Interview

Crisis Core Is the Developers' Answer to the Mysteries and Gaps in *Final Fantasy VII*'s Narrative

The game is garnering attention due to how it sheds light on the mysteries of Final Fantasy VII. *With its release just around the corner, three members of the game's core staff sat down with us to talk about its appeal!*

The mystery behind the DMW is revealed during the last battle!

Interviewer: Could you tell us how you went about developing *Crisis Core*?

Yoshinori Kitase: When we began talking about creating something for the PSP, we decided right off the bat that it would be a title that ties into the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII*. So I consulted Tabata, who'd proven himself with *Before Crisis*.

Hajime Tabata: After hearing what Kitase had to say, I in turn consulted Nomura, who'd worked on *Before Crisis* with me.

Tetsuya Nomura: When I told Tabata I wanted to make a story about a SOLDIER with Zack as the protagonist, he agreed with me, and from there the project started to take shape.

Interviewer: Was it decided from the beginning that the game would be an action RPG?

Tabata: When we decided Zack would be the main character was also when we decided the game would include action-oriented features geared toward entertaining solo battles.

Kitase: However, there were some twists and turns figuring out the more detailed parts of the system, such as whether or not you'd be able to move the character during combat.

Tabata: Since we were starting from scratch developing for the PSP, it took quite a lot of time trying to get things to render the way we envisioned. As a result, we actually did at one point remove the ability to maneuver the character during battle.

Nomura: But then I showed off this other game I was testing. I said that considering how smoothly you could move the character around in that game, we should be able to make the character move even better in ours.

Tabata: Nomura also gave us a lot of advice on things like how to achieve a sense of immersion. The most difficult part was the DMW system, though. It took a lot of hard work getting people in the company to accept it.

Interviewer: Was it because of some strong sense of attachment you had to the DMW that you went through all that trouble getting it implemented?

Tabata: We knew from the beginning that the DMW system would be both engaging and meaningful in terms of gameplay.

Kitase: But with only one playable character, there were concerns about whether the DMW would prove to be entertaining or not.

Tabata: It was precisely because there was only one playable character that we needed to add some sort of X factor to the basic battle system. If we didn't, the combat would end up getting monotonous. With the DMW, even if the symbols don't match, Zack's status will still continually be changing as the numbers line up. So, for example, if you get "No MP Cost," you can take advantage of it and blast away with magic, whereas if you get "No AP Cost," you can guard and dodge roll as much as you want while you fight. All sorts of changes like that can arise during battle.

Nomura: You get this interesting feeling that the battle conditions aren't shifting but rather the player's status, which is continuously changing.

Kitase: When I actually sat down and played, I was relieved to find the DMW added variety to the battles. I thought to myself, "This is fun!"

Nomura: Even those who had misgivings about the DMW became engrossed when they actually tried playing with it.

Tabata: It's thanks to our staff we were able to pull it together into something so interesting.

Interviewer: When the DMW enters the Modulating Phase, an event screen is displayed. Are these events that take place during the main story of *Crisis Core*?

Tabata: There are images from the main story as well as other events that can happen. There are all sorts of memories depicted in a fragmented form, and these are shown as flashbacks.

Nomura: I wanted to incorporate a sense of excitement that the symbols might align, as well as the thrill of being rescued by good luck. I also thought users would be pleased if the clips that play were exclusive events that you don't get to see during the main story. So we went with this mental landscape that lets you know you're entering the Modulating Phase.

Tabata: We wanted to make the events intertwine with the battle system this time around.

Nomura: The most meaningful aspect of the overarching DMW system is revealed in the game's last battle.

Tabata: The DMW was originally Nomura's idea. I think it's reasonable to say his intention with it was to intensify the climax of the game's last scenes.

Nomura: When the playtesters gave us their impressions, many of them said they came to understand the reason for the DMW's existence at the end of the game. I was happy to hear that we'd communicated the intention behind it.

Tabata: Even Kitase, who hadn't given me any feedback about the game up to that point, praised us for that sequence from the last battle to the ending cinematic.

Kitase: I didn't know it was being used that way. When I played through the last battle, I was surprised, too—"So this is what the DMW was for!"

Tabata: If you play the game to the end, I'm confident you'll understand what the DMW is all about.

A hopeful ending that leads into *Final Fantasy VII*!?

Interviewer: Our protagonist Zack has now been given a last name, and once again it's related to weather. Was there any sort of commitment you had to giving him this name?

