# Xenosaga Episode I - Weekly Volume II interview

Translated by Gwendal, GameFAQs forum, Jul 2, 2012

Development staff roundtable

[This will be] a very frank roundtable discussion, according to the development staff at Monolith Soft. Including director Takahashi, I sat down with four of them to bring you interesting information you wouldn't be able to hear anywhere else. With [insight into] the development process, inside information on the characters and ending with their amibitions and more for their next title, this will be a must-read for fans!
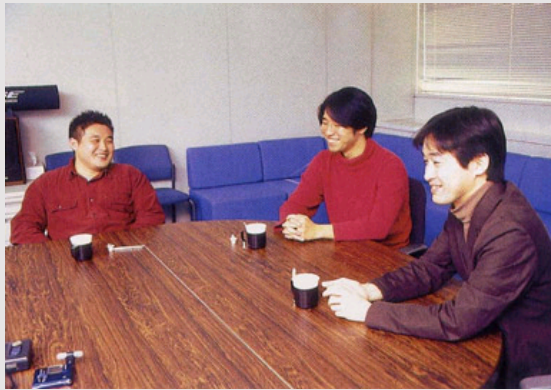
So you can laugh at it now!?
## Various behind-the-scenes stories

Interviewer: In this roundtable discussion, I'd mainly like to ask if you have any behind-the-scenes stories or other tidbits from the development process for the fans. So without further ado, if you remember any interesting episodes from development, please do tell.

Inukai: In the early stages of development, MOMO was very strong, to the point that she could fight the battles all by herself. Even though Ziggy was supposed to protect her, he proved totally unnecessary. (Laughs) That was fairly awkward, so we quickly adjusted the balance.

Tayzou Inukai
Effects Director

Takami: I did the exchange of motion data. When I applied MOMO's motion data to Ziggy's model, he started moving just like her. Pretty smoothly, too! On the one hand, I felt a bit bad about it, but on the other hand, it was kind of cool too. It was pretty random!
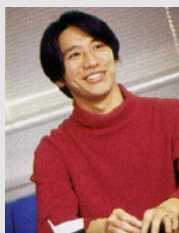
Norihiro Takami

Inukai: Takami loved playing around like that. I'd be working hard on making some kind of data or other when he'd come over to show me something, saying "Hey, check this out!". (Laughs)

Takami: We had some good times there. