple shorter segments and stitched back together. The song worked unexpectedly well in the recent video, but do they have something even better in store for the final release?

Art Director: Yūsuke Naora

Born January 9th, 1971, in Shimane Prefecture. After graduating from a fine arts institute, Naora started work with an arcade game developer. He made a mid-career move to [what was then] Square, where he took a job as a graphic designer. He worked as art director for *Final Fantasy VII*, overseeing field maps and game graphics. He and age-mate Nomura make a powerful team as they continue work on the *Final Fantasy* series. Recent noteworthy works include *Unlimited Saga* and *Front Mission 4*.

Naora: The other day, when I was organizing my things for the move to the new office building, I stumbled upon some old material from the *Final Fantasy VII* days. As I was sorting through the files, I came across a picture of Cloud with his bangs all up and swept back [laughs]. These days that image must really be worth something. But very early on, we were planning to make *Final Fantasy VII* for a different console like the SNES, so obviously what we had back then turned out very different from the final version of the game.

Interviewer: Did the shift to the PlayStation change anything about your creative approach?

Naora: Up till then, all us *Final Fantasy* designers had only ever worked by placing pixels [laughs]. Suddenly we started creating things with CG, so you had this influx of staff who had experience working with 3D CG. I remember one day the design staff just ballooned. Also, there were now many more occasions to request help from outside companies on stuff like CG movies. I began talking a lot with outside companies, which was a first to me. *Final Fantasy VII* really was a project full of firsts.

Interviewer: How do you feel about your involvement this time?

Naora: Cloud is a particular favorite of mine from *Final Fantasy VII*, so I’m thrilled to be working with him again in an official capacity, so to speak. Also, the CG we’ve achieved matches the image quality I envisioned, so I’m glad to be able to work with it. Cloud came out exactly how Nomura and I and other members of the staff picture him in our heads, so I’m happy

about that as well. When we did the hair and stuff we would all be like, “Yeah, that’s the way it’s supposed to be” [laughs]. He’s only CG, but he still makes your heart skip a beat [laughs].

Interviewer: I hear the visual below is your work. Can you provide a little commentary?

Naora: I wanted to convey the sense that the old mako reactor–driven world from the previous game had come to an end, that Midgar, the City of Mako, was destroyed, and that all sorts of things had happened in the world since then. I’ve used the nucleotide sequence as a motif to evoke the image of a “broken world.” I’ve also integrated the Jenova cell genes into the logo to throw the original game into relief. I put a lot of effort and attention into creating this visual, so I hope everyone will spend some time speculating about it. Of course, the recent video is also superb, so I hope you’re all excited.

On creating the latest *Final Fantasy VII* title

I know a lot of people say this, but *Final Fantasy VII* is a very special work to me. Back during development, I found the end of the process much more challenging than the beginning because we just had so little time. *Final Fantasy VII* U.S. release date fell right in the middle of my stay in Honolulu, Hawaii, and I remember walking around a shopping mall near work and seeing this random guy wearing a *Final Fantasy VII* t-shirt. That made me incredibly happy to see. This time, I’m aiming to deliver all sorts of visuals that forecast more new developments for *Final Fantasy VII*.

A visual foreshadowing a broken world

Note how the ordinarily hexagonal shapes in the nucleotide sequence have been made octagonal, enveloping Cloud and Sephiroth and symbolizing the world’s decay. The title logo is modeled after the genes of the Jenova cells that Sephiroth and Cloud carry (though technically this is just one of several meanings the title logo holds), foreshadowing a narrative connection to the previous game. This time, Naora is also in charge of designing promotional material like this, and aims to show us how the upcoming movie’s world and lore are set up.

Codirector: Takeshi Nozue

Born November 20th, 1972, in Tokyo. Joined [what was then] Square on July 1st, 1999. When *Final Fantasy VII* came out, Nozue was still just a technical school student, and experienced the game as a player. After making a mid-career shift to Square from another game company, he helped out with *Final Fantasy IX* and *X* as a movie lead. He’ll once again be putting his skills to the test as a movie director.

Interviewer: I hear you were still on the player side of things back with *Final Fantasy VII*. How do you feel being part of the project this time?

Nozue: That's right, I was. When *Final Fantasy VII* released, I was just like any other player [laughs]. At the time, I thought to myself, "Holy cow, they've really come out with something amazing here. I hope I'll be able to make a title like this one day." I joined Square mid-career after transitioning from another company. The production environment here is really excellent, and there are all sorts of people to support me in my creative endeavors. Just a ton of truly talented people. The difference from other companies is very much apparent. There are so many incredibly capable people here, and I can't help but feel fired up.

