

Final Fantasy VII Plot Analysis

by falsehead

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***** FINAL FANTASY VII - PLOT ANALYSIS *****

PlayStation RPG 1997 UK (PAL)

PLOT ANALYSIS (version 2.1) 27/02/2004

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***** INTRODUCTION/REVISIONS *****

INTRODUCTION - I decided to write this guide after the amazing feedback I got from writing a similar plot guide for the Tekken series. It seems that Final Fantasy VII, even several years down the line is still stimulating peoples imaginations in a way few other games have managed before or since. Final Fantasy VII has a hugely complicated plot, and a full understanding of the events of the game really requires more than one play through. As this is a game with 60+ hours of gaming generally required to complete it, many people have not had the patience to do this. It is for these people that I have attempted to clarify the games plot in a step-by-step story.

I have laid out a chronology of events that happened prior to the beginning of the game first. These are all events explained in flashbacks and secret scenes. Then I have gone through the story, explaining what happens in detail.

I have also transcribed the four key secret scenes, after the main story guide. These provide key in-game evidence of my version of events, so I thought it would make life easier to write them out.

I have provided an FAQ with the most commonly asked questions. I have split this into character sections to make locating your relevant questions easier. Basically if you have a general question about Wutai, it will be in Yuffies section. The Ancients and Cetra under Aeris. Questions about Corel and AVALANCHE under Barret etc. I will add to this in future updates.

Needless to say, this guide is one HUGE SPOILER. I recommend you play the game through once at least to avoid spoiling your enjoyment of the game. Well I hope it helps clarify any confusion you may have had about what happens in this awesome game. Don't hesitate to email me if you want more detailed explanations or if you have any theories of your own. Even if you just plain disagree, I'd still like to hear from you! Enjoy.

REVISIONS - Version 1.0 (20/04/2002). This is the first version of this FAQ. I have put together what I hope is a coherent explanation of the story and provided proof from the text of the game to back up my assertions. I will wait and see what emails I get about this guide and provide further clarifications if they are needed in the next update.

Version 1.1 (06/05/2002) - Wow, well I have been getting my emails alright! This is a mini update, basically fixing some spelling mistakes and some errors I made in the name origins section as well as adding some new ones.

I am saving and collating the various emails on theories about the game and plan to write them up in the next update. So keep sending your stuff, it's all very interesting to read!

Version 1.5 (08/06/2002) - Ok I have been sifting the emails and have added a new section at the bottom about Aeris and her death. I have also split up the

name origins and added some more. Also added some more info to the FAQ section. I have tried to credit people with suggestions and ideas in the relevant places but I did lose a lot of emails when my inbox crashed (again), so if you see something you think you suggested to me, let me know and I'll make sure you get credit. Please keep the questions and suggestions coming, its all helpful, to me and to other readers!

Version 1.6 (07/07/2002) - The section about Aeris has excited a lot of interest! I have added some clarifications to that section and a link to a FAQ that explains in details the actual changes or not between the Japanese and USA versions. Plus some more additions to the name origins section, which everyone seems to like a lot.

Version 1.7 (02/09/2002) - Added a couple of reader responses to the Aeris section at the end. Added some new stuff on WEAPON. Also added some info on Zack, which can be found in Aeris's section of the FAQ.

Version 1.8 (09/01/2003) - Added some more stuff to the name origins, and some more interesting email submissions on various aspects of the plot. These have been shunted into section 8 to help keep thing under control. Also with rumours about FF7-2 growing, there is now a section for thoughts on that as well.

Version 2.0 (07/09/2003) - Woah it's been a while since I updated. Well the main addition here is extracts from an interview with one of the creators of Final Fantasy VII which has some interesting and controversial things to say about various aspects of the game. I've also inserted some sub headings into the Story of the game part just to make it a bit easier to navigate around (requested by a few people). Finally rumours still abound as to whether FFVII will get a remake or a sequel. Some people say no.. others are rumoured to be keen.. Basically folks, it's not confirmed, but its not denied either (argh!!)

EMAIL POLICY - I feel I have to lay out my position now regarding emails re: this FAQ. I do appreciate the emails I am sent regarding the game and this FAQ. However, I have had to restrict how much more stuff I add regarding things like possible sequels etc as they come dangerously close to fan-fics. Also a lot of people have sent me emails that basically tell me stuff I have already written. Please, PLEASE read the entire document before emailing me. It's a waste of both of our time if you just tell me something I already know or ask me something I have explained already. Also please bear in mind, I write many other guides and get emails about them, PLUS I work from home on my PC and have a lot of work related emails to deal with. Sometimes, I just never get a chance to deal with long and detailed ones until perhaps a month or so after I get them.

Version 2.1 (27/02/2004) This is just a quickie update. Sorted out some formatting stuff and some typos. I am aware of the new film sequel to Final Fantasy VII - "Advent Children". Rest assured this will be covered in this FAQ when it becomes available. I've also bashed out a plot FAQ for Final Fantasy VIII, so if you like that game, head on over to GameFAQs and check it out.

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***** 1) EVENTS PRIOR TO THE GAME - TIMELINE *****
=====

- Over 2000 years ago.

An interstellar race known as the Cetra arrives on the Planet. They are on a quest for the Promised Land. The Planet is an ideal location as it contains the Lifestream, pure magical energy drawn from every living thing on the Planet. There is already humanoid life on the Planet and the Cetra settle in

tribes amongst them.

- Approx 2000 years ago.

Jenova arrives. He/She is known as the "Calamity from the Skies". It lands at the north of the Planet and Cetra who have settled in a place called "Knowlespole" go and investigate. Jenova appears disguised as a Cetra, promising peace, but infects the Knowlespole Cetra with a terrible virus that mutates and destroys them. Jenova then moves across the Planet infecting and destroying the Cetra tribes.

Jenova's landing caused a huge wound in the Planet and the Lifestream gathers there at what becomes known as the Great North Cave to repair the Planet. Five Huge Robotic Weapons of increasing power are created by the Planet to kill Jenova (WEAPON, DIAMOND WEAPON, ULTIMATE WEAPON, RUBY WEAPON and EMERALD WEAPON), but before they can be used, a few surviving Cetra manage to defeat Jenova (now in permanent female form) and seal her in rock.

The Weapons go into hibernation and the few surviving Cetra disperse amongst the Human population.

- Over the next 2000 years.

The people of the Planet grow more sophisticated. The centre of commerce, government and power is centralised mainly in a large city called Midgar. This city becomes more populated over the years. A commercial weapons manufacturing company called Shinra figure out a way to draw power from the Lifestream in the form of pure Mako. Mako is used by everyone as a source for materia and magic, but Shinra create huge reactors that suck Mako from the Planet. This allows Midgar to become a huge, sprawling and prosperous city. However the speed of Midgars technological change is not matched by its democratic changes and Shinra finally take over the running of the government and form their own military wing and secret police force to keep a hold on power.

To keep a charade of democracy, a mayor is elected to run Midgar, but he/she is merely a puppet in the pay of Shinra. Shinra develop an elite armed force called SOLDIER, where promising soldiers are treated with Mako to enhance their abilities. They also create the Turks, a shadowy collection of assassins, spies and undercover thugs to carry out less obvious empire building on the companies behalf.

Over the last 50-odd years of Midgars history, it has become place of two extremes. Wealth, luxury and power fuelled by the Mako reactors are the lot of those who live high above the ground on Midgars raised Plate structure. Poverty, deprivation and oppression are endemic in the under-city, making life a constant struggle for those who live in the slums under the Plates of the Higher Midgar.

57 years ago

- Vincent Valentine born. At some point in the next twenty years he joins the Turks.

48 years ago

- Nanaki (Red XIII) born in Cosmo Canyon. He is one of the few remaining of his species. At some point during Nanaki's growing up, the Canyon was attacked by a vicious tribe know as the Gi. Nanaki's mother was killed. Seto, Nanaki's father fought off the Gi, but was turned to stone in the process. Nanaki is never told the truth as to where his father went and grows up believing Seto

abandoned the Canyon to the Gi like a coward. Nanaki's species is very long lived and has some connections to the Ancients. This may explain why Hojo took an interest in Nanaki many years later.

33 years ago

- Barret is born in Corel. Corel at that time is a prosperous town built on the coal mining industry. Coal still being the principal source of fuel for places outside of Midgar at this time.

32 years ago

- Cid Highwind born.

31 years ago

- Professor Gast while excavating in Mount Nibel, finds Jenova inert in a 2000-year-old geological stratum. He takes Jenova to Nibelheim, where he begins to research her origins and powers. At this point he believes her to be an Ancient/Cetra. Shinra become very interested in his work and offer him money and assistance to carry on.

30 years ago.

- The Jenova Project is started. The goal Shinra are aiming for is the creation of humans with the powers of the Ancients. It is not clear if Gast knew of this, but Hojo the scientist sent to assist by Shinra most certainly did.

Gast and Hojo start experimenting on Jenova. These are conducted in the basement laboratory of Nibelheim Mansion. A young female scientist called Lucrecia and a young Turk called Vincent (sent to keep an eye on things) are also present.

As the experiments progress, Vincent falls in love with Lucrecia. However she is in love with Hojo and declines Vincent's proposal of marriage. Lucrecia becomes pregnant by Hojo. Hojo, having no luck using full-grown humans and creatures in his Jenova experiments, decides to use his unborn child instead. He injects Lucrecia and the baby with Jenova cells. Lucrecia becomes very sick and upon delivering the baby, finally becomes altered beyond recovery.

Vincent in a rage confronts Hojo. But he is incapacitated by Hojo and subject to more Jenova treatments. He becomes another twisted monster like the rejects being stored in pods at the Nibelheim Mako Plant.

Hojo then stores Jenova in the Mako Plant and takes his perfect newborn baby son away to Midgar and Shinra headquarters where he can be raised and observed as he grows. The boy is named Sephiroth and he is never told who his parents are.

At some point Professor Gast left the project, most likely after Hojo began his warped experiments on live people. Realising he had no way of stopping the Shinra scientist he decided to get away before Shinra decided he is no longer useful.

Vincent awakes to find Lucrecia and Hojo gone and the experiments at Nibelheim Mansion over. In despair he seals himself up in a coffin in the basement and sleeps for the next 30 years. Lucrecia, having new powers courtesy of the Jenova cells also goes into seclusion in a Waterfall Cave.

28-24 years ago.

Professor Gast travels the planet. He is possibly looking for more information on the Ancients/Cetra. He visits Bugenhagen at Cosmo Canyon during his travels and gives him scientific equipment. At some point along the way he meets Ifalna, one of the last Ancients on the Planet. They fall in love and retire to Icicle Lodge on the Northern Continent. Gast does not officially leave Shinra, but he does not tell them of his whereabouts.

22 Years ago

- Aeris is born to Professor Gast and Ifalna. Soon after her birth Hojo finally tracks Gast down. He tries to take Aeris and Ifalna away for his experiments. Gast and Ifalna resist. Gast is killed and Ifalna and Aeris are captured.

21 years ago

- Cloud born in Nibelheim. He grows up a lonely and isolated child; constantly frustrated by his inability to allow himself to be the person he wants to really be.

20 years ago

- Tifa born in Nibelheim. She is out-going and lively and has a lot of friends. Although she and Cloud are close in age and distance they don't spend much time together as children.

Approx 16 years ago

- Shinra go to war abroad with the town of Wutai. The fierce pride of the leader Godo has kept Shinras influence out of the town, but they are quickly crushed and Wutai has to become a tourist town to carry on and survive. Somehow during this time, Ifalna escapes from Shinra Headquarters Laboratory with Aeris and gets as far as Sector 7 station in Midgar. Here, exhausted and wounded she hands Aeris over to Elmyra Gainsborough and then dies. During their first meeting Elmyra's husband is killed far away and this is sensed by Aeris.

Elmyra adopts Aeris and raises her. Aeris grows up showing strange intuitive powers and an affinity with nature. She keeps about her person a small white pearl of materia that her dead mother left for her. This is actually the materia for summoning Holy. But Aeris is not aware of its power. As she grows up, Tseng the leader of the Turks pesters her. He wants to take her back to Shinra Headquarters, but Aeris manages to avoid Shinra every time.

Sephiroth is also proving to be a hugely capable and talented young soldier with abilities and powers that far outstrip his peers. His conduct during this time of war earns him a hero's reputation even though he is still in his teens and he continues to rise through the ranks of SOLDIER.

During the War, Shinra keep investing in new military research and formulated a space program. An experienced young pilot called Cid Highwind was destined to fly Shinras rocket into space. Cid has already proved himself worthy with the Sea Plane the Tiny Bronco and the Highwind airship. But his dream was crushed when the launch was aborted due to technical problems. After the War with Wutai finished, Shinra decided its Mako business was more profitable than war and Space exploration and the Space program was dropped.

16 years ago

- Yuffie born in Wutai.

12 Years ago

- Tifa's Mother dies. An upset and confused Tifa believes her Mother has gone to Mount Nibel and sets off to find her. Cloud follows to make sure she stays safe but Tifa is injured in a fall. Tifa's father arrives and blames Cloud for leading her astray. Cloud, distressed at being wrongly blamed and angry at his inability to save Tifa, decides that one day he will become as strong and capable as the Legendary Sephiroth and resolves to join SOLDIER when he is old enough.

- After Tifa recovers, her and Cloud become a little closer. She hears of his plans to join SOLDIER, at the same time she starts training under martial arts master Zangan perfecting her hand-to-hand combat skills.

9 years ago

- Zack leaves his home in Gongaga and joins SOLDIER; he easily makes the grade and gets to serve under the command of Sephiroth.

7 years ago

- While stationed in Midgar, Zack meets and dates Aeris. He writes to his parents about her during this time.

- Cloud leaves Nibelheim, but fails to get into SOLDIER. He becomes an ordinary Shinra soldier and cuts off all contact with his hometown and old friends; so ashamed is he that he failed again.

5 years ago

- Reports of monsters disrupting life for the workers at the Mt. Nibel Mako reactor results in Sephiroth, Zack and Cloud being sent to Nibelheim to investigate. On reaching Nibelheim Cloud keeps his identity hidden from Tifa and the other townspeople. He cannot bear to be seen as just an "ordinary" soldier.

Tifa takes the party to the Mako reactor. Tifa and Cloud stay outside. Inside, Sephiroth discovers Jenova's body and sees all the mutated "failed" experiments of Hojo's. He begins to realise his origins may be similar and becomes upset. Zack is disbelieving at first, but when one of the mutated humans falls out of a pod he also begins to be concerned. The party return to Nibelheim Mansion.

Sephiroth finds all the notes of Jenova Project in the basement of the Mansion. He is aware of Professor Gast's initialisation of the project but has not been told how Gast died or Hojo's full involvement in his creation. Later in the night Zack goes to speak to Sephiroth and finds Sephiroth a changed man. Sephiroth has discovered Gast's notes he made at Icicle Lodge about the Ancients. He now believes he is descended from the Ancients and regards normal humans as traitors who abandoned the Cetra to a terrible disaster. However he does not seem to accept Jenova is the cause of that disaster. He rants and raves at Zack before leaving quickly to see Jenova whom he refers to as "Mother".

Zack follows him outside and sees the whole village in flames. Many people are dead or dying, a Shinra Soldier (Cloud) tends to his dying mother. Sephiroth

heads for the reactor with several townsfolk in hot pursuit. Tifa and Zack chase after him, Cloud following behind.

At the reactor Tifa discovers her father's body. Sephiroth has killed him. As Sephiroth moves towards the Pod with Jenova in it, Zack tries to attack him but is batted away. Tifa picks up Sephiroth's discarded sword and attacks him, but he takes the sword back and cuts her down. Cloud arrives to witness this and he tenderly moves Tifa into a more comfortable position before confronting Sephiroth.

Sephiroth opens the pod and tries to free Jenova. As Cloud approaches Sephiroth tells Jenova he has come to reclaim the Planet for her. Cloud stabs Sephiroth then returns to tend to Tifa. Injured, Sephiroth can only take Jenova's head with him, he leaves the pod room, walking past Cloud. Cloud follows him onto the bridge above the Life stream running far below at the bottom of the reactor. Sephiroth stabs Cloud through the chest, but Cloud keeps a hold of the sword and uses it to flip Sephiroth and Jenova's head into the bottom of the Mako reactor. Cloud then passes out.

- In the immediate aftermath, Zangan (Tifa's tutor) arrives at the reactor and takes the wounded Tifa to Midgar. Here she sets up a bar called "Seventh Heaven" in the sector 7 slums when she has recovered.

- Cloud, Zack and the surviving residents of Nibelheim are gathered up and used by Hojo to create clones of Sephiroth now they believe the original is dead.

- Far from dead, Sephiroth washes through the Life stream until he ends up at the Great North Cave. Having assimilated the knowledge of the Ancients while in there he begins to formulate a plan to turn himself into a God. This involves summoning a Meteor to cause a big enough wound on the planets surface to make the Life stream rush to one place, where he can absorb it all. Over the next 5 years he experiments with controlling the Sephiroth clones remotely and projecting himself psychically. His physical body however remains in the Great North Cave for the duration of the game.

- Shinra cover up the incident at Nibelheim and repopulate the town with Shinra staff. Experiments carry on at the Mansion, but Jenova is moved to Shinra Headquarters (now minus her head), for safekeeping. After the cloning project proves to be a failure, Hojo moves back to Midgar permanently and carries on research there. At some point he captures Nanaki for a series of unknown tests and names him Red XIII.

4 years ago to present day

- Shinra persuade the people of Corel to accept the building of a Mako reactor. Barret, seeing that coal has no future, pleads Shinra's case. His best friend Dyne opposes it, but Barret talks him round. One day Barret and Dyne come back from a trip out of town and find Shinra burning down Corel.

They discover that Shinra have blamed several explosions at the new reactor on sabotage by Corel Townsfolk. Barret and Dyne are both severely injured in the fighting. Dyne falls over a cliff and Barret believes him dead. Barret goes back to Corel to be with his now dead wife Myrna. He sees Dyne's wife Eleanor is also dead but Dyne's daughter Marlene isn't. He decides to take Marlene and flee to Midgar.

Barret has his useless arm replaced with a gun, he also hears of a similarly injured man who has a gun arm and surmises Dyne is still alive. But he cannot find him. Dyne remains at Corel, the desert overtakes the town and a huge

Entertainment Complex called the Gold Saucer is built above it. Corel becomes the Gold Saucer Prison town. Dynes mind disintegrates and all those who come into contact with him as he carries on as the Boss of Corel Prison fear him.

Meanwhile the remaining survivors of Corel move northwards and settle in the devastated North Corel, which has also lost its income from the shut down Mako Reactor. They live near the Ropeway station that leads to the Gold Saucer. They eek out a miserable existence selling junk to travellers going to the Gold Saucer.

- Barret, swearing revenge on Shinra decides to start targeting their reactors in Midgar. He hooks up with Tifa (who is also harbouring anger towards Shinra) and uses the basement of her bar as a centre of operations for his environmental terrorist group AVALANCHE.

- At sometime close to the present day, Zack and Cloud escape the Shinra Mansion. Cloud is nearly catatonic from Mako and Jenova treatments. Zack dresses him in a spare SOLDIER uniform and they manage to get to the mountains near Midgar before Shinra catches up with them. On their journeys Zack tells Cloud all about his life in SOLDIER and what happened when he was alone with Sephiroth. Cloud is still too confused and messed up to respond, but Zack takes care of him.