Nomura: There was no one particular driving the naming scheme. It sort of just unfolded without us realizing. Cloud and Squall's names were my idea, but after that the names were different and the streak was broken, which was perfectly fine. But then with Final Fantasy *XIII*, Toriyama [Motomu Toriyama, director of Final Fantasy *XIII*] wanted to go with something weather-related, and so the main character was named Lightning.

Kitase: It's the same with Biggs and Wedge. I'd say there's no individual who feels really particular about it, yet the staff still makes an effort to observe the tradition.

Nomura: But so when it came to Zack, we decided to give him a weather-related name, too, seeing as the convention was still going. We went with Fair, as in good weather.

Kitase: We'd already decided on the logo, so we used that as the basis for a name that evokes the image of a blue sky. We had three candidates in all.

Nomura: We almost went with a different name that Kitase nominated, but there was a lot of pushback and we ended up choosing Fair [laughs]. However, you can see a vestige of that name in the sunflower depicted on the swim trunks Zack wears in Costa del Sol.

Interviewer: There's a nice atmosphere between Zack and Cissnei during the event on the beach. What's the nature of their relationship?

Nomura: During the main story of *Final Fantasy VII*, there's a remark Aerith makes with respect to Zack about there being other girls.

Tabata: Cissnei's positioning does sort of remind you of that. Plus, she's someone who becomes a source of support for Zack. The mental imagery that can be seen in the DMW portrays some degree of feelings.

Interview: I hear that you were responsible for some portion of the event direction, Mr. Kitase. What part of the story did you work with?

Kitase: It was around the climax of the game's middle portion. At first we said, "Why don't we have our young staff members create a new *Final Fantasy VII* game using a young person's sensibility?" However, I was ultimately placed in charge despite not being young myself. *Final Fantasy VII* is a title to which fans are very strongly attached, and it seems like that fact placed pressure on our younger staff. They would shy away when put in the position of altering the original *Final Fantasy VII* even a little bit.

Interviewer: Specifically, what part were you in charge of?

Kitase: It's the scene where Zack and Sephiroth fight one another. In *Final Fantasy VII*, that moment is sort of a gap that we aren't told much about. It's an important scene that lets us know what happened to Cloud and Zack and how they were done in. I initially tried working Jenova into the fight, but Nomura chewed me out.

Nomura: Well yeah, because there's no such scene in *Final Fantasy VII*'s original story [laughs].

Kitase: Everyone's so strict about this kind of stuff [laughs].

Nomura: Although, even in the original *Final Fantasy VII*, there are parts of the story that can be interpreted differently depending on how you look at them. For this section, we've included our own interpretation of events. Toward the end of *Crisis Core*, there's a scene where Cloud speaks with Zack that I think will leave some people feeling uneasy.

Tabata: They might wonder, "What happened to his memory of that time?" But I think this is our response for how we the creators interpret that part of the story.

Interviewer: With Zack as the protagonist and a dark ending to the story already determined, I imagine the scenario must have been a challenge.

Tabata: I don't think the last scene makes for a dark ending. There's no question that Zack's fateful end is sorrowful; but more important is the fact that his life and what he accomplished has meaning, and that his will is passed down and sets the stage for what happens in *Final Fantasy VII*. As such, the last scene allows us to feel a real sense of hope about the future.

Nomura: I think players will recognize this intention when they see how the ending is directed. I think we ended up with a finale that's sad yet hopeful.

Tabata: *Crisis Core* is founded on the thoughts and feelings all our staff members have about *Final Fantasy VII*, so I think players will be left with this feeling that *Final Fantasy VII* is what comes next after the era of *Crisis Core*. Of course, we created the game so that you don't have to be familiar with *Final Fantasy VII* in order to enjoy it. However, I think that when they watch the ending cinematic, players will feel the urge to play through *Final Fantasy VII*'s story.

Interviewer: Could you tell us which scenes each of you feels most attached to?

Kitase: Well, I think the event I was in charge of is actually the best in the game, so for that reason, and because I helped create it, I'd have to say the battle between Zack and Sephiroth. That part was a blank spot in *Final Fantasy VII*, but in *Crisis Core* we've revealed what happened for the first time.

Nomura: For me it's the scene where Zack gets angry and talks about how fighting is all SOLDIERs need to do. Aside from that, I like all the detailed reactions Zack has, like in that one part where Angeal shoves him back. I felt really impressed by how the voice actors handled their pauses in the scene where Zack and Cloud introduce themselves to each other.