Interviewer: What exactly is it you're in charge of?

Nozue: I'm handling the overall movie production. I guess you could say I'm like an on-site director [laughs], except it's the CG stuff I'm in charge of. Essentially, I make all sorts of decisions with Nomura and then communicate those decisions to the staff so we can execute them in production.

Interviewer: In terms of percentage, roughly how far along are you in production right now?

Nozue: Let's see... I'd say we're still only about 10% done [laughs]. The video we just presented at the game show was compiled specifically for that exhibition, and it includes some scenes that won't be included in the actual film. Also, we're still in the process of improving Cloud's CG. Taking into account various aspects of production, I think we're still only at 10%. That staff still isn't quite satisfied with the visuals at this stage. We're planning to increase the quality even further.

Interviewer: Could you point out the highlights of this recent video?

Nozue: The idea this time isn't just to make a CG movie but to create visuals with a sense of atmosphere. Therefore, we're approaching the footage itself through an optical lens, being very meticulous about all sorts of movement and material textures. In this respect, we're aiming for a different sensibility than what you get with the movies we make for our games.

Interviewer: By the way, how long did it take for you to make that recent three-minute clip?

Nozue: About a month. That includes the time it took to model the characters we're using in the full film; otherwise, it probably took a little less than a week. But it really takes time to model the characters and sculpt backgrounds like the destroyed mako reactors, and we plan to keep pushing until we're satisfied with the quality of what we've made. We're certainly feeling some pressure, but there's a lot of fun to be had as we continue to create, so please look forward to what's in store.

[Image caption:] Once a city at the height of prosperity thanks to its mako reactors, Midgar now lies in ruins after a Weapon attack, seemingly devoid of any human inhabitants. Even the modeling for its ruins has been painstakingly crafted, the desolate atmosphere beautifully captured in the recently released video.

On creating the latest *Final Fantasy VII* title

Before now, I helped out with the movie production for *Final Fantasy IX* and *X*, but this time I think we'll be able to present visuals with a different feel from what you get with the movies in traditional *Final Fantasy* games. The images are intentionally out of focus, and we've fretted much over the texture of the clothing.... In a way, I feel like you pick up on the film's atmosphere as if you were seeing things with your own eyes. I have memories of experiencing *Final Fantasy VII* as just another player and being astonished by what I saw. With this latest video, I'm hoping to deliver that same sort of astonishment to viewers. Right now, the film is still only 10% complete. Things are only going to get better from here! -Nozue

Taking pains to craft scenery with a sense of atmosphere

[Image caption:] Sunlight filters in through stained glass windows, setting a scene where you can nearly sense the atmosphere inside the church. Rather than aiming for perfect realism, we're being shown what things are like in the world of Final Fantasy VII. It really looks amazing!

[Image caption:] From weapons and hair to skin and clothing texture, every factor lends to the film's compelling visuals. The recently unveiled video is just a trailer—a mere prologue for what's to come. This upcoming Final Fantasy VII film, being produced by an illustrious staff, is scheduled to release next summer. A distribution method still hasn't been decided, so be sure to keep an eye out for future news.

Scenario Writer: Kazushige Nojima

Born January 20th, 1964, in Hokkaido. Formerly of Data East, where he handled the scenarios for series like *Jake Hunter* and *Glory of Heracles*, Nojima began working at [what was then] Square on February 1st, 1995. Since *Final Fantasy VII*, he's helped out with *VIII*, *X*, and *X-2*. In addition to the upcoming *Final Fantasy VII* title, he's in charge of writing the scenario for *Kingdom Hearts II*.

Nojima: I joined Square right around the time *Chrono Trigger* wrapped up. So I wasn't there yet for *Final Fantasy VII*'s earliest planning stage. By the time I arrived, there were already designs for things like Midgar, and I remember thinking, "Huh, looks like the plot is pretty far along." Except when I read it carefully, I realized the whole middle of the scenario was missing [laughs]. I was like, "Oh, I guess this is what they need me to fill in" [laughs]. Back then, I came in as an outsider. It was my first time being anywhere close to a *Final Fantasy* title. I didn't even know how the team went about creating *Final Fantasy* games, but it was pretty laissez-faire—they handed me the reins and basically let me do whatever I wanted [laughs]. When I got there, the characters hadn't really even been defined yet, and in the first plot that Sakaguchi wrote, there was this character who robs a train. It went kind of like a Western movie. Though maybe there are still some traces of it in the train scene at the beginning [laughs]. At any rate, Nomura did the drawing for all the character designs, and once we got the characters talking, I pretty much wrote the rest from there. Everyone on the staff would tell me this and that thing they wanted, so I had