When Shinra find them Zack is shot dead. Cloud is left alive, as he is considered no threat. However Cloud manages to pick up Zacks sword and make it to Sector 7 railway station in Midgar where Tifa finds him still confused. As he gets better Clouds mind takes Zacks experiences and mixes them with his own, setting up the split personality that would allow Sephiroth such control over him.

Remembering Zack's idea that they become mercenaries, that's what he tells Tifa he is now and she decides to hire him to help AVALANCHE blow up the Mako reactors. It is here that the actual game begins...

[NOTE: I have explained in the FAQ later in this guide how I came to construct that timeline. Hopefully this description of the game's actual events will make it clearer as well]

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***** 2) THE STORY OF THE GAME *****
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1) ASSAULT ON REACTOR ONE

The game begins with Cloud meeting Jessie, Biggs, Wedge and Barret at the entrance of Midgar's Mako reactor No.1 after hijacking a train to get there. Barret is suspicious of Cloud as he doesn't trust someone one who used to work for Shinra. Jessie and the others are just grateful to have Clouds fighting expertise on their side. Barret explains that the Mako reactors are sucking the life out of the planet, which is why they must be destroyed. Cloud says he doesn't care; he's only in it for the money. Cloud follows Jessie into the reactor and goes deeper inside. Together with Barret they fight their way to the entrance of the reactor core. Just as they begin to lay explosive charges, Cloud clutches his head and a mysterious voice rings in his head.

Then an alarm goes off and the reactor's self defence goes into overdrive. Cloud and Barret fight off a robotic guard scorpion. The fight has cost them time and they now have ten minutes to evacuate before the explosives goes off. On the way back though Cloud discovers Jessie has got stuck, he frees her and they make their way to the outside. As they escape the bombs goes off and

Reactor No. 1 is put out of commission. AVALANCHE has scored their first major strike against Shinra, now its time to get to safety.

Barret tells the gang to split up and meet at Sector 8 railway station. As Cloud gets moving he sees a beautiful young woman selling flowers. She stops him and asks about the explosion and Cloud buys a flower from her. Then he hurries off only to be confronted by many Shinra Soldiers. He is surrounded, but escapes by leaping off a railway bridge onto a passing train. In an amazing stroke of luck, it's the same train that the rest of AVALANCHE have got on. He climbs inside and everyone except Barret are happy to see him. Barret chews him out for his reckless behaviour.

2) SECTOR SEVEN SLUMS - MEETING TIFA

The rest of the journey passes uneventfully, Jessie explains to Cloud how she faked Ids for them so they could pass through Shinra's security checkpoints with out being detected. She also gives Cloud a lesson on the Midgar rail system and the structure of the city itself.

Soon they are back at the Sector 7 slums and head to the bar "Seventh Heaven" which is run by Cloud's childhood friend Tifa. In the bar Cloud has a fight with Barret over the money he is owed. He prepares to leave but Tifa intervenes and persuades him to come on another mission. There is a flashback to the young Tifa and Cloud where she first makes him promise to come back and be a hero and rescue her. It is also where Cloud states he wants to be in SOLDIER and be like Sephiroth. After Cloud agrees to stay on and take out the Sector 5 Mako Reactor, Tifa is also to come along this time.

The next day they board the train to sector 5, but a security alert forces them to abandon the train early. They use an underground subway to access the reactor. Deeper in the reactor core, Cloud has another spasm. He sees Tifa as a young girl standing over the dead body of her father in a similar reactor, she accuses Sephiroth of killing him. She picks up Sephiroth's discarded sword and runs into the reactor core. Cloud snaps out of the flashback. They plant the bomb at the core then begin to leave, but are stopped by Shinra Soldiers. The President of Shinra appears. He insults them then sets his new weapon Airbuster on them. Then he leaves. They defeat Airbuster but it explodes taking out the walkway and Cloud plunges into the city below.

3) SECTOR 5 - MEETING AERIS, RESCUING TIFA

He awakes in the Sector 5 slums, inside a Church. Here he meets Aeris the flower girl again. She asks him to be her bodyguard and he agrees. Then Reno and Rude of the Turks turn up and begin to chase them. Cloud and Aeris escape up into the top of the church and then over the slum rooftops. They reach Aeris house where she introduces Elmyra, her adoptive mother. Aeris says she'll show Cloud back to sector seven the next day. She goes up to bed, and Elmyra asks Cloud if he could sneak out without Aeris knowing. But when Cloud does leave, Aeris is waiting for him at the entrance to sector six.

They take a break at a deserted playground and from here see Tifa in a Chocobo carriage going into Wall Market. They follow her there and find she has gone to Don Corneo's place. So after running a few errands they get Cloud dressed as a lady and get into Don Corneo's brothel. Cloud is lucky enough to be picked to be his date for the night. As he keeps Corneo talking, Tifa and Aeris break away from their captors and come up to "rescue" Cloud. They then threaten Corneo and he tells them that Shinra are going to break the plate above sector seven and literally bury AVALANCHE. Then he opens a trapdoor and

drops them in the sewers where the fight off Aps.

(There is a short cut to the Shinra Headquarters where we see Reeve (Cait Sith) butting heads with Heidegger about the plan to destroy Sector 7. Reeve is against it, so the President gives him a few days off, so they can carry on without Reeve objecting)

4) CONFRONTING RENO, AERIS IS TAKEN BY SHINRA

Tifa, Cloud and Aeris make their way through the Train Graveyard. At the other end they find AVALANCHE fighting with Shinra on the sector seven pillar. Jessie, Biggs and Wedge are killed. Aeris takes Marlene to safety. Tifa and Cloud go up to help. At the top they fight Reno of the Turks, but cannot disarm the bombs he has set. Then they see Aeris in the helicopter, she has been captured! They escape the exploding pillar and plate on a wire they use to swing down from. They end up in the sector 6 playground and Barret becomes more resolved to wipe Shinra out. Cloud also hears Sephiroth's voice telling him that he, Sephiroth is the rightful heir of the planet - an Ancient.

They then head back to Aeris house only to find that although Marlene is safe, Aeris is now prisoner in Shinra's Headquarters. Elmyra tells them about how she found Aeris and Ifalna 15 years ago and that Aeris is an Ancient. They head to Wall Market and climb up a wire onto the top plate. They then make their way up to the final few floors of Shinra Headquarters. Up there they meet the Mayor, who tells them he has no power, he just looks after Shinra's paperwork.

5) INFILTRATING SHINRA, CAPTURE AND ESCAPE

Further up they listen in on a conference with several top executives and Hojo in attendance. They say they plan not to rebuild sector 7, but instigate a neo-Midgar programme, which is linked to the Ancients and the ideal of the Promised Land. Hojo says he has been running tests on Aeris, but it would take too long to run full tests and says he plans to breed from her to make tougher subjects. They follow Hojo upstairs and Cloud is aghast to find a pod with a headless Jenova inside it. They then rescue Aeris from Hojo and meet the lion like creature Red XIII. But their attempt to escape is foiled by the Turks and they are taken before President Shinra. He tells them that Aeris is an Ancient and they plan to use her to find the Promised Land, where they can build a new Midgar in a Mako rich environment. He then sends them to be locked up.

In the cell, Aeris reflects on the Promised Land and tells Tifa that she can hear voices from the planet and her mother sometimes, but she herself doesn't know where the Promised Land is. After that they go to sleep. When they awake their doors are unlocked and all the guards dead. They follow a trail of blood and find Jenova is missing from the pod she was in. They carry on further and find President Shinra dead with Sephiroth's sword stuck through him. They meet up with a terrified Palmer who says Sephiroth was ranting about not letting "us" (humans) have the Promised Land. Then Rufus the President's son turns up. Cloud stays and fights him, Tifa guards the escape route and Barret, Red XIII and Aeris go down in the lift and fight off the 100 Gunner.

They reach the bottom, bickering like mad and Tifa greets them. They all hop into a three-wheel van and accompanied by Cloud on a motorbike they roar off. Shinra bikers chase them to the end of the motorway, then they fight the huge Motorball. After this they drop down from the incomplete road and exit Midgar's City walls. They are now out in the field and separate into two

groups.

6) LEAVING MIDGAR, CLOUD FLASHBACK IN KALM

They meet up in the nearby Village Kalm. They get a room and Cloud tells the group his story of the events in Nibelheim five years ago. However at this point in time he is using Zack memories. The first clue that this Cloud was at Nibelheim all along though can be found in the very first scene. There is an ordinary soldier suffering from motion sickness, Zack/Cloud says he never suffers from it, yet later we find out he does (when he talks to Yuffie on the Airship). Anyway, he basically narrates the story as told in the chronology above. Tifa is quiet while he talks about it. His flashback to seeing his mother is oddly broken up and he recalls his father dying when he was young. His flashback ends as he confronts Sephiroth in the Jenova Chamber.

The group then decide to follow Sephiroth and find out what he is planning to do with Jenova. They set off for the Mythril Mine. After stopping by Chocobo Bill's farm to learn how to catch Chocobo's they cross the marshes and find evidence that Sephiroth had been through. A giant serpent, the Midgar Zolom is impaled on a tree. They enter the Mines and meet up with Tseng and Rude and new recruit to the Turks, Elena. She lets slip that they are also chasing Sephiroth and they are headed for Junon Harbour. So our heroes head for Junon next.

At the run down town of Junon they help rescue a girl from a monster called Bottomswell. That night Cloud has a dream where he puzzles over why he did not see Tifa socially during the time he was in Nibelheim. When he awakes he uses the jumping skill of Mr. Dolphin to leap up into the main town of Junon Harbour. Here he disguises himself as a Shinra Soldier and snoops about the town. After having to partake in a televised parade in Rufus's honour, he ends up in front of Rufus and Heideigger and does a little display with some other soldiers. During his time in Junon, Cloud finds out that Shinra have an Airship prepared, they are using another called the Gelnika, Sephiroth has been seen in Junon but cannot be found and finally that Hojo left a letter of resignation and disappeared from Midgar.

7) JUNON PORT, FOLLOWING SEPHIROTH BY BOAT

Cloud boards the boat headed for the other continent and soon discovers everyone else is aboard. But they can't relax long, Sephiroth is loose on board and kills a lot of people. They fight Jenova: BIRTH in the hold and actually get a glimpse of Sephiroth. The defeated part of Jenova disappears and they are left pondering further what Sephiroth's plan is. They then disembark on the Costa Del Sol. Here they find Hojo sunning himself on the beach, but he refuses to be forthcoming about anything so they leave and head for North Corel. On the way they are told a black-cloaked man has passed that way earlier.

They reach North Corel, where Barret is given an unfriendly reception. The populous also speak of seeing a tattoo on the black clad figure. After hearing Barret's story of how Shinra betrayed the people of Corel (see pre-game Chronology) they board the ropeway and travel to the Gold Saucer.

Inside Barret stomps off. Cloud is approached by Dio the complex manager and asked if he knows what "Black materia" is. When Cloud demurs, he says a black-cloaked man had been through earlier asking about it. Wandering around, he is confronted by the bizarre Cait Sith. A small grey cat that rides a giant stuffed moogles. Cait Sith tries to tell his fortune and decides to tag along

to see if any of them come true (though actually it's cos he is Reeve...). Then they find murdered employees and hear reports that a man with a gun for an arm has done it. Dio appears and dumps them all down into Corel Prison.

8) COREL PRISON, DYNE, ESCAPE VIA CHOCOBO RACING

Down here they find an emotional and angry Barret. Asking around they discover that another gun-armed man called Dyne runs the place and it was him who shot everyone. Barret confronts Dyne, and after fighting him tells him that Marlene, Dynes daughter is still alive. Dyne though decides he can't go on living as the twisted, angry man he has become and entrusts Marlene to Barret forever. Then he kills himself. Barret then threatens a few people until Cloud is accepted as a Chocobo jockey (the only way out of the prison). Cloud wins the race and when it's over everyone is set free. Dio realised they were not to blame and gives them a buggy as compensation.

They cross the desert and make their way round to Cosmo Canyon, where the buggy breaks down. They go into the canyon and Red XIII reveals that this is his home. They meet up with Red XIII's grandfather a man called Bugenhagen who has an Observatory at the top of the Canyon. Red XIII also reveals his real name as Nanaki. As they talk to people at the Canyon they find that this place is a centre for the study of the Planet. Nanaki tells the group that his race were the protectors of the Canyon and his mother was killed many years ago when the Canyon was attacked by the Gi Tribe. He detests his father whom he blames for running away and allowing his mother to die. They all then go up to Bugenhagen's Observatory.

9) COMSMO CANYON, BUGENHAGEN EXPLAINS THE LIFESTREAM

Bugenhagen has a large model of the planet. He tells them that the planet may die soon as he has been hearing its cries of pain getting louder. Bugenhagen explains that everything in the Universe is linked. When a person or any living things dies their body may rot away but their soul returns to the planet. These spirits merge into one, a life-force that covers the planet - this is called the "Lifestream". This Lifestream is full of Spirit Energy that infuses all new life and merges back together when that life is over. It not only makes people, animals and birds but Planets as well, if that Spirit Energy is drained, then the Planet will die. This is why Mako manufacturing is so destructive. The Spirit Energy is extracted from the Lifestream, compressed and turned into Mako. The energy is lost and without it the Planet will crumble and die.

Bugenhagen then talks to Aeris in private, when she rejoins the group by Cosmo Candle she is a little upset. She is brooding about being the last Cetra and if she can save the planet. Barret finds a new impetus in the canyon after remembering he promised he would take Jessie, Biggs and Wedge there when they had beaten Shinra. Tifa is also pensive, the flames remind her of the events in Nibelheim, but she can't bring herself to talk to Cloud about it. Nanaki also speaks of his anger at his father.

10) CAVE OF GI. NANAKI LEARNS THE TRUTH

Bugenhagen comes down and tells Nanaki it is time he new the truth about his Father. He, Nanaki and Cloud enter the sealed up cave of the Gi. The Gi tribe were the creatures who attacked Cosmo Canyon many years before.

The cave is filled with their vengeful spirits,

which could not return to the Lifestream. They fight the ghost of the tribe leader - Gi Nattack. After this they find the petrified body of Nanaki's father - Seto. Now Nanaki knows the truth, his father died a hero's death defending the canyon. Bugenhagen tells Nanaki that he must continue to travel with Cloud, to give the Planet every chance of survival. As he resolves to be a hero like his father tears roll down Seto's stone cheeks...

Nanaki rejoins the group and they carry on the Tifa and Cloud's hometown - Nibelheim.

11) RETURN TO NIBELHEIM, WHAT IS THE "REUNION"?

When they arrive both Tifa and Cloud are aghast to find the place is unchanged. It should have been ruined or at least shown some signs of the devastation Sephiroth wrecked on the place. They ask around and no one will acknowledge the events of five years ago. They accuse Cloud of lying and saying terrible things. Cloud and Tifa cannot remember who any of these people are. There is even someone living in Cloud's mother's house, but it is not his mother. They find several black-cloaked figures on the outskirts of the town. They are tattooed and speak Sephiroth's name and about becoming one with him. They speak of the "Reunion". They tell him Sephiroth is in the Mansion. So they go inside to look for him.

Cloud confronts Sephiroth in the laboratory. Sephiroth seems to speaking riddles, he calls Jenova the "Calamity from the Skies" and Cloud demands to know if that means she is not an Ancient. Sephiroth asks Cloud if he is coming to the Reunion, then tells him he has no right to participate. Then he flies away leaving Cloud frustrated and confused. They have no option but to get in the buggy and carry on North.

12) ROCKET TOWN - MEET CID HIGHWIND

They roll up next in a place called Rocket Town, so called because a big rusty old rocket (No. 26) sits in the middle of the place. Asking around they discover that Sephiroth has passed though. They also find out that there is a pilot in town called the "Captain". A man who was destined to be the first man in space as part of Shinra's now abandoned space program. They got to the Captain's house and see there is a small plane there called the "Tiny Bronco" they decide to ask if they can use it. They meet Shera, the Captain's assistant who tells them that Rufus is on his way to discuss reopening the Space program. Then the Captain arrives and introduces himself as Cid. Cid then tells them about Shinra's Space program, how he blames Shera for messing up the launch of No. 26 and how Shinra changed from weapons manufacturer to Mako producers.

Cid refuses to allow them to borrow the Tiny Bronco. Just then Palmer then Rufus turn up and demand to use it as well. There is a fracas between Palmer and our heroes and somehow they all climb aboard the Tiny Bronco and escape. Unfortunately they tail gets shot out, so the plane ditches in the sea. Luckily it can still be used as a boat. Cid decides to join them as he is fed up with Shinra and living in Rocket Town. Cid tells them that Rufus was chasing Sephiroth to the Temple of the Ancients. So they decide to try and find it before Shinra does. By lucky coincidence they land up on a small island where a trader lives. He tells them he sold an item called the Keystone to the manager of the Gold Saucer, this Keystone being the item that will unlock the Temple of Ancients. Apparently this Temple contains something called Ultimate Destruction Magic.

13) GOLD SAUCER, WHAT IS THE BLACK MATERIA? CAIT SITHS BETRAYAL

So off they go to the Gold Saucer where Dio agrees to lend the Keystone to them. The cable car is broken so they spend the night in the Ghost Hotel. They try and make sense of the story so far. They surmise that Sephiroth is searching for the Promised Land but also something called Black Materia. They also think that the tattooed clones are something to do with Sephiroth. Nanaki is worried, he has a 13 tattoo and is scared he might go mad like the pathetic clones they have seen so far. Later that night Aeris and Cloud go out on a date. After taking part in a play they ride around the saucer on a monorail. Aeris tells Cloud how much he was like "him", Zack. She also says she wants to meet "Cloud". This confuses him, "I'm right here" he says...

Later still Cait Sith reveals himself to be a Shinra spy. He takes the keystone and delivers it to Shinra. But he decides to stay with the group, saying he is troubled by his conscious. With a bit of blackmail, he is accepted to stay. He also knows how to get to the Temple of Ancients, so the next day they pilot the Tiny Bronco eastwards to get there.

When they arrive they find more clones lurching around the place. Aeris and Cloud get inside and find Tseng lying wounded. He has been injured by Sephiroth and is rambling about how the Promised Land is not what Rufus and the others think it will be, he hands the Keystone to Cloud. He then falls unconscious. Cloud puts the Keystone on the Altar and they descend into a maze like structure of buildings. They chase a Lagomorph around the place until they finally catch it. Aeris says it's a spirit body of an Ancient, one that's lost the ability to talk over so many years. She is led to a pool of wisdom where the Ancients show her Sephiroth and Tseng's encounter. Sephiroth tells Tseng he plans to merge with the planet and become a god and the way to do it lies in the Temple. Then he stabs Tseng.

14) TEMPLE OF ANCIENTS - SEPHIROTH REVEALS HIS PLAN

They carry on deeper into the Temple where they meet Sephiroth. He informs them he plans to inflict a huge wound on the Planet and absorb the life energy that will gather there to heal it. He points to a mural on the wall and says it depicts the means to do this, by summoning a huge meteor. He then rushes at Cloud and disappears. Cloud begins to freak out, he splits into two mentally. He struggles to regain control and he becomes one again. After a fight with a Temple Guardian, they discover a small model of the Temple. It is labelled "Black Materia". Shaking the model causes the room to shake, they realise the model IS the Temple. Solving each puzzle will shrink the Temple down into a piece of Black material, but will crush the person inside as well. They decide they need to keep the Black Materia out of Sephiroth's hands, and Cait Sith volunteers his stuffed body for the task.