Tabata: During production, we gave a lot of thought to the scenes that feature Genesis. *Advent Children* was a cinematic piece, so it was intense in terms of the camera work and movements. In contrast to that dynamism, we tried to adopt a more static direction with *Crisis Core* where the camera doesn't move much during events. In Genesis's scenes, we wanted to focus on depicting his human presence. The production staff experimented a lot with those scenes, and in the end we were able to achieve the sensibility we were aiming for in *Crisis Core*, nailing down the feel and movements of his character as well as that static style of direction. Aside from those, the ending cinematic is a must-see, even if you do know what's coming already.

[Image caption:] No longer a mere guest character like she was in Before Crisis, *Cissnei now occupies an important position. Could she be part of a love triangle with Aerith?*

Executive Producer: Yoshinori Kitase
Profile: Has had a hand in almost every *Final Fantasy* title since *Final Fantasy V*. While overseeing the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* project, he took charge of event direction and minigame production for *Crisis Core*.

Director: Hajime Tabata
Profile: A core member of the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* staff who served as director for the cell phone game *Before Crisis*. He's also working as director for the cell phone game *Final Fantasy Agito XIII*.

Character Designer: Tetsuya Nomura
Profile: Has taken charge of character design for numerous popular Square Enix titles and also worked as director. More than just a character designer, he's been closely involved with *Crisis Core* since the game's planning phase.

Potion Report

A potion is being released in the same vein as last year's promotion. What gave rise to the potion this time around!?

Interviewer: What made you decide to release a potion again after last year's *Final Fantasy XII* promotion?
Keisuke Inakagi: I should begin by saying that our collaboration with Square Enix [hereafter Square] dates back not just to last year's potion but a little bit further than that—roughly five to six years. So this *Final Fantasy VII* 10th anniversary potion is the next installment of that partnership. However, the concept is different this time, so we've changed the flavor from last time.
Interviewer: Were there any directions from Square regarding the potion this time?
Ichirō Hazama: When we were given the plan for the project this time, we had some idea of what we wanted to do. Suntory accepted all of our proposals, so it all went very smoothly. As for the taste, based on Nomura's suggestion of a citrus flavor as well as the image of Sephiroth, we were able to come up with a few variations, from which we chose one after our staff graciously sampled them.
Inakagi: Dolomite is a substance with energy properties that also fits the image of Sephiroth, so we decided to use it as a key ingredient. From there, we tweaked the flavor so that it captured the resplendent and cold-blooded image of Sephiroth.
Interviewer: As far as long-term collaboration, are there any plans to release more *Final Fantasy VII*–related products, such as a second potion campaign?
Hazama: As it happens, Suntory has produced a second flavor that's separate from the first. Since this potion is a limited edition, we hope that *Final Fantasy VII* fans will go out of their

way to purchase it. After that, a greater number of people will be able to get their hands on the second version. Both potions are delicious, of course, so please look forward to when they go on sale.

<u>Keisuke Inakagi of Suntory</u>
Manager, Food and Beverage Division, Suntory Ltd.

<u>Hazama Ichirō of Square Enix</u>
Associate producer. In charge of the current collaboration.

Limited to 77,777 bottles!

[Image caption:] This potion was produced to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Final Fantasy VII*'s release. As such, its production has been limited to 77,777 bottles. The set comes with a luxurious case and guidebook, and will go on sale for ¥3,980 (tax included).*

Gallery Report

The *Final Fantasy VII* 10th Anniversary Gallery event was held at the Spiral Garden in Aoyama, Tokyo, from August 31 to September 2. The event featured a display of illustrations and backstory key art from the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII*, and offered visitors the chance to buy related merchandise. A reception party was held the day before the exhibition, to which involved staff and members of the press were invited. The event also saw the unveiling of the second and third iterations of the potion project (shown at left and releasing October 23 and November 27, respectively), which were announced in collaboration with Suntory Ltd.

[Image caption:] Promotional images and video from Final Fantasy VII*–related works were on display in the event space. There was also an area where you could test play* Crisis Core *before its official release.*
[Image caption:] A two-meter-wide replica of Midgar was also on display in the center of the venue.
[Image caption:] The second round of Final Fantasy VII *potion character cans, available in 16 variations at ¥200 each (tax included).*
[Image caption:] The third round of Final Fantasy VII *potion character cans come packaged with a Trading Arts mini. Available in 8 variations at ¥980 each (tax included).*