to gently pretend I hadn't heard them, or else interpret what they said to suit my own needs [laughs]. It was a lot to handle. But I got to portray Cloud as I wanted, and I was able to include a playable flashback scene, which is something I'd always wanted to do one day, so in that respect I was very content. However, because of all the painstaking work I put in, my hands got so full with crafting Cloud's story that I think I requested Vincent be cut from the game [laughs]. I said I wanted to decrease the number of characters because I was already so swamped with Cloud. But Vincent ultimately turned out to be another really popular character, so I'm glad he didn't get scrapped [laughs].

Interviewer: I feel like the game's ending left players scratching their heads. There were several ways you could interpret it. Do you think you could sum things up for us?

Nojima: For that last scene of the ending, we decided not to harp on about what happened to each character like we'd done in the past. Instead, we came up with the idea of suddenly skipping forward 500 years. Though people often say it's difficult to understand, the message is pretty straightforward: basically, because of the efforts of Cloud and his allies, the planet is still around, and smoke is rising from Midgar, which means there are definitely still humans alive. The theme was quite simple. [Naora interjects: "Oh. I just remembered... I may have forgotten to add that smoke in (laughs)."] All present: "You've got to be kidding!" Roars of laughter ensue.]

Interviewer: Speaking of which, the theme last time was the life of the planet. What's the story's theme this time?

Nojima: Last time, Cloud and his team gave their all to save the life of the planet, but this time the theme is saving children.

Interviewer: Where did this emphasis on children come from? Is it related to the subtitle "Advent Children"?

Nojima: Yes, it is. This time, I knew from the beginning I wanted to start with a girl narrating, and I wondered if it would be possible to present the story from her point of view. Generally speaking, children are in a vulnerable position. The theme this time is saving these suffering children. "Salvation" is another term for "saving," isn't it? So the implication here isn't a gentle sort of healing but salvation achieved through shed blood and painful trials. And the object of that salvation is the children.

Interviewer: Does this have to do with the so-called Geostigma present in the story?

Nojima: The disease has become very prevalent. It's a side effect from the Lifestream. With humanity continuing to drain the planet of its life, the planet heaved forth the Lifestream to protect itself. And the result of that response has manifested in humans' bodies as a disease called Geostigma.

Interviewer: Have you already completed the whole scenario?

Nojima: This time, Nomura and I are working together to create the foundation for the story. Nomura started by handing me pieces of the plot where he'd written what he wanted to do in terms of direction and production, and then I put those all together. I've included the various things I wanted to do as well, so my work [on the scenario] itself is already finished. Just the

other day I sat in on some motion capture recording, so I think all that's left is polishing up the visuals. It's in your hands from here, Nozue [laughs]. I hope everyone's looking forward to it!

On creating the latest *Final Fantasy VII* title

At first I was panicking a bit [laughs]. The idea of making a *Final Fantasy VII* sequel was pretty intimidating. After *Final Fantasy VII* came out, the internet came into widespread use, and when I saw how incredibly passionate people were about it on their blogs, I thought, "Man, we probably shouldn't mess with anything, should we?" [laughs]. But when conversations about it arose, I totally wanted to do it, though maybe I was just waiting for someone else to speak up. So for this project I made sure to get on board. I was like, "Instead of having someone else write the scenario, let me!" [laughs]. *Final Fantasy VII* is a title that I'm very attached to. I think we'll be able to deliver a good story this time as well. -Nojima

The meaning contained within the "Advent Children" subtitle

"Advent" is the four-week period before Christmas. It refers to the advent of Christ, which in turn means "arrival" or "second coming." Are the "children who come again" numbered Sephiroth Copies who were implanted with Jenova cells and manufactured like Cloud? Or does this subtitle tie into the theme of "children's salvation"? There are wheels within wheels....

[Image caption:] A mysterious new character shown fighting toe-to-toe with Cloud. The type of weapon he wields, his incredible fighting abilities, and the extent of his physical capabilities bring Sephiroth to mind.... Could one interpretation of "Advent Children" be that this man is the second coming of Sephiroth?

[Image caption:] A fearless smile, silver hair, and a figure clad all in black. Standing with his back to Midgar's ruins, you can sense Sephiroth's genes in his appearance. It looks like our only choice is to wait for more information before we can get a full picture of this mystery-steeped character.