They trust him and depart, fighting Demon Gate on the way. Cait Sith solves the puzzles and the Temple reduces down into a small piece of Black Materia sitting in the hole where the Temple was. They pick up the material and comment that no one can use it alone to summon Meteor. But then Sephiroth appears and informs them that his years travelling in the Lifestream have given him the knowledge and power to use the materia. Cloud then convulses and splits in two again. One stays standing still, the other lurches towards Sephiroth and hands him the Black Materia. He then collapses. Sephiroth laughs then departs. Aeris goes over to Cloud but he begins to attack her. Just this moment Cait Sith (mk.2) and the rest of the gang show up. Tifa yells at him and he passes out.

15) AERIS LEAVES, THEY FOLLOW HER TO THE FORGOTTEN CITY. TRAGEDY

Cloud dreams - he speaks to Aeris in a beautiful forest. She tells him she is going to handle Sephiroth alone. She then fades from view and Sephiroth appears and tells Cloud "we" must stop her soon. Then Cloud awakens in the Inn at Gongaga. The others tell him Aeris has gone. Cloud says he knows, and he knows she has gone to the City of the Ancients. He is paranoid about continuing, knowing he could betray them to Sephiroth, but Barret and Tifa talk him round. They take the Tiny Bronco north to Bone Village, where the archaeologists digging there tell them they saw Aeris enter the Sleeping Forest, which leads to the Forgotten City of the Ancients. They acquire the Lunar Harp and make their way through the Sleeping Forest to the deserted Forgotten City.

They search through the beautiful coral like structures and get deeper into the city. They finally discover a small shrine by a pool of water and Aeris knelt in prayer beside it. Cloud leaps over to her and draws his sword, he is being compelled by Sephiroth to kill her, but Tifa snaps him out of it. But before they can do anything, Sephiroth descends out of nowhere and runs his sword through Aeris, killing her. She slowly falls to the ground; a small pearl of white materia falls from her body and bounces down into the water. Cloud cradles her dead body while Sephiroth informs him that his job is nearly done and now he will head north to the Promised Land. Cloud rages at him, but Sephiroth forces them to fight another part of Jenova (LIFE). Then he tells Cloud he (Cloud) cannot feel hurt, loss or pain as he is merely a puppet. Then he disappears. Cloud takes Aeris's body out into the deeper water and lets it drift down to a peaceful resting place...

16) SEPHIROTH MUST PAY! TIME TO SCALE THE GREAT CLACIER

They all get together and listen as Cloud tells them he is determined to defeat Sephiroth, now more than ever. But he needs them to stop him from doing something terrible. They all agree and decide to go north to Icicle Inn. There they find evidence of Professor Gast's research (see secret scenes and pre-game chronology). They discover they need to scale the Great Glacier. Then Elena (from the Turks) shows up and blames them for killing Tseng, giving Cloud a good punch up as payback. When Cloud comes round, they borrow some snowboards and off they all go.

They arrive at the bottom of the Great Glacier and explore the frozen wastes until they find a small house at the bottom of the Glacial Cliff. Inside a man called Holzoff tells them that many hundreds of years ago something fell from the sky in the nearby area. They stay the night and scale the cliff the next day. They soon find themselves inside a huge crater. They follow the twisting pathways to the centre of the crater, coming across dying clones as they do so.

The scene changes to the deck of an airship. Rufus, Hojo, Scarlet and Heidegger are aboard. They are descending into the crater that Rufus decides is the Promised Land as it is so Mako rich. Hojo muses to himself about the Reunion.

17) AT THE CRATER. CLOUD BELIEVES HE IS A FAILED CLONE

Back to our heroes, they have made it to the centre of the Crater. Sephiroth is killing some more clones and when they confront him he decides his current body has "outlived its usefulness" and disappears. He gets into Cloud's head and tells him its time for the Reunion. They then battle Jenova: DEATH. Cloud figures out that a powerful will is at work in the area. He then hands the

Black Materia to Nanaki for safekeeping. Leaving Nanaki, Barret and Cait Sith behind he, Tifa and Cid carry on.

Sephiroth bombards Tifa and Cloud with images of Nibelheim five years ago, but the true events with Zack. Cloud dismisses this as a lie to undermine him, but Tifa is uncertain. Cloud demand to know why Sephiroth is doing this. Sephiroth calls him a failed experiment; a clone made by Hojo of Jenova cells and Mako whose "real" self was destined to obey Sephiroth, which is why he gave him the Black Materia. Not even worthy of a number tattoo.

Sephiroth picks up on Tifa's doubts about Cloud. She cannot explain how he and Cloud share a common childhood memory of Nibelheim, yet she never saw him five years ago. Sephiroth says "Cloud" was created when he met up with Tifa in Midgar, the Jenova allowed him to shape himself around her memories of a boy name Cloud. Cloud stick to his guns, saying Sephiroth is lying. Then he tries to remember how he came to join SOLDIER and he can't. He collapses at this revelation.

18) CLOUD HANDS OVER THE BLACK MATERIA TO SEPHIROTHS REAL FORM

The scene shifts back to Rufus and Hojo who have walked into the central cave. Rufus is convinced it's the Promised Land. Hojo disagrees. They feel a rumble and a huge eye blinks at them. Hojo states that it is WEAPON, created to protect the planet. Meanwhile Sephiroth tricks Nanaki into following the others deeper into the cave. Cloud then arrives in the cave and warns Rufus and the others to leave. Nanaki shows up and Cloud asks him for the Black Materia. Cloud is now obeying Sephiroth. He apologises to everyone. Hojo is gleeful that his theory about Jenova cells reuniting has been proven, but then disgusted that only the failure made it. Cloud rise up into the ceiling and broods about how he was being summoned by Sephiroth not chasing him. He then hands the Black Materia to the cocooned body of the real Sephiroth. The whole cave begins to rumble and come apart. Rufus, Hojo and the rest make for the Airship, escaping just in time. WEAPON rises up out of the crater and seals it with an energy barrier. Everyone but Cloud makes it out OK.

Tifa dreams - she is meeting Cloud at the sector 7 railway station. She remembers being uncomfortable about his memories, how he knew some stuff he shouldn't and how he forgot other stuff he should. How she wanted him to join AVALANCHE so she could keep an eye on him.. She awakens to find that she and Barret are locked up back in Junon Harbour. Barret explains that she has been out cold for seven days, in that time WEAPON is tearing the place up and Sephiroth has summoned a huge meteor that is hanging ominously in the sky. Rufus shows up and tells them they are to be executed to make the people feel better. They are being blamed for all the calamity Sephiroth has caused.

19) WEAPON IS UNLEASHED. TIFA IS TO BE EXECUTED

Tifa is put in the gas chamber. As Scarlet locks her in WEAPON attacks. Using this as a diversion a disguised Cait Sith incapacitates Scarlet and frees Barret. Rufus is throwing everything he has at WEAPON but still it attacks. Scarlet recovers and locks Barret and Cait Sith out of the room where the gas chamber is. Luckily the guard dropped the key in the confusion and Tifa manages to let herself out. Rufus fires Junon's huge cannon at WEAPON, which retaliates by tearing a hole in the side of the harbour. Tifa is able to climb up and is chased down the barrel of the Sister Ray by Scarlet. They have a slap fight. Tifa then runs to the end of the cannon and leaps off, only to grab a ladder coming out of the side of the Shinra Airship (the Highwind). Cid is in control and Cait Sith, Barret and Nanaki are also safe and well.

Tifa tries to think of what to do next, but she is very despondent. She wants to see Cloud again. Nanaki thinks that Cloud may have washed into the Lifestream. He says there are places where the Lifestream gushes up through cracks in the Ocean floor. So they head to one of these places, Mideel.

20) A CRIPPLED CLOUD IS FOUND AT MIDEEL. TIFA STAYS TO CARE FOR HIM

Sure enough, in an AMAZING stroke of luck they find Cloud at Mideel. He washed up on the shore about a week before, but he is a wreck. He has been poisoned by Mako and is a drooling, shuddering shell. Sat in a wheelchair he can only jerk his head and mumble broken words. Gutted, Tifa lays her head on his knee and cries. Outside the clinic, the Doctor tells Barret and Cid that Cloud has had so much knowledge drenched Mako forced inside him that he has literally shut down mentally. Tifa decided she wants to stay with Cloud, Barret asks her is she is sure its him and not Sephiroth's shadow. She is adamant. So the others return to the Highwind and try to think of what to do next.

21) THE OTHERS QUEST FOR THE HUGA MATERIA

Once aboard, Cait Sith lets them eavesdrop on a Shinra meeting. They plan to destroy Meteor by collecting Huge Materia from Mako reactors all over the planet. These are massive chunks of compressed Mako, which they will somehow ram into the meteor. They have collected it from Nibelheim and are planning to get some more from Fort Condor and North Corel. So Barret decides they must get this Huge Materia and they duly elect Cid leader. First they head for the reactor near North Corel. There they arrive too late to stop them loading the Materia onto a train. They manage to hijack the train though prevent it smashing through North Corel, they also acquire the Huge Materia.

They then head for Fort Condor. This is place where the inhabitants protect a massive Phoenix that nests at the top in the abandoned reactor. They fight off Shinra's attack and witness the hatching of the new Phoenix. They collect the second Huge Materia and go back to the airship. They decide to go and check up on Cloud and Tifa back in Mideel.

Back in Mideel and Cloud is still a clod. At that moment Ultimate Weapon appears and attacks. Barret, Cid and Nanaki fight it, but in the process the Lifestream begins to boil up. It bursts up out of the ground taking most of Mideel with it. Tifa and Cloud don't make it out in time and both plunge into the shining green depths...

22) FINDING THE REAL CLOUD, TIFA UNRAVELS HIS TORMENTED MIND

Now we enter a mixture of Cloud and Tifa's minds. Tifa find herself in a black expanse. Weird screeching noises surround her, she tries to run but gets nowhere. She collapses, pleading for Cloud to help her and spirals away into darkness... to come around on a strange platform suspended in the middle of space. Three paths lead off the platform, by each sits a Cloud. A fourth Cloud hangs over the area, transparent, clutching his head in pain.

She approaches the first Cloud and they walk together, back to Nibelheim of five years ago. Finally Tifa tells Cloud that this memory is wrong, she never saw him that day. She waited for him, but he never showed up. Zack replaces Cloud and they come back to the platform with three Clouds. Cloud asks her if she is sure that young man was not him and she says yes. He remembers his

promise to her when they were small, was it just a lie? They revisit that memory. Tifa ponders Sephiroth's assertion that she helped make Cloud from her own memories. But she thinks it is too real to be imagined, he must be remembering it. She says she believes he is the real Cloud from Nibelheim, but he does not. He has to find the truth himself. They arrive back again at the platform.

She gets him to talk about memories only he could have known, not ones he could have got from her. He remembers the day Tifa's mum died and how Tifa went into Mt. Nibel and how he followed and got blamed for Tifa having an accident. How he wanted to be strong so Tifa would notice him. Frustrated by his inability to fit in, he starts to look down on the people around him. Except for Tifa. This memory proves to Tifa that he wasn't made five years ago, that they are getting closer to discovering the truth.

They both agree to revisit Nibelheim and this time events unfold in Cloud's head as they actually happened. He reveals he was there all along as one of the ordinary soldiers, too ashamed to admit he never made the grade. He remembers stabbing Sephiroth and knocking him into the Lifestream. Now he has faced the truth of his own past he combines back into one Cloud. Finally he is the real Cloud again.. With this coming to terms done with, he and Tifa exit the Lifestream and return to the normal world.

22) CLOUD IS RESTORED. THE MATERIA BOMB MUST BE DISARMED

They all reunite back on the ship and Cloud apologises to everyone. They then decide to go to Junon and the Underwater Reactor to try and swipe the last Huge Materia. They go to Junon and travel down into a deep underwater reactor. There they fight Reno and take control of a submarine. This they use to blow up the submarine carrying the Huge Materia. They then go back to Junon and spot another Shinra airship flying off towards Rocket Town. They get in the Highwind and give chase.

Once in Rocket Town they discover that the plan is to load the Huge Materia into Rocket no. 26 and pilot it into meteor. A huge Materia bomb. Cid decides to take over the rocket. Cloud pleads with him, saying they have to retrieve the Materia, but Cid says he believes science can save them from Meteor and pushes Cloud aside. The argument is cut short by Palmer launching the Rocket with them inside it of it. Luckily there is an escape pod, so once Cid has got over his joy at being in space they retrieve the materia and go to the pod. On the way the faulty tank blows up injuring Cid. Cid realises he has wrongly blamed Shera all these years, when she was right about it being broken. Right on cue, Shera appears and helps get Cid into the pod. They get away and the Rocket smashes into Meteor. Parts break off, but it is not enough and Meteor carries on plunging towards the planet's surface.

Aboard the Highwind, the gang wonder if they were wrong to interfere with Shinra's plan. But Cid gives a rousing speech about how they should be the Planet's protectors. They hear a scream from the Planet and decide to go and see Bugenhagen for advice on what to do next. They go and see him, he asks them to look into their hearts for the way. Cloud and the others all think of Aeris and decide she is still the key to defeating Sephiroth. They decide to return to the Forgotten Capital with Bugenhagen in tow. On the way they share memories of Aeris. Cait Sith tells them that he (as Reeve) had informed Elmyra of her death. They soon arrive back at the Capitol and take Bugenhagen to the Shrine where she was killed.

23) BUGEHAGEN IN THE FORGOTTEN CITY - SEPHIROTH MUST BE KILLED

Bugenhagen figures out that the power needed to defeat Sephiroth and Meteor is "Holy". They realise they need the White Materia to summon Holy, but are unsure how to get it or use it. Bugenhagen says they need to find the Key to the Ancients to help him figure out what they should do next. So Cloud and the others leave him and go and look for it.. Would you believe it, they manage to find it using the submarine lurking on the bottom of the sea. They return with it to Bugenhagen and place it in the music box. A secret cave is revealed. They enter and Aeris's death is replayed. They realise that Aeris had already prayed for Holy. Holy is summoned, but Sephiroth is blocking it. The only way to release the power of Holy is to kill Sephiroth.

They return to the Airship where Cait Sith informs them that the Junon Cannon has been moved to Shinra headquarters, where it is going to be fired at Sephiroth's energy barrier. Back at headquarters, Scarlet informs them that the cannon will fire Mako shells and is to be called the Sister Ray. Then feedback hits Cait Sith as Weapon rises out of the sea and commences attack upon Midgar.

They decide to fly back there and try and defeat Weapon. Barret and Cait Sith then have a big fight over the morality of Barret's terrorist actions. Cait Sith also says he can't quit Shinra now, even though he wants to. In his position he can do more good where he is, than as another enemy of Shinra.

As they head for Midgar, the Sister ray fires at Weapon, knocking it backwards.

It retaliates with a barrage of energy blasts. The Highwind pitches in firing at Weapon as well. The huge energy blast from the Sister ray cuts through Weapon and carries on focused at the energy barrier around the Great North Cave, which is manages to dissipate. Weapon is dead, but unfortunately his energy blasts hit Midgar with full force. Rufus is killed in the ensuing explosions. Now the barrier is gone, our heroes fly over the crater.

24) THE CRATER CAN BE REACHED, BUT MIDGAR IS IN PERIL FROM HOJO

But before they can go inside they hear via Cait Sith that energy is still being supplied to the Sister Ray. It's overloading and the explosion it will create will destroy Midgar. Reeve takes control and discovers that Hojo is sending power to the cannon. He can't stop him as Reeve, so Cloud and the others decided to go and stop Hojo. Reeve tells Scarlet and Heidegger to stay out of their way. But they decide Reeve's time is up and call two guards to kick him out of the building. They intend to stop Hojo themselves using their new weapon the Proud Clod.

Cloud and the others parachute into the Midgar slums, Cait Sith warns them Heidegger is out for their blood. They slip into a storm drain and find themselves in a maze of pipes then an underground railway. There they meet Reno, Rude and Elena and call a truce. Reno sees no point in fighting anymore and the Turks slope off. They climb back out onto Midgars streets near a large tower, there they face off against the Proud Clod and kill Scarlet and Heidegger. They then ascend the tower and confront Hojo at the top.

Hojo has completely lost it and is ranting about sending more power to his son, Sephiroth. He abuses Cloud as a failure and tells them he has injected himself with Jenova Cells. He then mutates, so they kill him and shut down the energy feed. They are left to reflect on the bombshell that Sephiroth was Hojo's son.

Then they go back to the Highwind and realise they now have to go to the centre of the North Cave and kill Sephiroth. Cloud tells them they have seven days to defeat Sephiroth before meteor falls and tells them to go and see their loved ones. They all go their separate ways.

25) THE FINAL NIGHT. CLOUD AND TIFA ALONE

Tifa and Cloud sit on the edge of the crater and reflect that they both have nothing except each other now. They speak of how in the darkest moments they heard each other voices. Cloud mumbles that he always had so much he wanted to say to her, but now they are alone he can't think of anything. Tifa says gently to him: "Cloud... Words aren't the only thing that tell people what you're thinking..." Night falls.

Next day, Tifa awakens next to Cloud and they had back up to the airship. At first they think they are alone, but the rest of the gang are waiting for them. All fired up they head for the North Cave and to Sephiroth.

They fight their way down through a series of eerie caves. Finally they find the entrance to the middle of the crater. Half of the group stay behind to fight off the monsters, Cloud and the others drop down into the green, sparkling centre of the crater. As they leap across to the middle, they face even tougher battles, culminating in the fearsome Jenova: SYNTHESIS. After defeating her, the crystal structure they are stood upon breaks up and they go rushing into blackness.

Cloud falls towards a glowing white sphere, Holy. He lands on a suspended stone platform, along with the others. Sephiroth appears in front of the white sphere of energy and forces them all up into the air. He torments them with rings of energy, but somehow they break free and challenge him. He appears to them as the huge mutated "Bizzaro" Sephiroth. They defeat that form, but a new form appears. "Safer" Sephiroth, a large, one-winged almost angel like figure now fights them. They defeat him and with the final blow his body breaks apart in a burst of light and energy.

They make it back to the lip of the crater and rest. They ponder what will happen next. Suddenly Cloud convulses and hears Sephiroth in his head. He travels back into his mind and in a terrible rage destroys Sephiroth with his ultimate attack, the Omnislash. Sephiroth looks almost surprised as he finally dies for good. Surrounded by green Lifestream energy, Cloud sees it pooling and joining into a column of pure Holy energy. A female hand reaches out to him, he smiles..

25) SEPHIROTH IS DEAD. BUT METEOR STILL CRASHES DOWN...

Tifa grabs him as he sits on a ledge in the crater, everything crumbling around him. He is too far away and she topples over the edge. Cloud grabs her and Cait Sith pulls them both up onto safe ground. The Highwind appears just in time and they climb aboard. Now all they can do is watch and see if Holy does the trick. Back in Kalm, Marlene senses something and immediately thinks of Aeris. Now we see Midgar, Meteor has almost reached the surface, blasts of energy destroy first the upper plates then crash down into the slums.

