

Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII Special Interview

The Truth Behind the DMW Is Hidden in the Game's Climax

Character Designer: Tetsuya Nomura

Director: Hajime Tabata

The DMW proved difficult at first, stumping even members of staff.

Talk of porting *Before Crisis* to a mobile device is what set everything in motion

Interviewer: Back when the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* was first announced, it didn't include a title that began with "C," did it?

Tabata: "CC" was originally a missing link, and there was no plan to bend over backward trying to come up with something to fill the gap. Then one day, [Yoshinori] Kitase proposed the idea of releasing a *Final Fantasy* game on the PSP. He said so long as we were doing it, why not release it as part of the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII*? And that was how it all started.

Nomura: The proposal at the time was to do a polished one-to-one port of *Before Crisis*. However, I'm not a fan of things like ports and multiplatform releases, so we instead settled on making "BC" a story about a SOLDIER, the title of which would be *Before Crisis Core*. But seeing as it would be a new game, we decided there was no need to stick to the "BC" initials, so we dropped the "B" and went with *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII*.

Interviewer: What led you to consider Zack for the protagonist?

Nomura: When I thought of a SOLDIER from the *Before Crisis* era, my mind jumped to Zack. Sephiroth is already the strongest in the world, so there would be no room for growth, and no conceivable threat that could lead him to get a game over.

Tabata: I gathered everything into a plan for a story about several SOLDIERs and asked [Kazushige] Nojima if he'd write the scenario for us. The first draft contained the fundamental through lines of the story—Zack's relationship with the SOLDIERs 1st Class and how his destiny intersected with theirs. Nojima had a very strong attachment to Zack from the very beginning, saying "This is the type of guy he is," and we combined that input with Nomura's image of Zack to arrive at a portrait of our protagonist. I think we ended up creating a character with plenty of depth.

Interviewer: Was Genesis's appearance in *Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII* a result of what you had during *Crisis Core*'s planning stage?

Tabata: It's the other way around, actually. Genesis's appearance and premise had already been finalized for *Dirge of Cerberus*, so we decided to adopt that backstory and portray him as he was at the time of *Crisis Core*.

Interviewer: Tseng also looks like he's an important character.

Tabata: Yes, he crosses paths with Zack a lot.

Nomura: Although Lazard actually gets more stage time in this game. I think it's easier to maneuver brand new characters when depicting past events. You tend to run into all sorts of restrictions with characters who already exist.

Tabata: We can't go changing the past just to suit the needs of production.

The DMW is a fun element that spices up the game

Interviewer: The biggest new feature of this work is the DMW. Where did you get the idea for it?

Tabata: It grew from the question of whether the game could effectively utilize pachinko's entertainment factor and element of luck.

Nomura: I've had a real attachment to pachinko ever since *Final Fantasy VII*, which supported a pachinko simulation controller throughout the entirety of its development. When we jokingly talked about it, the programmers actually went ahead and implemented the support, which was very convenient since it allowed you to operate the game using only one hand. We ended up removing it in the final release, though.

Tabata: Nomura was always saying how pachinko was designed with entertainment in mind, so we got to thinking how it could be elegantly integrated into *Crisis Core*, which in turn led to the DMW system.

Nomura: Instead of pushing a button to stop the reels, we wanted players to enjoy a pachinko experience that was less under their control.

Tabata: But we had a tough time getting the other staff to understand the DMW.

Nomura: The reception was pretty harsh, wasn't it?

Tabata: I knew from the outset I wanted there to be some component where changes occur that are out of your control. I thought it would work well if we combined the game's standard controls with this DMW system where support bonuses and status effects are granted automatically.

Nomura: It turns out this sort of system is highly compatible with RPGs where there's only one character.

Interviewer: It feels really exciting when a flashback scene suddenly pops up.

Tabata: With the DMW, you get to enjoy glimpsing these little episodes and anticipating the big move you get as payoff. It's also fun to see how the flow of battle changes as Zack moves from one to the next status condition.

Interviewer: Definitely. When the numbers line up and your MP cost becomes zero, you feel like, "Okay, time to go nuts and fire off all my magic!"

Tabata: The stronger your opponent, the more important it is to capitalize on those changes. That element of strategy makes for a really engaging experience.

Interviewer: It's sort of like getting these little hints about where to take your strategy while playing.

Nomura: I think that without the DMW, the final product would have been pretty blasé.

Interviewer: It must have been difficult to fine-tune.

Tabata: It was—but not as difficult as getting everyone else on the team to understand the system [laughs].

Nomura: It can be pretty hard getting people to understand when you do something unorthodox. Players may feel puzzled at first when they sit down with the game, but they'll realize the system's purpose if they make it to the end. I'd ask the audience to play all the way through to the last battle. At that point, they'll be sure to grasp the DMW—"So this is why it's here!"

Tabata: Kitase actually came to me specifically with that reaction—"So that's what it was for!" I think we've produced something that's well worth the long wait.

Nomura: I hope players will make it all the way to the game's ending, which we took great pains in crafting, obsessing over it till the very last minute. I can't tell you how many times we tore apart and improved the sequence that runs from the game's climax to its ending.

Tabata: I felt pretty confident at the beginning of the process, but we ended up redoing it something like 20 times [laughs]. Everyone on the staff bore down and made sure to implement all of Nomura's detailed feedback, though, and when it was finished I really felt happy about the product we'd created. I hope players will look forward to it.

Interviewer: I expect this game will make the clamor for a remake all the louder, so I hope you'll take that into consideration.

Tabata: What do you say? Feeling optimistic?

Nomura: I am! Though whether we have the manpower is a different question....

Interviewer: I'll be patiently waiting for it while I play *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII*!

Why the special bundle is limited to 77,777 units

This all-new limited edition PSP bundle is leading many to lament missing their chance at a reservation. After inquiring about this, we were told that preparing 77,777 of these special bundles was an exceptional task in and of itself, forcing them to go well beyond providing the initially planned 10,000 units. Producing an arbitrary number of bundles to meet consumer demand wasn't an option; in order to release in advance of the special-edition PSP, the game's deadline would have had to be moved up significantly, and there wouldn't have been enough time for development. With no effective resale solution, this fixed number seems to mark the limit of what can be manufactured. "I'll be lining up on release day to buy one myself," says Nomura. Best of luck to all who are interested!

[Image caption:] Nomura also tried to make a reservation on the e-store, but didn't have any luck.

[Image caption:] Tabata apparently managed to reserve a bundle at a convenience store.