Then Holy appears, a point of white light gathering force and aimed directly at Meteor. A huge hole opens up in Meteor, just the size of Midgar. As the power of Holy hits Meteor, red energy pours down onto Midgar pummeling it. Shocked, Cloud and the others observe that Holy is having the opposite effect. Then they see first one, then two, then hundreds of pinpricks of green light appear all over the Planet's surface. They rush towards the column of Holy light. They all combine in a huge mass of energy, the Lifestream, Holy, Meteor and Midgar. As Meteor begins to dissolve, the scene pulls out to reveal Aeris, surrounded by green light, smiling at you, the way she does at the beginning of the story...

500 years later...

Nanaki is running through a sandy red valley, two cubs trying to keep pace with him. He is much older now and his mane has grey hairs, but his tattoo is still visible. He stops on a plateau and howls. In the distance we see Midgar, now nothing more than a ruin, ablaze with flowers.

THE END

***** 4) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS *****

In this FAQ I have provided the quotes from the script and actual scene references that justify my construction of the pre-game Timeline and well as explaining the ending of the game. This is also my forum for further expanding on my explanations when asked about them in emails.

a) EXPLAINING THE ENDING

Final Fantasy 7 has a VERY open ended ending as it were. This is my attempt to explain it. This is probably the hardest question to answer as much of my theory is based on supposition rather than hard facts. Even combing the script doesn't yield much of a definite explanation. But based on what has gone before, I think this is a reasonable interpretation.

So understanding the ending depends really on how you regard the significance of the death of Aeris and the extent of the powers she and Sephiroth possessed.

It also requires some thought as to the symbolism of the game and the true meaning of Midgar.

In my opinion Aeris only died in a physical sense when Sephiroth stabbed her. She was an Ancient and possessed of tremendous powers. It is arguable that she actually wanted to die physically so her spiritual self could merge with the lifestream and heal the planet. In fact Bugenhagen pretty much says this when they take him to the Shrine where she was killed.

Bugenhagen: "Holy... the ultimate White Magic. Magic that might stand against Meteor. Perhaps our last hope to save the planet from Meteor. If a soul seeking Holy reaches the planet, it will appear."

Sephiroth's physical body spends the WHOLE game in the great North Cave. It is only his psychic self our heroes encounter until the end. Sephiroth's plan was to use meteor to inflict a wound upon the planet, the life stream would rush to that spot, he would absorb it all and become godlike.

Once Sephiroth dies at the end, Meteor heads for Midgar. Midgar is arguably the "wound" of the planet all along. Characters throughout the game talk of the cries of the planet growing stronger in the years Midgar/Shinra have been sucking Mako out of the planet. Remember early in the game the only place that flowers grow in Midgar is in Aeris church. With the glimpse of Aeris we see in the final moments it is implied that her consciousness had merged with the life stream and the combined power of Holy and Meteor generates enough force for the corruption of Midgar to be healed.

This is maybe what the ancients meant by the Promised Land, a place where the life stream and the physical world meet and create paradise. So again arguably Aeris does "reincarnate" at the end as we see Midgar ablaze with flowers. She undoubtedly had the power to live on in a non-physical form, and maybe that what Cloud meant when he says, "I think we can see her again" in the final

cinema.

b) THE JENOVA PROJECT/SEPHIROTH

i) How do you know what the Jenova Project was for?

The Jenova Project was an attempt to create humans with the powers of the Ancients. Sephiroth is actually the only one who can be considered any kind of success. Even then he was flawed as we later find out Jenova was no Ancient, but actually an enemy and destroyer of them. Cloud's flashback in Kalm, Professor Gast's Icicle Inn records and several meetings with Hojo confirm this. The Jenova Reunion Theory is Hojo's related idea that no matter how small the pieces, Jenova will try and reunite as a whole, which explains why all the Jenova injected clones and Cloud are drawn to the same place. That's why they first go to Midgar where Jenova is stored then follow Jenova's body to him at the Great North Cave.

ii) Exactly how old is Sephiroth?

It's tricky to work out Sephiroth's exact age, but it's certain that he must have been in his mid-twenties before he was "killed" five years ago in Nibelheim. As Professor Gast was still around for Hojo's initial experiments at the Mansion, Sephiroth is older than Aeris. Although a date of thirty years ago is not exact, it seems to fit with Gast and Hojo's chronology.

iii) How do you know Hojo and Lucrecia are Sephiroth's parents?

Hojo calls Sephiroth his son when he takes control of the Sister Ray and just before he mutates himself. Justifying his actions he says: "My son is in need of power and help. ...That's the only reason." Although he refers to a woman he impregnated and offered to the Jenova Project, it is only in the secret scene in the Waterfall Cave that we find out it's Lucrecia.

iv) What happened to Sephiroth after the Nibelheim incident? And what was his plan?

Sephiroth fell into the Lifestream at the bottom of the Mako reactor, presumed dead he actually floats in the Lifestream and ends up in the Great North Cave. In the sequence where Cloud hands the black material over to him, he is shown to be hanging, eye's closed, in some kind of trance. The Sephiroth they have encountered is actually just a projection of his will. Cloud says it himself: "I wasn't pursuing Sephiroth, I was being summoned by him". They don't actually encounter the "real thing" until the final battle of the game. It is his psychic projections and possessed cloned body that tells them how he intends to achieve supreme power in the Temple of the Ancients sequence and other meetings.

Sephiroth: "You stupid fools. You have never even thought about it. All the spirit energy of this Planet. All its wisdom.. knowledge... I will meld with it all. I will become one with it... It will become one with me. It's simple. Once the Planet is hurt, it gathers Spirit Energy to heal the injury. The amount of energy gathered depends on the size of the injury... What would happen if there was an injury that threatened the very life of the Planet? Think how much energy would be gathered! Ha ha ha. And at the centre of that injury, will be me. All that boundless energy will be mine. By merging with all the energy of the Planet, I will become a new life form, a new existence. Melding with the Planet... I will cease to exist as I am now. Only to be reborn as a 'God' to

rule over every soul."

And that's why he decided to summon Meteor, to inflict a huge wound on the planet.

v) Why did Hojo mutate himself?

Hojo appears to have lost what tiny thread of sanity he may have possessed by the time our heroes battle him back in Midgar. He injects himself with Mako to make himself more powerful, this way he can kill them and allow his son Sephiroth to become the powerful God he is aiming to be. But Hojo's justifications are mostly just ramblings by the end; this is the most sense I've been able to make from them.

vi) Why do the WEAPONS attack Midgar?

A few people asked this and it's not got an obvious answer. My theory is that the Weapon's either being controlled by Sephiroth in some way OR that they focus on Midgar as the source of the planets wound and driven by ancient programs are somehow compelled to attack it.

I had an intriguing suggestion submitted by 'Peptuck' about why they did this:

"You said that no one knows why WEAPON is attacking. Actually, Hojo explains exactly why they are attacking. He says in the North Crater right before WEAPON awakens ... "WEAPON, a monster created by the Planet. When the Planet is in danger, they awaken and destroy everything."

To put it simply, WEAPON is the Lifestream's way of bracing itself against threats. Everything that WEAPON kills is one more bit of Spirit energy that returns to the Lifestream, further increasing its strength. That's why WEAPON attacks"

That makes a lot of sense, the Planet is reabsorbing the spirit energy of the individual living things for the greater good and protection of the planet.

vii) Are Jenova and Sephiroth the same person?

This is complicated. Some people I have talked to feel that Sephiroth who appears in the game is actually a reincarnation of Jenova. The "real" Sephiroth (or the first Jenova clone) died in the Nibelheim incident five years ago. Jenova's head ended up at the North cave and used Sephiroth's body as a template to reform. It has already been stated that Jenova could appear as male or female. This is backed up by parts of the game where Jenova seems to be at least talking through the Sephiroth manifestation. But why would the game show Jenova and Sephiroth as two separate entities? Why would Sephiroth keep referring to Jenova as his mother? Why would Jenova bother pretending to be Sephiroth? Of course its arguable that Sephiroth always was at least partly Jenova, in the same way all the clones were. Sephiroth can maybe best be understood as an evolution of Jenova. Or if you like, Jenova's son, which of course, it was we know he is.

c) CLOUD STRIFE

i) What's Clouds problem??

Cloud main problem was an arrogant streak, which became his greatest weakness. He wanted to be part of the gang, but he also felt superior. He was torn by the desire to belong, but also the desire to be the greatest.

Cloud: "I used to think... they were all stupid."

Tifa: "What?"

Cloud: "You were all childish, laughing at every little stupid thing."

Tifa: "But we were children, back then."

Cloud: "...I know. I'm the one that was stupid. I really wanted to play with everyone, but I was never allowed into the group. Then later... I began to think I was different... That I was different from those immature kids."
(Lifestream Sequence)

When he found out he wasn't the greatest, the shame it induced in him made him cut himself off from his family and friends and much readier to believe his memories acquired from Zack were the truth of his life.

ii) Why did he lie about his past?

Cloud didn't lie, he genuinely believed what he was saying when he told everyone about the Nibelheim incident and being in SOLDIER. The effects of the experiments he underwent afterwards and his prior problems with shame and low self-esteem conspired to produce a split personality that was not healed until Tifa visited his subconscious in the Lifestream. For detailed proof of this refer to Zack and Clouds Escape from Nibelheim transcribed in the next section.

iii) Why did he obey Sephiroth's commands and why did he freak out?

Cloud is suffering from mental fragility bought about by his conflicting memories of the past few years. As Sephiroth undermines his confidence further, his self-doubt becomes crippling. The Jenova cells in Cloud allow Sephiroth some mental control over him as well (the pains and blackouts he has in the first half of the game as well as his realisation that Sephiroth was summoning him to the Great North Cave). His childhood also shows a boy who wanted to belong, but was afraid to get involved. As he realises he may not be the man he thought he was but a clone he begins to find the idea of belonging to Hojo's group of clones desirable and pathetically asks for a number. When Hojo labels Cloud a failure and turns his back on him his fragile sense of self finally shatters. This all comes to a head in the Great North Cave sequence.

Believing himself to be a failed clone given the identity of the kind of brave and popular man he had always thought himself to be (he actually says to Tifa: "I never lived up to being 'Cloud', Tifa... Maybe one day you'll meet the real 'Cloud'.") he basically has a severe nervous breakdown. Only through the actions of Tifa, who forces him confront and reveal the truth, does he allow himself to finally accept that although he wasn't the man he thought he was, he is still a brave fighter and loyal friend (The Lifestream Sequence). This coming to terms with himself and his past allows him to heal and reject Sephiroth's control. After the Lifestream sequence Cloud sums up what had happened to him thusly:

Cloud: "I left my village looking for glory, but never made it in to SOLDIER..... I was so ashamed of being so weak; then I heard this story from my friend Zack... And I created an illusion of myself made up of what I had seen
in my life..... And I continued to play the charade as if it were true. I'm physically built like someone in SOLDIER. Hojo's plan to clone Sephiroth wasn't that different. It was just the same procedure they use when creating members of SOLDIER. You see, someone in SOLDIER isn't simply exposed to Mako energy.

Their bodies are actually injected with Jenova cells..... For better or for worse, only the strong can enter SOLDIER. It has nothing to do with the Jenova Reunion. But weak people..... like me, get lost in the whole thing. The combination of Jenova cells, Sephiroth's strong will, and my own weaknesses are what created me. Everyone knew that. I'm..... Cloud, the master of my own illusionary world. But I can't remain trapped in an illusion any more..... I'm going to live my life without pretending."

Tifa: "You're sure messed up, Cloud!"

The final sequence of the last battle against Sephiroth is symbolic of Cloud ridding himself of the last molecules of Jenova and Sephiroth's influence on him for good.

Charkie also sent me an interesting interpretation on Sephiroth's hold over Cloud connected to the Cabbalistic meaning behind his name:

"I read a chapter about a concept called "gilgul," which means "transmigration of souls" (AKA reincarnation). Apparently there are different schools of thought in Kabbalah about the variety and extent to which this occurs. If applied correctly, this explains a lot about FFVII. The Lifestream would be the collection of souls, ready to be reborn elsewhere as other humans, or other living things such as animals or plants (As shown in Bugenhagen's machine), or possibly even inorganic matter. There's a Kabbalistic idea of "dybbuk," which is person that died, but who, as an 'unclean' spirit, can attach itself to the living and basically possess them. This explains Sephiroth's control of Cloud quite adequately. Sephiroth left his body five years prior to the game's start, and when he goes back in... Well, did he exude his power over Cloud anymore? I don't remember... If not, then this is probably what was intended. Of course, like I said, there are differing - and mutually exclusive - schools of thought on the subject."

iv) Did he love Tifa or Aeris?

It's my belief he truly loved Tifa. There isn't much in the script to back this up, but the way they spend the final night together alone before the assault on the Crater is suggestive of something more than just friendship. Tifa was prepared to give up her life to look after him when it looked like he would be mentally and physically disabled for life. Certainly during the Lifestream sequence it is implied that he had deep feelings for her he could never express at the time: ".....a sealed up secret..... wish.....Tender memories..... no one can ever know....." A large part of that sequence is devoted to him confessing his desire to be closer to her. Did the arrival of Aeris change these feelings? I don't think so. For sure Cloud felt very strongly about her, and they become very close in a short space of time. But I think her powers distanced herself from him as a romantic object.

v) Just where did Cloud go in the Lifestream?

I had to include this from Charkie - "For the plot timeline, you might want to mention that Cloud made a stopover in the world of Final Fantasy Tactics. It sounds like some little extra that has nothing to do with an actual timeline, but upon his appearance in FFT (Due to a strange machine), he says the last thing he remembers is falling into the Lifestream. It's unclear whether the machine brought him from a different time, world, dimension, or any combination of the three. It also may be that he left his body for the time of his comatose state, or maybe FFT is even all in Cloud's head. On an interesting note, Cloud's trip into the Lifestream is late in FFVII, when Cloud is likely level 40 or over, yet when he appears in FFT, he's at level 1. Is it a Superman/other world type thing, or is the FFT world much stronger?"

I'm not sure if I should confuse non-FFT players by putting it in the Timeline, but it's a fun idea that, that's where he went. Aeris was there as well... maybe that's where the Lifestream leads to. Oh dear, hope Sephiroth doesn't get through.

d) AERIS GAINSBOROUGH

i) What was her relationship with Zack?

Zack and Aeris dated 7 years ago, she calls him her "first love". When they visit Gongaga village they meet his parents and discover that he is missing. Also Cloud claims to have never heard of him and is confused that Zack was a SOLDIER first class, the same as him. This is probably the first inkling that Zack and Cloud are linked in some way. Also when he asks Tifa about Zack then she blusters and says she never heard of him, another clue that she is covering something up about the Nibelheim incident.

I also had an interesting observation sent in about why Aeris and Cloud had such strong feelings for each other, even after only knowing each other a short time. Michael Zeigermann pointed out that Zack and Aeris dated for a short time and she obviously cared a lot about him. During the time Cloud and Aeris are together he is still partially living with Zack memories subconsciously inside him (the stories Zack told him about his when they were on the run together from ShinRa). So the part of him that was "Zack" drew him to Aeris, and maybe drew Aeris to him in some way. Remember when they go to the Gold Saucer on the date, she makes some cryptic references to "meeting the real Cloud". After she is gone and Cloud rediscovers his true self, he remains fond of Aeris, but I think he also rediscovers his true, long time love of Tifa.

Also talking of Zack and Aeris, this also proves that Zack is NOT the sick man in the pipe in Midgar. For a start he looks nothing like him, second he has a tattoo and Zack never did and third, I think Aeris would have said something if he was! So stop emailing me about it!!

ii) Why didn't Shinra capture her earlier?

Good question! A rather lame excuse is given when Cloud talks to Elmyra after Aeris abduction by Tseng.

Cloud: "It's amazing how she's avoided the Shinra for all these years..."

Elmyra: "The Shinra needed her. So I guess they wouldn't harm her."

Tifa: "But, why now...."

Elmyra: "She brought a little girl [Marlene] here with her. On the way here, Tseng found them. She probably couldn't get away fast enough. She decided to go to the Shinra in exchange for the little girl's safety."

Its also implied that Tseng has a crush on Aeris when you overhear Reno and Rude talking at the Gongaga Reactor, which may explain his reluctance to hurt her. But when Aeris was younger? Hard to believe Shinra couldn't have got hold of her if they truly wished.

(for a longer discussion of Aeris's death and it's implications see section 7 at the end of this document)

e) TIFA LOCKHEART

i) Why did she not talk to Cloud about their conflicting memories?

Tifa is also worried that her memories have been messed up. Although she never saw Cloud at the Nibelheim incident, she can't fault the fact he knows exactly what happened. Also she remembers growing up with him and is not sure if Cloud is the Cloud she grew up with, one who was made five years ago and given some of "her" Cloud's background or that it is the real Cloud and her own recollections of what happened are in error. Just before they descend into the North Cave they are barraged by illusions from Sephiroth where he tells Cloud he was made piece by piece from Jenova cells to be a clone of him. Then shaped using Tifa's memories, Tifa who could never remember what happened after Sephiroth wounded her has no way of knowing this is not true.

Sephiroth: "Cloud... Don't blame Tifa. The ability to change one's looks, voice, and words, is the power of Jenova. Inside of you, Jenova has merged with Tifa's memories, creating you. Out of Tifa's memory... A boy named Cloud might've just been a part of them."

Again, it is not until the Lifestream sequence that she realises Cloud was at Nibelheim all the time.

ii) How did she end up in Midgar?

After she was wounded, Zangan her teacher took her to Midgar. See the Letter from Zangan in the next section for the full story.

f) BARRET WALLACE

i) Why does everyone in North Corel hate him?

The people of North Corel spurn Barret; he was the one who championed the cause of ShinRa in setting up a reactor at the original Corel (now the Gold Saucer Prison Town). It is slightly confusing when Barret returns to North Corel as he is blamed for destroying that town. But Barret actually comes from Corel a town he now believes to be "... here no more. Heard it got buried... in just 4 years."

Plus the reactor is nearer North Corel as well, so maybe North Corel is the result of people moving up to work nearer the reactor, and when it shut down and the desert began to envelop Corel, most of the rest of them moved to the wreckage of North Corel to carry on trying to make some kind of living. Anyway, this revelation is told to us by Barret at the Gold Saucer ropeway station. Later in the game, if Barret, Cid and Nanaki manage to stop the train hitting North Corel, Barret will be forgiven. If not, they spurn him again.

ii) Whose child is Marlene?

Marlene is actually Barret's friend Dyne's daughter. When he confronts Dyne in the Desert Prison. Dyne is clearly mad and starts saying that he must kill Barret and then Marlene so they can join his dead wife. After Barret fatally wounds Dyne, Dyne says these final words.

Dyne: "Think about it... Barret... How old was Marlene back then...? Even if I

did go to her now... she wouldn't even know me... And what's more... Barret.... These hands are a little too stained to carry Marlene anymore... Give that pendant to Marlene... It was... Eleanor's... my wife's... memento... wow... Marlene's... already..... 4..... Barret.... Don't... make... ..Don't ever make Marlene..... cry..."

Then he throws himself to his death. :(

g) NANAKI/RED XIII

i) How did he end up in Hojo's hands?

Alas, no one sees fit to tell us. When they first rescue him from Hojo's lab he dismisses their questions. When he returns to Cosmo Canyon again there is no talk of how he left it. It seems possible that after Hojo murdered Gast he found records of Gast's visit to the canyon and went there to acquire a new specimen. But that is speculation on my part.

ii) If he's the last of his kind, how did he have kids?

This is unfortunately one of those massive plot holes you could drive the Highwind through. It is explicitly stated he is the last of his kind and the last protector of Cosmo Canyon. Perhaps the rebirth of the planet at the end caused more to appear, but its seems silly that someone didn't spot the contradiction and just remove any references to the state of Nanaki's species.

However further exploration (thanks to bobtheguitar) reveals that Bugenhagen contradicts his prior assertion, telling Nanaki he might find a mate while adventuring with Cloud. Also several people agreed with a theory I had but wasn't sure if I should include as its quite "icky". Basically Hojo implies strongly that he is planning to breed Aeris with Nanaki to create a longer-lived child. So Nanaki can obviously breed with two legged human types. As his grandfather is also a human type this would seem to be the case.

h) CID HIGHWIND

i) Why was Shinra's Space program abandoned?

Well lets have Cid explain in his own inimitable fashion:

Cid: "You know Shinra developed a lot of technological gadgets during the meaningless war, right? Now it's a Mako company, but in the old days it was a weapons manufacturer. Well, they came up with a Rocket Engine. There was so much excitement about the thought of going into outer space. Our dreams got bigger and bigger. They put a major budget into it and made prototype after prototype! Finally, they completed Shinra No. 26. They chose the best pilot in Shinra-- no, in the world-- me. I mean, come on. And finally we get to the day of the launch. Everything was goin' well... But, because of that dumb-ass Shera, the launch got messed up. That's why they became so anal! And so, Shinra nixed their outer space exploration plans. After they told me how the future was Space Exploration and got my damn hopes up... DAMN THEM! Then, it was all over once they found out Mako energy was profitable. They didn't even so much as look at space exploration. Money, moola, dinero! My dream was just a financial number for them! Look at this busted Rocket. I was supposed to be the first man in space with this."

This all comes out when you first visit Cid, later of course we find out Shera saved his life by stopping him launch a faulty rocket. This is a useful speech as it helps in fixing the date of the War on Wutai and Shinra turning over to Mako above everything else.

i) VINCENT VALENTINE

i) How did he end up becoming a mutant?

After he discovered Hojo was experimenting on the pregnancy Lucrecia he confronts him in the Mansion Lab. Hojo knocks him out and pumps him full of Jenova, causing Vincent to become prone to mutation under stress (his Limit Breaks). The full story of Vincent, Hojo and Lucrecia is explained in the secret scene at Waterfall Cave (see transcript in the next section).

j) YUFFIE KISAGARI

i) Why is she so obsessed with Materia?

If you have Yuffie in your party and visit Wutai you'll hear the story of how Wutai was crushed in the past by Shinra. Yuffie is angry at her father (Godo) for allowing Wutai to be subservient to Shinra and he tells her to respect him and his way of handling things. She calls him weak, he calls her a miserable daughter. She tells Cloud the following:

Yuffie: "...I've been hearing that ever since I was little. Before I was born, Wutai was a lot more crowded and more important...You saw what it looks like now, right? ...JUST a resort town...After we lost the war, we got peace, but with that, we lost something else. Now look at Wutai...That's why... if I had lots of materia I could..."

..bring glory back to Wutai. After their battle in the Pagoda Godo confesses he is still keen to fight off Shinra, he is just waiting for the correct time. He sends Yuffie off with Cloud and Co. to learn, fight and return stronger.. and hopefully with all their materia as well!

k) CAIT SITH

i) Who controls Cait Sith?

Cait Sith is controlled by Shinra employee Reeve. Reeve is in charge of the Housing in the undercity slums. He is first seen in the conference scene, when Cloud and the others infiltrate Shinra Headquarters. Later, although he gives the team a run around, it appears his social conscious gets the better of him and he decides to help out, while reporting back what Shinra is up to.

Cait Sith: "...Alright, yes, I am a Shinra employee. But we're not entirely enemies...Something bothers me. I think it's your way of life. You don't get paid. You don't get praised. Yet, you still risk your lives and continue on your journey. Seeing that makes me... It just makes me think about my life. I don't think I'd feel too good if things ended the way they are now."

This results in his removal from the Headquarters later in the game after Rufus is killed. From here he oversees the evacuation of lower Midgar, and can be seen in Kalm in the final cinema. At the same time he is also controlling Cait Sith and arguing a lot with Barret about the rights and wrongs of his eco-terrorism and the welfare of Marlene.

***** 5) THE SECRET SCENES TRANSCRIBED *****

These four scenes are not available during the normal course of play, you have to go and seek them out. I have included them here as the FAQ above refers to these scenes a lot.

a) ZACK AND CLOUD'S ESCAPE FROM NIBELHEIM

This is probably the most important revelation in the whole game as it clears up the mystery behind Cloud's identity crisis and how he fell under Sephiroth's influence. It is a little hard to understand why Square hid this major piece of plot explanation away as a secret scene. Anyway, if you revisit the basement laboratory of Nibelheim Mansion on disc 3 Cloud will have a long flashback about how he and Zack came to escape from Nibelheim and how he ended up in Midgar. The text and description is as follows:

LABORATORY FLASHBACK - START

Zack and Cloud are both confined to glass tubes in the laboratory. A man arrives in the lab with some food and goes to open Zack's tube.

Man: "Hey! This is your food."

As he opens Zack's tube, Zack punches him out. Zack then jumps out of the tube and opens Cloud's tube. Cloud tumbles helplessly out of the tube and falls to his hands and knees. His head shakes and he convulses then he collapses on the floor. Zack has retrieved his 'Buster' sword and goes to help Cloud up. Zack then drags the incapacitated Cloud out of Nibelheim. The scene goes black and we hear the sound of someone putting clothes on.

Zack: "Oh, here!! Put on this. It smells a little though don't complain.

You

look pretty good with that. Well..."

The scene comes back into focus. Zack and Cloud are in the back of an old pick-up truck. Cloud has been dressed in a SOLDIER uniform. He is still shaking uncontrollably. Zack is pacing about, he bangs on the rear window of the drivers cab.

Zack: "Yo! Old guy! We at Midgar yet?"

Driver: "Shaddup! You're lucky I even gave you a ride!"

Zack returns to Cloud and sits beside him. He starts to talk to him. Cloud is unable to respond to Zack and can't do anything except shake his head up and down.

Zack: "What're you gonna do when we get to Midgar?"

Cloud: "....."

Zack: "I got a place I can crash for a while. No wait, the mother lives there to... Guess that's out..."

Cloud: "....."

Zack: "Yep...gotta change my plans! Hmm... No matter what I do, I need some money first... hey, wanna start a business? But what could we do?" Hey Cloud. Think there's anything I'd be good at?"

Zack turns and shouts at the driver.

Zack: "Hey, old guy. What do you think I'd be good at?"

Driver: "What're you yappin' about? You're still young ain't ya? Young folks should try everything! You gotta pay your debts while you're still young. Go out and look for what you really want."

Zack: "Try everything...That's easy for him to say... (does some squat thrusts for a bit then has an idea) HEY! Of course! I got a lotta brains a skill that other guys don't. That settles it! I'm gonna become a mercenary! (yells at driver) Yeah! Thanks pops!"

Driver: "Hey.. didn't you even hear a word I said?"

Zack: "Listen, I'm gonna become a mercenary and that's that. Boring stuff, dangerous stuff, anything for money. I'm gonna be rich! So Cloud. What are you gonna do?"

Driver: (shaking head) " No, wait...you got it all wrong."

Cloud: "u..uhhh....."

Zack: "Just kidding... I won't leave you hanging like that. (he sits next to Cloud and rests his head on him, Cloud stops shaking for a moment) We're friends right? Mercenaries Cloud, that's what you an' me are gonna be. (He stands up) Understand Cloud?"

The scene fades to Zack and Cloud struggling through the mountains near Midgar. They get to a cliff. Cloud is still clearly sick and being dragged by Zack. Zack hears gunshots, he drops Cloud who slumps face down to the ground. Zack unsheathes the Buster Sword and goes off screen to check out what the noise was. He runs back and kneels by Cloud to check he is OK, then a bullet hits Zack in the chest. He is knocked backwards and lands at the edge of the cliff. Two Shinra soldiers and a captain come on screen and run past Cloud to Zack. They surround Zack and shoot him several times at point blank range. One goes over and aims at Cloud.

Soldier: "What should we do with this?"

Cloud: " ...Ah... ughhhhh....."

Captain: "...Forget it. Just leave him."

They all leave. It begins to rain. Cloud drags his himself over by his hands to Zacks dead body. He sits by Zack and picks up the Buster sword still lying across Zacks body. He looks at it blankly then still weak and trembling he lifts the sword to the sky. The scene pulls back to show the Midgar in the distance, then fades away to black.

END OF LABORATORY FLASH BACK

Prior to this revelation there are several clues that can be found if you look for them in the Nibelheim Mansion Lab. Check the two tubes and you'll get the following information of how Zack (specimen A) and Cloud (specimen B) planned their escape:

"C project
specimen (B) code c
"A scratch left by a fingernail inside the beaker.
'Lets get out of here'."

"C project
specimen (A) code z
"A scratch left by a fingernail inside the beaker.
'Feeding time', that's our chance!"

A further search of the library next to the lab reveals reports on the hunt for Zack and Cloud.

"Escape report no.1
X month X day
The two escapee's located near Midgar"

"Escape report no. 2
Description at the time of capture.
A - Former member of SOLDIER/Number ()
No effect could be detected from either Mako Radiation Therapy or Jenova on him
B - Regular/Number ()
Reaction to Jenova detected."

"Escapee report no.3
Concerning their disposal.
A - Shot for resisting.
B - Escaped during A's resistance."

"Escapee report no.4
Other.
B's whereabouts is currently unknown. But, we submit there is no need to pursue him, due to his diminishing consciousness. Awaiting further instructions."

From all this evidence, we can see that Zack, already treated with Mako was able to resist the Jenova treatment. Cloud however, suffered the double trauma of Mako treatment and Jenova therapy. His terrible condition once out of the tube can most likely be explained by this trauma, his wound from Sephiroth and his "failed" reaction to the Jenova cells (remember Hojo calls him failure and does not tattoo him).

The one frustration is how long were Cloud and Zack kept in the tubes? It is likely to have been years, rather than weeks or months as when Tifa sees Cloud again she reacts like it's the first time in 5 years when the Nibelheim disaster happened (at this time Tifa is still going along with Cloud's messed up memories of the event, she actually hasn't seen him for 7 years).

In my opinion they were kept in stasis then experimented on approx four years after. Then they escaped and managed to spend several months crossing over from one continent to another while avoiding Shinra. During their time together on the run, Zack told him all about what Sephiroth said in the Basement Lab, his life in SOLDIER and many other things.

Finally within sight of Midgar, Zack is killed and the Shinra soldiers leave Cloud because they can't be bothered to take him back (they write in the report that he escaped, to save them the trouble). Cloud, still delirious makes his way to Midgar with Zacks uniform and Sword.

Confused and sick, Cloud, winds up at sector 7 station where Tifa finds him. Clouds brain is too ashamed to admit he never made it in SOLDIER and so a massive self-denial sets in. Zacks memories are merged into Clouds life and he becomes the person he always wanted to be. It is this split in his personality that makes him so much more malleable than the other clones for Sephiroth...

b) THE ICICLE INNE FILMS

When you are in Icicle Lodge you can view three films that fill in some background to the Ancients, Jenova, the weapons and Aeris's birth.

FILM 1: The Original Crisis

(The film is basically Prof Gast filming Ifalna and asking her questions)

Gast: "Camera's ready! Then, Ifalna, please tell us about the Cetra."

Ifalna: "2000 years ago, our ancestors, the Cetra, heard the cries of the Planet. The first ones to discover the Planet's wound were the Cetra at the Knowlespole."

Gast: "Tell us Ifalna... Where is the land called 'Knowlespole'?"

Ifalna: "Knowlespole refers to this area [The northern continent]. The Cetra then began a Planet-reading."

Gast: "Ifalna, what exactly does Planet-reading entail?"

Ifalna: "...I can't explain it very well, but it's like having a conversation with the Planet... It said something fell from the sky making a large wound. Thousands of Cetra pulled together, trying to heal the Planet... But, due to the severity of the wound, it was only able to heal itself, over many years."

Gast: "Do the Ancients, rather, the Cetra, have special powers to heal the Planet?"

Ifalna: "No, it's not that kind of power. The life force of all living things on this Planet becomes the energy. The Cetra tried desperately to cultivate the land so as not to diminish the needed energy..."

Gast: "Hmm, even here so close to the North Cave, the snow never melts. Is that because the planet's energy is gathered here to heal its injury?"

Ifalna: "Yes, the energy that was needed to heal the Planet withered away the land... then the Planet... The Planet tried to persuade the Cetra to leave the Knowlespole, but..."

Gast: "Ifalna... Let's take a break."

Ifalna: "I'm all right... When the Cetra... were preparing to part with the land they loved... That's when it appeared! It looked like... our... our dead mothers... and our dead brothers. Showing us spectres of their past."

Gast: "Who is the person that appeared at the North Cave? I haven't any idea."

Ifalna: "That's when the one who injured the Planet... or the 'crisis from the sky', as we call him, came. He first approached as a friend, deceived them, and finally..... gave them the virus. The Cetra were attacked by the virus and went mad... transforming into monsters. Then, just as he had at the Knowlespole. He approached other Cetra clans..... infecting them with... the virus..."

Gast: "You don't look well... Let's call it a day."

(End of film)

FILM 2: What is Weapon?

Gast: "Ifalna, can you comment on the thing called 'Weapon'?"

Ifalna: "Yes, Professor. The one the Professor mistook for a Cetra... was named Jenova. That is the 'crisis from the sky'. The Planet knew it had to destroy the 'crisis from the sky'... You see, as long as Jenova exists, the Planet will never be able to fully heal itself."

Gast: "Back then, Weapon was a weapon the Planet produced of its own will?"

Ifalna: "Yes, but... There is no record of Weapon ever being used. A small number of the surviving Cetra defeated Jenova, and confined it. The Planet produced Weapon... But it was no longer necessary to use it."

Gast: "So, Weapon no longer exists on the Planet?"

Ifalna: "Weapon cannot vanish. ...It remains asleep somewhere on the Planet. Even though Jenova is confined, it could come back to life at some time... The Planet has not fully healed itself yet. It is still watching Jenova."

Gast: "Where is Weapon?"

Ifalna: "I don't know..... I can't hear the voice of the Planet well... Times... have changed. The Planet... is probably watching this situation closely."

Gast: "...Thank you, Ifalna, that will be all for today."

FILM 3: Confidential

* Daughters Record 10 days after birth.

Ifalna: "What are you doing, Profes..... I mean, honey?"

Gast: "Oh, I'm thinking of taping it on video. But, the video's not working right..."

Ifalna: "What are you going to tape? Is there still something I haven't mentioned?"

Gast: "No, that's not it. I'm going to record my beautiful daughter. And when she's sleeping, her face ...looks like an angel."

Ifalna: "First, we have to figure out her name. We can take the video later!"

Gast: "I've already decided! If it's a girl, then it'll be Aeris. That's that!"

Ifalna: "You are SO selfish! But Aeris is a good name! Hee hee... it's a good name, considering it came out of that forgetful head of yours!"

Gast: "Right!? Oh, the video tape....."

* Daughters Record 20 days after birth.

Ifalna: "Video again? You just got through taping!"

Gast: ".....Please don't say it that way. It's our lovely daughter, both yours... and mine! Don't you want to capture her childhood on videotape?"

Ifalna: "If you keep doting on her like that, she won't grow up to be strong... Aeris is different from the other children. I wonder what dangers await her...?"

Gast: "Never say that! I will protect you and Aeris no matter what!! You and Aeris are my only treasures. I'll never let you go!!"

Ifalna: "I feel so much better now, darling. If I hadn't met you, I....."

(They embrace, and then there is a knock at the door)

Gast: "Who could that--! I was just about to..."

Ifalna: "Damn!! How dare they intrude on our 'private time' together!"

Gast: "I'll send them away."

Ifalna: "Yes, at once!! Who the devil? It, it's them!!"

(She opens the door, it Hojo and two Shinra Soldiers)

Hojo: "Heh, heh, heh..... I've been searching for you, Ifalna... or should I say, Cetra! Long time no see, Professor Gast!"

Gast: "Hojo... How did you know?"

Hojo "Believe me, I had to turn over a stone or two to find you. Two years I waited.... That's how much I wanted this new sample..... Ha, ha, ha."

Gast: "...New sample? You don't mean Aeris!?"

Hojo: "Hmm, Aeris? What a nice name..... Ha, ha, ha."

Gast: "That's it! I'm severing all ties with the Shinra. Hojo, please leave."

(Ifalna kneels on the floor before Hojo.)

Ifalna: "Please, Aeris has nothing to do with it! All you want is me, right?"

Gast: "Ifalna!"

Hojo: "I'll need all of you for my experiment. You understand, don't you, Professor Gast? We can change the future of the Planet!"

Gast: "Don't worry, Ifalna. I'll take care of this!"

Hojo: "Please don't put up a fight. I don't want any harm to come to my precious sample."

Hojo: (turns and face camera) "Mmm? What a funny looking camera. Guard! Destroy it!"

(The guard nearest the camera shoots out the camera. The screen goes black, but the sound keeps recording.)

Hojo: "Be careful with her!! Ha, ha, ha..... (sounds of a fight)

Ifalna: "Wh... what are you doing, Professor!?"

Gast: "Ifalna! Take Aeris and run!!"

(Gunshot.)

Gast: "Eyaaaaah... Darling.....!!"

Hojo: "Oh, and uh... don't forget the child! Hmm, a video? The Ancients... Weapon!? Heh, heh, heh... a mountain of treasure! Thank you, Professor... Ha, ha, ha."

(Film Ends)

So four important films. It establishes what happened to the Ancients and what Jenova is (sort of). Although there is no explanation as to Jenova's female appearance when she appears to have been male upon her first appearance. Also regrettably it raises some more questions as to Jenova's motivations and origins. Jenova is clearly labelled here as a non-ancient. But he/she is never really given a viable reason for doing what he/she did or why he/she wanted to destroy the Cetra. Maybe Jenova was just malevolence for its own sake.

It also establishes that Aeris and Ifalna must have been in Hojo's custody for some years. Aeris is new born here, and when Elmyra remembers meeting her at the station she is old enough to be walking and talking.

c) LUCRECIA AND VINCENT

(On disc 2 after you acquire the submarine you can visit Lucrecia. Travel to the Waterfall Cave, which is in the Nibel area. Get out with Vincent in your party and go into the cave. You'll see a kind of shrine and Vincent will walk towards it and hear a voice...)

Lucrecia's Voice - "Vincent..."

Vincent - "That voice? It can't be..."

(A light appears, there is the form of a woman kneeling inside it.)

Vincent - "Lucrecia...?"

Lucrecia - "Vincent.....?"

Vincent - "Lucrecia!"

(Vincent goes toward her, she hold out a hand to stop him.)

Lucrecia - "Stay back!"

(We now enter a series of scenes with no dialogue. I'll do my best to describe them)

- We are back in Nibelhiem, many years ago. There are three scientists in walking toward the Shinra mansion: Hojo, Gast, and Lucrecia.

-They are followed by a man in a Turks uniform, the young Vincent.

- The scene changes to Vincent and Lucrecia walking through Nibelheim Town Square, arm in arm.

- The scene changes to outside the mansion. Vincent is handing something to Lucrecia, (an engagement ring?). Lucrecia starts to cry and runs away shaking her head. Vincent stands and watches helplessly.

- The scene changes again and we see Hojo and Lucrecia at the gate, kissing. Vincent appears, stares sadly a moment, then leaves before they see him)

Vincent's Voice - "If she is happy then... I don't mind."

- The scene changes to the top floor of the Nibelheim Inn; Lucrecia has her head in her hands)

- The scene changes to the laboratory in the basement of the Shinra mansion. Hojo and Lucrecia stand side by side, on one side of the room, Vincent on the other.)

Vincent - "I'm against it! Why experiments on humans!?"

Hojo - "She and I are both scientists!!"

(The screen goes black.)

Vincent's Voice - "After that, a child was born to Lucrecia...
That child's name is...
Sephiroth..."

- The scene changes back to the top of Nibelheim Inn, Lucrecia collapse on the floor.

- The scene changes back to the laboratory. Vincent and Hojo argue heatedly, Hojo begins to lose it and in his fury shoots Vincent.

- The scene changes to show Vincent having been tied to an operating table. Hojo works away on the unconscious Vincent.

- When the scene changes again Hojo is gone and Vincent is alone. He gets up and looks at himself, the shaking he raises both fists to the sky and the scene fades to black.

Vincent - "Urrrrrrrrrgh!!"

Vincent's Voice - "This body is... the punishment that's been given to me...I was unable..... to stop Professor Gast and Hojo... And Lucrecia... I was unable to stop them...All that I was able to do was watch... That is my punishment..."

(We are back in the cave with Lucrecia and Vincent.)

Vincent - "Lucrecia... You're alive..."

Lucrecia - "I wanted to disappear... I couldn't be with anyone... I wanted to die... But the Jenova inside me wouldn't let me die... Lately, I dream a lot of Sephiroth... My dear, dear child. Ever since he was

born I never got to hold him, even once... Not even once. You can't call me his mother... That... is my sin..."

(Vincent moves forward to comfort her.)

Lucrecia - "Back!! Stay back!"

(He stops dead.)

Lucrecia - "Vincent... Won't you please tell me?"

Vincent - ".....What?"

Lucrecia - "If Sephiroth is still alive? I heard that he died five years ago. But I see him in my dreams so often... And I know that physically, like myself, he can't die so easily. Please, Vincent, tell me....."

(Cloud comes forward, but Vincent waves him back.)

Vincent - "Lucrecia... Sephiroth is dead..."

(The screen fades to black.)

SNIFF, well that's the full story of Sephiroth's birth and more reasons to hate Hojo like the rotten evil bad guy he is. If you return again to the cave on disc 3 you will get Vincent's Ultimate Weapon and Limit break. Lucrecia does not reappear, maybe once she thought Sephiroth was dead she was able to let herself die and find the peace she deserved.

d) LETTER TO TIFA

During Cloud's flashback in Kalm you can learn a music sequence to play on Tifa's piano ("Do Re Mi Ti La Do Re Mi So Fa Do Re Do."). If you return to Nibleheim on Disc 3 and play the tune you will get a short scene that explains how Tifa came to escape from Nibelheim and end up in Midgar. It takes the form of a letter from Tifa's martial arts instructor Zangan and the text is as follows:

"Tifa, what's happened to our town? Was it all an illusion, or just a dream? No, it was neither. I remember trying to get people out of the flames, but not having the strength... Burning with anger, I went to the reactor to kill Sephiroth.

But he was nowhere to be found. Instead, I found you, collapsed inside. I felt saving you was far more important than going after Sephiroth. There were several others that were still alive inside, but I was only able to save you.

As I was coming out of the reactor, Shinra troops were just arriving. I recall a scientist named Hojo was in charge. He ordered the troops to gather up everyone still alive for the experiment. I didn't know what type of experiment he was talking about, but I wasn't about to let them have my dearest student.

Putting you on my back, I headed down the mountain to the village. I used the Cure spell on you many times and started to head for Midgar to look for a doctor for you. I don't like that city, but my Cure spells weren't helping.

I decided to go to Midgar to find a doctor I could trust. I'm worried about

you, but I can't settle down in one place for very long. Have you recovered fully? Are you well?

I wonder how many years have passed since then? I just got into town again, but I can't believe it... The whole town is back to normal, except for the strange beings with black clothes all around...

The town reeks of Shinra, but I won't go after them. You may think I'm running from them, but it's just that I don't want anything to do with Shinra anymore. Feels like time is running out.

I'm sure you'll find this letter. And this gift for you. It should come in handy. I can't even jump anymore. But I hope you continue to sharpen your skills and remember what I taught you.

To my most precious student, From Zangan."

This is a key item of plot detail as it specifically ties the Sephiroth clone experiment to the former inhabitants of Nibelheim. It also explains how Tifa escaped from the ensuing mayhem in Nibelheim without being captured like Zack and Cloud were.

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***** 6) WHAT'S IN A NAME? *****
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One of the interesting things about Final Fantasy 7 is that many of the characters seem to have been given symbolic names. Some I present below are intentional; others may just be victims of the dodgy translation. But it's still fun to see just what some of those names actually mean.

SECTION 1 - PEOPLE

a) Sephiroth

This must be intentional. Sephiroth is a Hebrew word, which derives from the Cabbala, a branch of religious lore that has its roots in Jewish mysticism. It states that at the creation, God sent a pulse of energy out into the void; this branched into ten aspects or spheres, numbered 1-10. The Sephiroth. To return to God, a Cabbalist must conquer each of the Sephiroth. (I realise this is a massive over-simplification, I advise you enter Sephiroth as a search term in Google. You'll get one set of results relating to FF7 and another related to Cabbalism).

His final form is often thought to be a misspelling of the word "Seraph", but actually "Safer" or "Sepher" is another Hebrew word meaning "book of numbers". This probably has some relevance to the stress placed on the number-tattooed clones. The whole Sephiroth concept seems to be pregnant with numerological meaning. But whether it was never totally followed through, or lost something in translation, there seems to be no symbolic meaning to any numbers given in the game script. I'd like to thank bahamutairship for just clearing up that Sephiroth refers to the spheres not actually numbers

b) Cait Sith - Gaelic word, meaning literally "fairy cat". In Irish fairy stories, Cait Sith is in many King of Cats tales, which is why he wears a crown.

c) Tifa Lockheart - This is related to Sephiroth. The Tiferet is part of the

ten Sephiroth and means "balance and love". Also my admittedly brief dip into cabbalism turned up a further meaning, that of self-sacrifice. In the tarot, the Tiferet is represented with a heart.

d) Cetra - Possibly meant to derive from the Latin term, "Cetera", which means "Other".

e) Reeve - It's in the dictionary, it means a local official or magistrate of a district.

f) Lucrecia - May refer to a famous painting and poem "The Rape of Lucrecia". Symbolic of the scientific "rape" Hojo carried out upon her body perhaps.

g) Shinra - Or Shin-Ra. There is a monster that appears to originate in Egyptian mythology that has this name. It is described as a huge, dark vampire.

h) Aeris/Aerith - Interestingly, Aerith is an anagram of "I Earth".

i) Vincent Valentine - St. Valentine is the patron saint of protective lovers.

j) Barret Wallace - Maybe named after William Wallace the Scottish rebel. Also "barret" is an Olde English word for a flat cap. Headgear associated with the working classes, coal miners in particular (bahahahaha!!!).

k) Cloud Strife - Strife means struggle or conflict. Interestingly, the word "aeris" can be found in Latin - meaning "air, cloud, ether". Proof of a mystical link between them?

Cloud's "Cross Slash" Limit Break also forms a kanji meaning "Bad Luck"

l) Wedge and Biggs - Named after two pilots in the first Star Wars film (or the fourth if you really must...)

m) Don Corneo - Corneo comes from a Latin word meaning "hard", "made of horn", "horny". Well, er.. quite appropriate I guess!

n) Hojo - Japanese family of Taira descent that ruled Japan as hereditary regents

(shikken) from 1199 to 1333, a period known as the Kamakura Shogunate from the shogunal base at Kamakura. The Hojo gained prominence under the first shogun, Minamoto Yoritomo, who married into the family. His father-in-law, Hojo Tokimasa, became the regent for Yoritomo's young heir in 1199. By 1219, when the main Minamoto line was cut short by assassination, the Hojo were entrenched in power, and soon set up the legal and institutional structure of shogunal rule. In Japanese fashion, however, they left intact the puppet shogunate, which in turn pulled the strings of a puppet emperor. The clan ruled ably until the late 13th century, leading national resistance to the Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281, but they later tended to become inept and dissolute. The last Hojo regent killed himself in 1333 during the restoration led by Emperor Go-Daigo which led to its replacement by the Ashikaga shogunate. (Lots of info there courtesy of bobtheguitar, how relevant it is I'm not sure but it's interesting all the same!)

o) Rufus - Rufus is Latin for "red". Many Oriental cultures (well, Chinese, at very least), red is generally taken as a sign of prosperity or wealth which might connect to his status (thanks to Wen for this nugget).

p) Nanaki - a great theory about his name was put forth by a person who I have managed to lose the email from >_< So if you recognise your input please get

in touch. OK, Nanaki is actually an anagram of "Anakin" (as in Skywalker) and his other name, Red 13 may be a reference to the "Red" fighters in Star Wars: A New Hope. Not sure if it means anything... but its cool!

q) Cid Highwind - There's always been a Cid in Final Fantasy games, previous Cid were in FF2, FF3, FF, FF5 and FF6 as various pilots or scientists. However his name could also be derived from a Spanish hero El Cid as some one pointed out in a email to me, in the late 11th century, the Spanish were often led in battle by a great knight, nicknamed 'El Cid' (Real name - Rodrigo de Bivar). He was an amazing fighter, feared by opponents, and he even had a pet lion. Cid is also Spanish for Lord.

SECTION 2 - MONSTERS and SUMMONS

a) Shiva - Hindu God of destruction. Actually a male. Shiva as depicted in the FF series looks more like Kali. However, there is supposedly a Celtic female goddess called Shiva, which she may be based on. In some Final Fantasy's she has quite a Celtic appearance (chunky jewellery, skimpy clothes)

b) Ifrit - A djinn or fire spirit of Indian origin.

c) Alexander - Well he is probably named after Alexander the Great, but the reason I originally gave was in error. The Holy Roman Empire existed about 1000 years after Alexander did, oops! However two people, one who wanted to remain anonymous and the other who's email I managed to delete >_< pointed out what now seems blindingly obvious. Alexander was an angel one of the bravest of the Seraphim and his name literally means "helper of man." (slaps forehead).

d) Hades - Another name for Hell or the Underworld, also the name of the ruler of the Underworld in some mythologies.

e) Odin - King of the Norse Gods and also the god of war.

f) Leviathan - A huge sea dwelling creature of popular mythology, also present in the Bible. Also Leviathan, actually pronounced "Leevyathan" in Hebrew, is the Hebrew word for Whale (thanks to bahamutairship again for that)

g) Typhoon - As well as being the word for a violent storm, FF series will fans will spot that this is our old friend Chupon from FF6. Who causes great annoyance with his evil "sneeze" attack =)

h) Knights of the Round - The Knights of the Round table were Twelve Knights and King Arthur. King Arthur is a mythical King of Britain. They sleep on the Island of Avalon, where it is said they will rise again when the people of Britain are in dire need. King Arthur also wields the Excalibur sword, which does not appear in FF7, but does in other FF games.

i) Phoenix - The Phoenix is in several mythologies. Egypt where he is a child/creation of Amon Ra (sun god) Greek mythology where he was the bird of Prometheus, long before the gods existed, he was alone from the time Prometheus got captured. In the occult he appears as the guardian of the earth, and lord of fire. Also as one of the children of Lucifer, but he betrayed him to guard the earth.

j) Titan - the Titan is a Greek myth, they were giants who warred with the Gods.

k) Bahamut - Bahamut is the king of dragons, the mightiest dragon that ever existed, Bahamut appears in other story's as well, but not as a dragon.

in the occult he is also seen as king of dragons and lord of the earth as Satan and as one of the adopted children of Lucifer. In some myths he is also a big Fish.

l) Kjata - Appears in the fish based Bahamut legend. He's a bull with that sits beneath the mountain supporting the world.

m) Midgar Zolom - In Norse mythology the Midgarsorm was a giant serpent that circled around the world endlessly (contributed by James Haley)

SECTION 3 - EQUIPMENT and PLACES

a) Nibelheim - From Nordic myth. Means "frozen hell".

b) Midgar - Midgard. In Norse mythology it is the home of "man" one of the seven races around at that time.

c) Raganarok (One of Clouds Swords) - Also from Norse mythology, Ragnarok is the name of a great final battle that was to take place between the gods and the giants, which was destined to last for all eternity and to destroy the entire world in its wake. (contributed by James Haley)

d) Masumane (Sephiroth's Sword) - This name comes from a Japanese legend about two legendary sword smiths, Masamune and Muramasa. Masamune's blades were said to bless their holders with great luck, while Muramasa's blades were said to be bloodthirsty, and would turn on their owners. Interestingly, however, Masamune was said to make katanas, one of which Sephiroth's sword is most certainly not. (As an aside, Alucard can obtain swords with both these names in Castlevania: Symphony of the Night, which is the chief reason why I know this :) (contributed by James Haley)

e) Costa Del Sol - Means "Sun Coast"

f) Junon - "In Roman mythology Juno is the wife of the chief god, Jupiter. This would make her "queen of the gods", the second-most important god. It makes some sense in FF7, if you see Midgar as the "king" the most important and biggest, Junon is second. There are also very close ties between those two cities." (submitted via email from mastertonberry)

Any ideas about other names not listed here are welcome!

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***** 7) AERIS'S DEATH AND THE UNFINISHED GAME THEORY *****

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This section is devoted to an issue I wanted to keep separate from the general FAQ as it is such a BIG plot point and also has implication outside of the games plot and into the actual design and development of the game.

The first big question everyone has about FF7 is Aeris, why did she have to die? And indeed was she meant to stay dead? I always felt the ending of FF7 seemed a little rushed. I had always thought Aeris did have to "die" the way she did on disc one, but would somehow come back maybe even as the embodiment of Holy to fight Sephiroth in the final battle. I was emailed by RTSmith005, who has VERY strong feelings on the matter of Aeris death and whether she was intended to come back. He has given permission for that email to be reproduced in full below. While I DISAGREE that the game was spoiled by the ending as it stands (I always thought they were quite brave NOT to clear up every loosed end, so don't flame me people), I am still intrigued by all the evidence he

provides that Aeris was intended to be brought back.

THE INCOMPLETE GAME THEORY - contributed by RTSmith005

"As I sit writing this I am listening to Aeris's theme in the background. I first learned about Aeris's death when I was casually browsing FF7 web pages and I came across Andrew Vestal's masterful editorial on whether or not FF7 is complete. Ignoring the spoiler warning I found out that Aeris died during the course of the game. I was upset that I knew this fact, but I then decided that it was six months before the release, it didn't really matter. When I finally got the game I knew that Aeris would die at the end of Disc One. I decided to use her all the time during the battles, and I gradually got attached to her.

Attached to a video game character? Well, most people get attached to characters in movies or novels, and that is really what FF7 is, not just a game, but a movie/novel experience. As one of my friends who played the game said "Man it felt like I knew her." When I reached the Forgotten Capital I realized that Aeris was about to die and it seemed that my time with her was all too short and fleeting. It had been the date at the Gold Saucer that had really made me love her as a character. I watched in horror as Sephiroth descended and gutted the peaceful Aeris. As Cloud later said "She smiled, in the end..." I couldn't believe what I was doing. I was feeling sad at the death of a fictional video game character! I was on the verge of tears, real tears of sadness! How ridiculous and idiotic and stupid was that? Except it's not. Square has made a game where the characters seem real, and it is indeed a testament to them that we feel this way about them. It's nothing to be ashamed of, or to be embarrassed about. The rest of the game was good, but not as good as the first twenty hours.

The first disc of the game was pure genius. The second disc only got interesting when we learned about Cloud's past and the Sapphire Weapon attacked Junon. Otherwise, the second disc only gets very, very depressing, with the storyline making you think Cloud is a Sephiroth clone and Bugenhagen dying (although that is actually on Disc Three). The fall of Shinra was horribly done, in fact the last ten hours of the game are altogether horrible. The storyline is rushed, many plotlines are left unexplained, and the characters undergo very little development (besides Cid and Cloud). The third disc is a waste, as the last dungeon is hardly a challenge. The path to Sephiroth is interesting, and the fight with Jenova is good, but the Bizarro-Sephiroth fight is horrible and tedious. The final battle is incredible, literally some of the best music in any game. The ending was also good in the beginning, as Cloud's final battle one on one with Sephiroth was spectacular. Otherwise, the ending was absolutely a waste. FFVIII's ending was just as bad, with absolutely no character development occurring. The ending in FF7 was a waste of disc space and uninventive thinking. The scriptwriters should be shot for destroying such a good game. Indeed, many people I have talked to have totally changed their opinions on the game after viewing the ending.

In short the ending is horrible. My first opinion on it was that humanity was wiped out by Holy, as Bugenhagen hinted at earlier on in the game. However, upon thinking about it, wouldn't it be the ultimate injustice if humanity had killed Sephiroth, freeing Holy and thereby saving the Planet, and the Planet replayed humanity by killing each and every last one of them? But now, thinking about it, I hope that Holy did indeed wipe out humanity. It would be a fitting ending to an altogether tragic game. Why am I so bitter about the ending and the latter half of the game, you ask? Well, the answer is simple. Everyone probably knows about the Aeris resurrection theory. If you look at the game there is a vast amount of empirical evidence that Aeris's resurrection was originally supposed to be part of the game, perhaps if only in the original script or in early versions of the game. I believe that there is NO WAY to

resurrect her now, however, I believe that FF7 is incomplete, and that we are all playing a game that is truly the greatest ever made, but that could be so much better. First I will present the evidence that can be found in the game and related to the game.

- 1) The presence of Aeris's ghost in her church is a very small plot point in the game. In fact, it's barely discussed by any one in the game itself. Why else would it be in the game. A nostalgic moment? Perhaps.
- 2) Before the final battle there is an extra ledge that no one is standing on.
- 3) For the battle against Bizarro-Sephiroth, if you are strong enough to form three parties, then one party has only two characters. Each party should have three members...
- 4) Throughout the game Cloud is in situations in which he must pick Aeris over Tifa or show that he is an uncaring or a caring guy. However, after Aeris's death, this entire point is dropped. Considering the number of decisions you are forced to make (around twenty some) you would think it would have more bearing than who you get to date...
- 5) In the Japanese version, why does Aeris speak at certain points after you use the GameShark to get her back? Why does she only have it in certain spots?
- 6) Aeris's best weapon has only seven Materia holders and it can gain AP, while EVERYONE else's best weapon has eight linked slots and gains no AP.
- 7) Aeris's Umbrella has a higher Attack Power than her best weapon, the Princess Guard, whereas everyone else's best weapon has a higher Attack Power than all of their other weapons.
- 8) When you get Aeris's fourth limit break she has most likely already died. If you actually do what you need to do to get it before she dies you waste vast amounts of time (it took me three extra hours of getting her limit breaks up). The point is that if you get it before she dies, it doesn't seem like you should have it yet.
- 9) Right before the pillar steps in the Forgotten City before Aeris dies there is doorway in the background. If you look at the patterns on the pillar, the doorway is somewhat similar but markedly different. Programmers usually don't put extra stuff like that in a game; it's a waste of time and effort. There is no way to reach the door.
- 10) If you look at the floor before Cloud is trying to kill Aeris, there is a spiral staircase leading downward. If you think about the way the City is shaped it should be the reflection of the stairs above, but if you think on how the glass around Aeris is shaped, it physically couldn't be so...
- 11) In the game manual there are FMV drawings of the characters. Every character's drawing except Aeris (she is looking at the highwind you see it where disc 1 is in) actually occurs in the game, or could realistically occur. Aeris's cannot, as she wasn't with Cloud when he first saw the Highwind on the first trip to Junon. She had already died when Barret and Tifa made their escape on the Highwind later. In the picture she also dressed in white, and the entire game she dressed in red...
- 12) The strongest empirical evidence for this lies in a conversation Cloud has with Tifa during on the bridge of the Highwind... Tifa:I wonder what Aeris felt... when she was on that Altar... Cloud: I'm sure she wanted to give her life for the planet... Tifa: Really? I wonder? I don't think that's it at all.

I think she didn't think she would die at all, but that she planned on coming back all along. She always used to talk about the "Next Time". She talked about the future more than any of us'. This is very, very suspect, as anyone can see.

The entire game is ruined, in my opinion, by the loss of Aeris, and the death of hope and joy. Many argue her death insured the player's hatred of Sephiroth. Even if she were to be theoretically resurrected, I would still hate Sephiroth. In my opinion, Square should re-release the game with her resurrection, and a better ending, one worthy of a Final Fantasy game. Would it make her death meaningless? Yes, it would, her sacrifice would be null and void and hollow. But her death makes the game meaningless... Judging by the number of people who desperately want to resurrect her, I think Square would profit financially from such a decision. A game, which was already great, could be made truly perfect. But somehow, I don't think this will ever happen. - XxRTSmithxX.....(thx for letting me share this falsehead)"

Further discussion of this angle of the game is welcome, if anyone has conclusive proof either way of whether Aeris was to have stayed dead or was a victim of rushed development then it would be very welcome.

***** CLARIFICATIONS!!! *****

I just want to add that, this in no way implies that Aeris can be resurrected. Although it appears that she may have been intended to come back at some point in development, in EVERY version of the game, she dies and STAYS DEAD. In the US version, the PAL versions and the Japanese version. YOU CAN'T BRING HER BACK!

There is an excellent FAQ posted at
http://db.gamefaqs.com/console/psx/file/final_fantasy_vii_changes.txt

This explains in detail the changes between the US and Japanese versions and has a good debunking of all the Aeris rumours. But to sum it up quickly it says basically, "you can't bring her back!". Hope that's clear =) Of course you can bring her back with a gameshark but that's as pointless as using a code to put Sephiroth in your party.

***** REBUTTALS AND DISCUSSION *****

See next section for peoples responses to this and other issues raised here.

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***** 8) READERS RESPONSES and DISCUSSIONS *****

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I was quite surprised and gratified by the response RTSmiths views got. I am pleased to see many people engaging with his comments and several have provided some well thought out responses to his arguments. With permission of the authors I have reproduced their arguments in full.

"Hey, I just wanted to say that my friends and I have thought about the Aeris resurrection theory and came up with some reasons why it couldn't be possible.

1.) First in the final showdown with Sephiroth, there is a party of two. People assume that there is one person missing, but I look at it as there are two people too many. Considering that Yuffie and Vincent are both secret characters, this would make the third party nonexistent.

2.) Second, the whole reason Cloud and the others kept fighting was because

they hated Sephiroth even more for killing Aeris. If Aeris was resurrected, the plot line would have become very slow and harder to develop.

3.) In the previous Aeris resurrection theory, one of the reasons mentioned is concerning Aeris having a level 4 limit break. First, this could just be a challenge for more serious gamers. Most people don't beat Ruby weapon, just like most people don't take the effort to get Aeris' level 4 limit break. Also, if she didn't have a level 4 limit break, people would be suspicious when they viewed her limit breaks in the menu.

4.) Concerning the choices you have to make about Tifa and Aeris from Cloud's point-of-view- though this aspect of the game is quickly forgotten after Aeris' death, the whole point of the questioning is to give character development. When you are forced to take the position of a character and respond to questioning, you feel closer to the characters. Therefore, the questions are not needed later on in the game, as character development slows and plot development takes a stronger hold.

5.) For Aeris' ultimate weapon having only seven materia slots, the creators most likely did not want to give away the fact that Aeris' end was near by giving the player her ultimate weapon that early."

That is an excellent set of points provided by el_tortuga_en_fuego (Mitch Shelley)

Also Danny Soliman voiced the opinions of many people who emailed me saying that Aeris death is part of what makes the game so emotional and affecting, although still let down a bit by a rushed conclusion.

"I consider myself a devout fan of, in my opinion, the greatest game ever made, final fantasy seven. I am writing you because of an email that is present on your faq by RTSmith005. Though I agree that the death of Aeris was a tragic event (and believe me I was cursing Square for at least two years after the games release) I now believe that it was very necessary. Just like everybody hates sad movies, everyone hates sad videogames. But Aeris' death in the game gives the gamers a feel for the significance of her life. If Aeris had not died, the number of gamers who really grew to care about her, would decline dramatically. Even if bringing Aeris back was a possibility, I would have to say I would not do it. It would ruin the experience of the entire game.

A point I must agree with RTSmith005 on is the ending. I think that the ending was fitting but, I think everyone will agree with me here, it lacked the emotion that made the game a masterpiece. The ending in final fantasy eight I think was a brilliant ending (yes I understand that many ff gamers were upset with the game) but it summed up the entire game in a few glorious minutes. The ending in final fantasy seven seems to hastily explain what happens to the planet, but it fails to tell what happens to the characters on a personal level".

Another email from Mirea I had agreed she should have died, but perhaps this should have been exploited more.

"I was moved to tears by Aeris's death, and nearly didn't finish the game because of the effect it had on me. Looking back on it, though, I can see that it was necessary for her to die since it builds your hatred for Sephiroth. It also establishes that she was a great danger to him, which is why he had to eliminate her. However, I think Disks Two and Three would have been greatly improved by visions or ghostly appearances by Aeris, rather than being able to bring her back to life.

In the first place, her appearance in the City of the Ancients to Bugenhagen and the others should have been presented in more detail. Rather than being a mere film in the waterfall, she should have made a ghostly appearance that allowed for some interaction. She could have made another such appearance in the Ancient Forest, or to Cloud when he is sick with Mako poisoning, or when he visits the church in Sector 5. Aeris should also have been a playable participant in the final battle against Sephiroth in Disk Three, rather than getting just brief glimpses of her in the FMV.

Another thing is that I do not believe the human race was exterminated by the Lifestream when it destroyed Meteor. In the first place, it would have been totally out of character for Aeris to have been involved in the death of innocent people and children. In the second place, people were alive after the Lifestream erupted in Mideel. Although the city of Mideel had been destroyed by the Lifestream like Midgar was, the inhabitants of the city were still alive after the eruption. I think the only reason you see just Red XVII alive at the very end is simply because he is the only main character whose lifespan allows him to be alive after 500 years. The significance is that Midgar was never rebuilt, and the Planet has grown healthy again.

The ending could have been better if it showed what happened to each of the main characters on a personal level and allowed Aeris to be a playable character in the final battle against Sephiroth. The battle against Sephiroth should have been more difficult, too. However, the ending does accomplish a great deal. Sephiroth is destroyed, Cloud frees himself from Sephiroth's control, Aeris uses Holy, Cloud learns where to find Aeris, Cloud and Aeris's love for one another is reaffirmed, Meteor is destroyed, and the Planet is saved."

Some people have been sending some memories of stuff said about the game at the time in various magazines, I print these in the hope someone may be able to find the original source materials somewhere online or reality! This from Stephanie Pidity

"Several years ago I was reading a game mag...I think it was EGM, and they had visited Square. Their whole purpose was seemingly to ask about Aeris' resurrection. A quote from the mag was, "Employees were adamant that there was no way to resurrect Aeris, but they were quick to point out that the letters in her name could be rearranged to spell out RAISE." This is true, but of course in the Japanese version you spell it Aerith, which you pointed out in your guide spells I EARTH. That makes more sense, in my opinion.

As for the "unfinished game" theory, the same article in the EGM stated this strange story...

One Square official had a dream, woke up and called another. He'd dreamed about some girl and had a great idea...quoted from the official at Square to the editors at EGM: (ready?!?) "Let's kill off Aeris and put in Tifa." This happened near the end of production and was supposedly almost ready for release in Japan...

I wish I had the magazine (actually, if it was an EGM, then I might). But I swear this is true. It explains a lot about Aeris talking some after her death in the Japanese version (that is, if you are using a Gameshark to put her in your party). But everyone's theories are actually wrong. Yes, Aeris was meant to appear later in the game, except rather than resurrect her, she wasn't meant to die in the first place. And, though no one suspects it, Tifa was added hastily, with Aeris being

deleted from the story.

Tifa is hotter than Aeris. I'm sorry to admit it, but, from a female gamer writing this email to a female web writer that explains beautifully the confusing story of FFVII, to all male and female FF lovers out there... My theory as to Aeris' death is that guys are horny. Sorry to burst everyone's bubble(s).

Please print my letter. It's all true; I have a good memory. I'm actually surprised that no one has mentioned this before on any FF site I'VE seen."

Well if anyone can find the EGMS in question, proof is always nice to find! In a similar vein charkie sent me this great info from an official source about possible personal motivations behind the plot.

"Well, here in the US, for preordering the game, I was given a "Playstation Underground" two-disc set, one of which was Square demos/movies. On the standard disc that included normal demo stuff, and with absolutely NO documentation/mention of this AT ALL, there was a video interview with Hironobu Sakaguchi, one of the main staffers for this and umm... probably all the FF games. Sadly, instead of being subtitled, it had someone translating over him, but anyway, he said that while he was making a previous FF game, his mother died, and he wanted to look at life in a logical and mathematical way, and that FFVII is the first game in the series with the theme of 'life.' So I'd say that's the REAL reason Aeris had to die. As for what it says for his mental state, that he turned his mother into the last remnant of a dying alien race with a taste for strange men with giant swords (Who also happens to be a savior figure)... well, moving on... (Oh, and regarding RTSmith005's message on your FAQ, in response to point 1, I thought Aeris' 'ghost' was obviously just Cloud's memory/nostalgia, nothing else. Keep in mind that the world of FFVII operates only as it is stated. People don't die and become ghosts, they rejoin the Lifestream and contribute to the birth of new life elsewhere. And point 11, Aeris may have seen the airship before. Zack WAS a SOLDIER, after all. Also, the image of her looking at the Highwind does not depict her wearing anything but the clothes she normally has in the game. It's pink, not white or red. And as someone points out in rebuttal, they don't wanna give it away [Even though the commercials that played here in the US SHOWED her dead!! I wasn't to that point in the game yet and didn't know!! :P] Maybe it was just supposed to throw you off. Also, early scripts wouldn't have Aeris resurrected, because she wasn't originally slated for death.)

I had a long and interesting email from Grey who put forth his own spin on some of the events in the game some of which match what I said, others that are more subjective. But as I have said before, much of Final Fantasy 7's plot is open to multiple readings. My own version is how I see, but I more than welcome hearing what others have to say. Grey mentioned some issues about Iflana, Gast and AVALANCHE which I need to check against the game dialogue again for conformation. But I have put in the rest of his thoughts as these are on points of theory rather than correcting a misreading the script I may have made.

Email from Grey:

"Hmm, now regarding the chase of "the black-caped man"... In your guide you say that Sephiroth's physical form remains in the Northern Crater throughout the game, and everything you see during the game is just a projection of Sephiroth's will, but I don't think this is the full story. There are two other forces at work: the clones, and Jenova. The clones are often

mentioned by people you talk to as "a black-caped man", and often the party mistakes this as Sephiroth. However, clearly these cannot be Sephiroth, since Sephiroth would not show himself to random strangers. Also, some of the people you talk to describe the black-caped men as having tattoos - for instance Dio tells you a black-caped man about the same age as Cloud and with a tattoo of the number "1" was asking him about the black materia. Sephiroth had no tattoo, and he also looked older than Cloud, so obviously this was not Sephiroth, but one of the clones. You often encounter the clones often whilst chasing Sephiroth, since they (along with Cloud) are heading towards the point of Reunion.

Another thing it may be that the party is chasing is actually Jenova. As said by Sephiroth in the Northern Crater: "The ability to change one's looks, voice, and words, is the power of Jenova." The form of Sephiroth was a strong one for Jenova to take. It was also one that Jenova could easily use to influence Cloud and others. Sephiroth may also have had a lot of influence over Jenova at this point, and his mental projections were affecting the forms and actions Jenova took. Also, at several points where you see Sephiroth in the game you end up fighting Jenova (boat to Costa Del Sol, Aeris' death, Northern Crater). When Aeris is killed by Sephiroth he begins the line "Because you..." but then in the dialogue box it's Jenova who finishes the line "...are just a puppet". This implies to me that it was Jenova who took on the form of Sephiroth at that point. Also, when you kill the third form of Jenova you retrieve the Black Materia from it, but it was "Sephiroth" who initially took the Black Materia. This shows that it was Jenova in the form of Sephiroth that took the Black Materia from Cloud. Of course, Jenova and Sephiroth are intimately linked, and it could easily be said that either was controlling the other, or that their thoughts were equal...

Something that has to be wondered about is Jenova's escape from the Shinra building. When Cloud wakes up in the prison cell he finds his door unlocked, the guard outside killed and a trail of blood leading from Jenova's chamber. Jenova's chamber seems to have been busted through from the inside, implying that Jenova managed to escape itself (though perhaps someone else weakened the locks on its chamber). However, why was Cloud's cell open? It's obvious that Jenova didn't open it, since the trail of blood doesn't go near Cloud's cell or the dead guard outside it. One possibility is that Sephiroth opened it with his will, and that Sephiroth helped free Jenova somehow. Another is that one of the clones freed Cloud and helped Jenova. These both seem somewhat unlikely though, since we never see the clones helping out Cloud, and we rarely see Sephiroth helping him (except for pointing him in the direction of the Reunion Sephiroth usually lets Cloud deal with his own situations, unless he has some use). Yet another possibility though is that Cloud, under the control of Sephiroth, managed to break out of his cell, murder the guard and go help Jenova escape. He then went back to his cell and woke up to find it open. Palmer said he saw Sephiroth, but this could easily be Jenova taking Sephy's form, a projection of Sephiroth's will or Palmer being a paranoid git. The Masamune in the president's back is hard to explain, but then we don't know if it was the real sword or not.

Hmm, on the topic of the origin of Jenova and her motives... I think it can be taken for granted that Jenova is from another planet, or at the very least orientated from some point off the Planet Cloud and co live on. What its intentions or motives were is hard to understand, if indeed it had any real "motives". We never see any real personality to Jenova, just Sephiroth. I get the impression that Jenova is somewhat of a beast-like creature, or maybe like a virus, without any thoughts of its own. It takes over and becomes one with other creatures, and then spreads from there.

When it initially arrived on the Planet it infected the Cetra, since they were the most powerful species at the time, and tried to take over their whole race. The resulting war left the Cetra almost extinct. When Sephiroth and Jenova fall into the lifestream they gain the knowledge and wisdom of the Ancients, and a much greater plan enters the mind of Sephiroth - to become one with the entire Planet. It is a mixture of Sephiroth's personality and the knowledge of the Ancients that creates this idea, not any thought from Jenova. As for the appearance of Jenova as a male or female, I imagine it's purely a case of it being able to take on any form. It may be that the female form of Jenova we see is a Cetra that Jenova initially fully infected and put its whole energy into, and whilst all other Cetra infected with Jenova were killed that one Cetra could only be sealed away for the time being, since the remaining Cetra didn't have the power to fully wipe out Jenova's existence without it infecting the lifestream.

Now, on to the subjects of the Weapons. When released they seem to go on the rampage. However, it should be noted that two of them seem to have quite specific objectives: Diamond attacks Midgar and Sapphire attacks Junon. These are the two largest Shinra cities, and the two greatest wounds of the Planet (discounting the Northern Crater which was sealed off). So it seems as if the Weapons were trying to destroy two major areas harming the Planet, not simply going on a mindless rampage. I think the idea that they are trying to bring more souls into the lifestream is quite unfounded, but that's just my opinion... As for the motives of Ultimate, Emerald and Ruby, it's hard to tell. However, one must remember that Emy and Ruby were only added in for the American version, and were not originally meant to be in the plot, and Ultimate seemed to be in there mainly as a source for Cloud's Weapon and little thought seemed to have been put in to its creation. Diamond and Sapphire seem to be the only ones with any major role in the story.

Hmm, as for Cloud... You say that Cloud gained split personalities after reaching Midgar and absorbing the memories of Zack as his own, but I personally believe that his schizophrenia went back further than that. This is implied I think by the part where Tifa and Cloud are in the lifestream and Tifa helps Cloud regain his mind. We see three parts to Cloud then: as a child wanting to fit in with the other kids, as a young teen wanting to become stronger, and as a failure who never got into SOLDIER. I believe these were three main personalities that he had. His first psychological problems began as a child, when he could fit in with the other kids and was always an outsider. Then his problems became worse when the accident with Tifa happened. He felt guilty and he felt weak. As he said in the flashback he started getting into fights at the drop of a hat, often without any reason. Not the signs of a healthy psyche... Then he went off and tried to join SOLDIER, thinking that Tifa would respect him. He bragged to everyone about how he would do well and become like Sephiroth, but he actually completely failed to even get into SOLDIER and ended up as a lowly trooper. This made him feel even more weak and he became heavily ashamed of himself. the Nibelheim mission is obviously a very important part of the development of Cloud's personality. On the mission he is with two people he greatly admires: Zack and Sephiroth. Sephiroth because he is a living legend, with completely unequalled strength. But he also admires Zack because Zack is the person he wanted to be. Zack is smart, strong, charismatic, and doesn't get carsick, heh... We see Cloud emulating the little SOLDIER pose that Zack is doing - it seems obvious that he's thinking "I wish I were like him". This sort of thinking didn't help his mind later on, heh...

Now whilst in Nibelheim a lot happens to him. He feels ashamed being in his hometown again after failing to get into SOLDIER, and doesn't reveal his

identity or what has happened to him to anyone other than his mother. He feels like a failure and a weakling. He is embarrassed to even be there, and especially embarrassed to see Tifa so much but without being able to be reveal himself to her. Then, Sephiroth flips out and burns down the town. Cloud loses his mother, his hometown, all the people he knows. Tifa is heavily injured and it looks to him like she's going to die. He's lost everything. When he faces up to Sephiroth he manages to get an attack in, but later gets viciously stabbed and falls unconscious. When he next wakes up he finds himself being gratuitously experimented upon by Hojo. The Jenova cells enter his body and begin taking over, and with all the stress he's been through it's impossible to resist. Zack was able to resist the treatment easily. He had little worries in life, was strong of will and health. Cloud was much weaker with many psychological problems, plus he was heavily wounded by Sephiroth. The Jenova cells easily assimilated his mind and body. It's not until later (when he meets Tifa again) that he restructures his mind and memories, and not until disc 2 that he finds out the full truth about himself and manages to get over all of his psychological problems.

One thing you make mention of in your FAQ is Aeris' reason for being attracted to Cloud: the fact that he's so much like Zack, her first love. In the sector 6 playground when Cloud and Aeris stop to talk and Aeris asks Cloud more about himself, Cloud says he was SOLDIER First Class, and she responds "Just the same as him." This implies that she saw the similarities between Cloud and Zack, and was initially attracted to him because of this. However, I believe that over the course of the game she became more attracted to him for who he was, not for his Zack-esque personality. On the gondola ride she tells him "I want to meet the real you", implying that she really does want to get to know the part of Cloud that is himself, not Zack.

About Nanaki's capture by Hojo... When Nanaki returns to Cosmo Canyon the people there welcome him back gladly, but seem as if they were expecting him back at some point and weren't overly worried about him. To me this implies that he wasn't abducted from Cosmo Canyon by Hojo, but instead he maybe left on a quest or on some adventure to become more powerful, but accidentally ended up in the hands of Shinra. Also, as far as I'm aware it never says that Red XIII is the last of his species. Hojo says "Lending a helping hand to an endangered species... Both of them are on the brink of extinction... If I don't help, all these animals will disappear." but he doesn't say Nanaki is the last, nor does it say that he is at any other point in the game. So there is no plot hole in having Nanaki's kids in the ending. Also, in my opinion Bugenhagen wasn't his real grandfather. "Grandpa" was just an affectionate term Nanaki used for the old man, since it seems he was mainly raised by Bugenhagen after his parents died.

Hmm, another little error that seems to be in your FAQ is in the dialogue between Ilfana and Gast in the Icicle Inn videos. Some of the lines are messed up, with Ilfana saying some of Gast's lines and vice versa. I'm afraid I don't have the actual script myself, but maybe you can get it from elsewhere. Just thought I'd point that out...

One topic you don't seem to approach too strongly is the ending of FF7. In particular you never say whether or not you believe that everyone dies at the end or not. Now, I know that it doesn't make it entirely clear in the game, and that many people think differently about it, but I think it's a matter worth bringing up in your guide since it is so often discussed. My personal interpretation of the ending is thus:

The party members kill Sephiroth in the battle with Safer Sephiroth, but then Cloud says he hears Sephiroth laughing. The reason Sephiroth is

laughing is because by dying he is entering the lifestream and his plans can still go ahead when Meteor strikes. Cloud's soul then goes into the lifestream (we see wavy sparkly bits that look like lifestream) and encounters Sephiroth. He then destroys Sephiroth's soul and completely obliterates it from the lifestream (when Sephiroth dies we see a red sparkly lifestream-esque substance dispersing and disappearing, signifying the complete end of Sephiroth's malign existence). Cloud's soul is then pulled back into his body by Aeris. The party escape from the Northern Crater on the Highwind. Meteor is getting closer to Midgar and beginning to tear it apart when Holy intercedes. However, Holy battles strongly against Meteor without caring what happens to Midgar, and so Midgar gets even further damaged whilst the titanic battle goes on above. Also, it seems as if Meteor is winning the battle against Holy. Then we see Lifestream come and join the battle between Meteor and Holy, and a bright light is generated. We see last glimpses of the characters flinching from the bright light, and a final shot of Aeris surrounded by lifestream. I think this last shot of Aeris shows that she is the one who controlled lifestream and motivated it to help defend the Planet. It also shows that her death served a purpose, since she was able to join with the lifestream and help protect the planet from there.

Now, as for whether or not everyone dies, I think that's open to interpretation, and deliberately so. I think with the ending to FF7 Square were deliberately asking the gamer "Do you think humanity deserves to live or die?" Personally I think the evidence in the game points towards a doomed humanity. It had been mentioned before by Bugenhagen that Holy may well judge humanity as a threat to the Planet and destroy it. Also, the final shot of Nanaki and his cubs looking over the ruins of Midgar is quite heavy evidence, given that it only shows Nanaki (the non-human member) as having survived. The ruined and overgrown Midgar is further evidence, since if humanity were to survive they would have tried to rebuild Midgar, or at least salvage parts from it. Also, I believe there is a certain significance to them dying, since that way they can meet with Aeris again, in the lifestream, as Cloud and Tifa briefly mentioned about in the ending.

One other point of conjecture of mine is about the Black and White materias.

Personally I think these have some link between them. The Black Materia summons Meteor, the Ultimate Destructive Magic. The White Materia summons Holy, the Ultimate Protective Magic. Both seem to be tools of the Ancients and are very powerful. Their exact origin is unknown, but it seems as if they may have been created by the Ancients. One point to remember is that materia are condensed mako, or lifestream, and it is said that materia contain the knowledge and wisdom of the Ancients. Very little more is said about the White Materia, but perhaps more can be discerned about the Black... When the party visits the Temple of the Ancients Aeris says "This is... the Temple of the Ancients... I... know... I feel it... The knowledge of the Ancients... floating... You could become one with the Planet, but you're stopping it with the strength of will. For the future? For us?" This implies that there are some souls which could become one with the Planet, but do not in order to protect something. We know that the Temple of the Ancients itself was the Black Materia. It is my theory (and yes, it's just a theory, with quite little foundation to it) that many Ancients gave up their lives to create the Black Materia. The souls of the Ancients, all joined together, formed the black Materia and it's great power. The White Materia is probably a counterpart of it. These two materia were great weapons the Ancients formed for times of great need. It may be that they were created after Jenova was sealed off, in case Jenova should ever escape.

This is all completely conjecture though, heh...

Now finally (yes, at last) I'd like to address the points raised by RTSmith,

because they are views I disagree quite strongly with. Firstly, I would say that the first disc was actually quite uneventful. Apart from character development and Aeris's death the first disc comprises of mostly "chasing the black-caped man" around the world map. It's quite dull really. The game really picks up in disc 2, when you are fueled to continue onwards after Aeris' death and when much greater story elements start to appear fully. And personally I found the ending to be perfectly fitting and fulfilling, and it was a lot more thought-provoking and interesting than any other RPG ending I've seen. But anyway, reasons why Aeris was not meant to be revived:

1) Aeris' best weapon didn't have 8 slots because that would be over-powering it. It also had the element of being an ultimate character weapon since its strength varied on more than just attack power, since it powered up as your party became more injured (all of the ultimate weapons have some power-up thing like this). The Umbrella has a higher attack power because it is part of a range of weapons you can get for all characters at that point which have a very high attack power but no slots.

2) Her limit break is included out of completion. Also, it's quite lazily added in since it's just the two third levels limits combined. Furthermore, it's by far the earliest limit break you can get in the game, and also one of the strongest. To allow her to have such a strong limit break for most of the game (if she were to come back) would be overpowering her character.

3) With regards to the backgrounds and the door and steps mentioned. There are a lot of details like that throughout the FF7 world. The prerendered backgrounds have quite absurd amounts of detail, and there are a huge number of doors and pathways that you can't actually access. You're reading far too much into that supposed door in the background and the steps that go into the water.

4) The FMV picture of Aeris and the Highwind is not meant to be a shot from a moment you have Aeris in your party in the game. Look at all of the other character portraits like that. We never see Vincent posing on a rooftop with lightning in the background during the game, nor do we see Barret in Aeris' church with Marlene. There is mention of the pic of Aeris and the Highwind though, since if you speak to her on the Shinra boat after coming out of Junon she tells you that she saw the Highwind and would really like to fly in it some day.

5) About Aeris talking of the future and about meeting again, I think these are references to meeting in the lifestream when they all die. She talks of the future so much because she knows that when you die your soul doesn't die, but lives on as part of the Planet. also, she was always the most hopeful and happy person in the party, so she never worried about anything bad happening in the future.

6) Aeris was too powerful to live on as a party member. When she gets to the Temple of the Ancients she gains a lot more knowledge of the ancients and seems to become much more intuitive. After Cloud gives the Black Materia to Sephiroth she manages to disappear and get to the Cetra city on her own. She has the mental capability to project herself in Cloud's mind and gains the spiritual ability to summon Holy. She is simply far too powerful to act as a normal party member.

7) Most importantly the story would suffer if she came back. It would make her death, one of the greatest moments in the game, a lot less important. It would also ruin the whole point of her joining the lifestream and directing it to help protect and save the Planet. Maybe at one point Square

were considering reviving Aeris in the story (though there's little evidence for that), but it's obvious that they're final plan was to have her stay dead. I think this is the best way for the game to go, and sincerely hope that they don't give in to idiot fanboys by adding in any Aeris resurrection if they ever remake Final Fantasy 7..."

***** 9) FINAL FANTASY 7-2? *****

With rumours circulating that after FFX-2, Square may be planning FF-2, we could soon be finding out what happened to Sephiroth, Cloud, Tifa et al on the PS2. The planned short film "Advent Children" will not be a game, but is perhaps (I am hoping anyway) Square-Enix testing the waters for a full blown game remake.

Awesome! Lots of emails I got have asked what I though may have happened next.. well I have a few ideas I may share in the next update but for now here is a cool email from Salamander Strike regarding the ending of FF7 and what could happen next.

"Hi, just writing to talk about Aeris, the ending of Final Fantasy 7, and my ideas for a possible sequel. Just saying, I think that the plot was da bomb. The ending was ambiguous - Marlene, Aeris, Holy stopping Meteor, Highwind, and Sephiroth dying. But is Sephiroth REALLY dead?

After Safer/Sepher Sephiroth was destroyed, his seraphic manifestation dissolved. Then, his physical body was banished to the depths of the Lifestream. But what happened to him. Simply being thrown into the Lifestream wouldn't be enough to kill a demi-god. Sephiroth had already absorbed much of the Planet's energy. He was a tremendous source of power. He was learning that the Lifestream itself was a great power. Why would being swallowed by the Lifestream do? His spirit was still intact-in theory, wouldn't the Lifestream have a similar effect on Sephiroth as it would on Cloud. Alone, having his physical presence shattered would to nothing to man infused with Mako and Jenova cells. Like Cloud, Sephiroth is life itself. He and Cloud are more than likely one of the few who could survive falling into the Lifestream (i.e., dying) and still "survive". Theoretically, it would not be impossible for Sephiroth to mend his physical form and re-enter the mortal world via the bottom of the Crater.

By the same theory, it would not be impossible for Aeris to regain her form as well. Her burial place is quite odd. Water? And what about Holy? Isn't it possible that the white Materia would still exist after destroying Meteor? By the same account, what happened to the Black Materia? It is unlikely to think that the Materia just shattered. It is likely that Midgar would have collapsed under the duress of the power, and Holy and Meteor were buried beneath it.

My point being, what indication is there that the Materia are stagnant under the earth. If the black Materia were to re-activate itself, it would cause tremendous seismic tremors, enough to create breaks in the earth where the Lifestream would rise. And what about Aeris? If the Lifestream were to open up, what would happen to Aeris? Being a Cetra, what would happen should she physically fell into the Lifestream? It is not unlikely to think that her spirit would allow her body to return. When Cloud and Tifa fell into the Lifestream, they came out, and Cloud was cured of Mako poisoning. Therefore, we can assume that the Lifestream has an anti-Mako effect and can cure many things. But Cloud and Tifa survived, because they fell into the Lifestream.

Therefore, if spirits return to the Planet via the Lifestream, then what is there to say that physical beings could not regain their spirits once they entered the Lifestream. Spiritually, there is no entrance or exit into the Lifestream, but physically there must be a way into the Lifestream. Logically, there must be an entrance into the Lifestream near the Crater, because Sephiroth's body was destroyed by Cloud and his being fell into the Lifestream and was washed away with his spirit.

Also, about a possible sequel: I think it would be cool. New plot, new battles, new enemies, awesome graphics, emotions running crazy, voices, even more FMV's, a vocal, plus a NEW cool Gold Saucer. And how about this plot scenario: In the beginning of the game, set one year to the day after the end of the first FF7, Cloud and company get tipped off that Shinra has constructed a new base inside the Nibel Mountains and has relocated the formerly-defunct Space Program. Their new leader is a former Shinra general, a shadowy man known only as Fang, whose face is draped in red cloth. Under his command is General Elisha Sines, a shy young woman skilled in the use of Materia. Also in command of them is Darius, a strange young scientist who turns out to be a mutant that had escaped from the Nibel Reactor. The new Shinra has rebuilt their army, and, after discovering a new, more powerful yet less genetically complex form of Mako energy, they restart the genetics process and start their labs working to create the perfect life form.

This name goes under the code name "Temrax". Using a combination of this new Mako energy combined with pure jenova cells, they begin a series of test on several captives, many of which had already been tested on and therefore had grown additional limbs or other strange deformities. Meanwhile, a great power surges within the earth. Meteor, the black materia, which seemingly has a mind of it's own, begins to break through the earth after being buried in Midgar. As it's energy grows, seismic tremors began to form, creating many points where the Lifestream bursts from the earth. As Meteor rises and begins to take a strange form, so does Holy begin to rise from the ground of Midgar. At this same time, a gash in the North Crater near the Lifestream begins to separate, and the physical presence of the Lifestream, a rushing river filled with water imbued with wandering spirits, washes up a sole survivor onto the rocks at the bottom of the Crater-Sephiroth.

Thus the battle begins. Shinra, Sephiroth, the Turks, and a new shady enemy determined for power all become enemies, and Cloud and his allies must again come to arms. But when the earth shakes under his feet, Cloud realizes he will be in for a enormous trip-onethat will show him his destiny, and give him new reasons to fight for the Planet."

(the email was reproduced in its entirety courtesy of Salamander Strike xyvandar@hotmail.com)

I must say that sounds like a great plot for a sequel (I'm sure people out there have their thoughts on what happened next, send 'em in!)

***** 10) INTERVIEW WITH YOSHINORI KITASE (Director of FFXIII) *****

In April 2003, UK multi-format magazine EDGE (<http://www.edge-online.com>) featured Final Fantasy XIII in their retro feature "The Making of.." The bulk of the article take the form of an interview with the games Director Yoshinori Kitase and character designer Tetsuya Nomura. I cannot reproduce the whole article here due to copyright issues, but I have reproduced the key quotes regarding the games plot, (the interview covers a lot of stuff on the technical

aspects as well which aren't so relevant to this FAQ) some of which you may find quite controversial!

1) Kitase-san on - Sakaguchi's (the writer's) Vision

"Sakaguchi had a great vision of the force behind the universe. He wanted to explore the idea that planets and people share the same basic energy and so are, in some way intrinsically linked. He developed this philosophy from drawing upon other cultures that stated when a planet disappears and invisible energy is released in space. This energy goes to some place and concentrates to give life again when certain conditions are met. The same energy drives people. So matter who or what this energy comes from, it will concentrate all together to give life to something or someone again."

2) Kitase-san on realising that Vision

"Sakaguchi's ideas were incredibly difficult to represent in the game since they involved an invisible abstract concept. It was something I had never seen done in a game before. So, I came up with the Life Stream. This was an idea that planets have the same kind of life systems and people's blood or nerve network. It allowed us to more clearly examine the issues we wanted to."

3) Kitase-san on the link between FF7 and Final Fantasy the Movie

"Sakaguchi's main ideas for FF7 and the world he imagined for the game were very closely integrated into the Final Fantasy Movie. FF7 and Final Fantasy [the movie] started at the same time in their development process and they share nearly identical roots. I may have to play/watch both again and compare all their common elements."

4) Tetsuya Nomura (designer) on the Death of Aeris

"The main issues of contention for fans worldwide are still Aerith's death and the ending sequence with Sephiroth. With the plot I wanted people to feel something intense, to understand something. Back at the time we were designing the game I was frustrated with the perennial dramatic cliché where the protagonist loves someone so very much and so has to sacrifice himself and die in a dramatic fashion in order to express that love. We found this was the case in both games and movies, both eastern and western. But I wanted to say something different, something realistic. I mean is it right to set such an example to people?"

5) Kitase-san on Reality and the Meaningless Death

(Adamant that cultural art puts a high value on the dramatically meaningful death Kitase-san begs to differ). "In the real world things are very different. You just need to look around. Nobody wants to die that way. People die of disease and accident. Death comes suddenly and there is no notion of good or bad attached to it. It leaves, not a dramatic feeling but a great emptiness. When you lose someone you loved very much you feel a big empty space and think if I had known this was coming I would have done things differently. These are feelings I wanted to arouse in players after Aerith's death relatively early in the game. Feeling of reality and not Hollywood."

6) Kitase-san on Resurrecting Aeris

"The world was expecting us to bring her back to life as this is the classic convention. But we did not. We had decided this from the beginning. There was a lot of reaction from Japanese users. Some were very sad about it while others were angry. We even received a lengthy petition addressed to our

scenario writer asking for Aerith's revival, But there many meanings in Aeriths death and that could never happen."

7) Kitase-san on a possible next gen remake

"If I were to redo the game on todays hardware I would like to make the charcetrns more realistic, I mean like FFX for instance. I think I would like to include full voice support but I would definitely keep the same plot and scenario. I know other members of the team are eager to do the update, but currently I have no plans."

MY REACTION: Well some interesting stuff there. the concepts the Lifestream idea came out of sound fascinating and as someone who noticed a strong resemblance to FF7 and "The Spirits Within" I'm glad I wasn't just imagining things. But, why-o-why then not make a FF7 movie.. maybe it wouldn't have been such a commercial flop.

The Aeris death stuff is also quite surprising as he seems to contradict himself. He seems to imply that Aeris's death was meant to be shocking due to its lack of meaning. It was an avoidable death that happened to someone who wasn't ready to sacrifice themselves. Then when asked about Aeris's resurrection he replies that "There are many meanings in Aerith's death.."

Maybe they production team ended up as confused as us by the end! But they seem adamant that her death was planned from the start and not a late addition to the plot to help provide motive against Sephiroth as some have implied.

As for his comments on a remake, well I'd prefer a sequel.. but if its just going to be a remake then he seems to be the guy to pressure as the others on the team all want to do it!

Feel free to email me about any aspect of this guide, any contributions you would like to make will be fully credited if used and are more than welcome. Please inform me of any errors, typos etc so I can rectify them immediately My email is falsehead@aol.com

(Blatant plug: check out my games website at www.kungfuhamster.cjb.net for loads of info on Martial Arts, Beat 'em Ups, Kung Fu Movies and Pokemon!)

Please also check out another great site for next generation gaming news and reviews <http://www.thunderbolt.be>

Big Thanks to CjayC, the cool bloke who runs GameFAQs. You've given me the opportunity to reach more people with my stuff than I ever could have alone!

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***** THE END *****

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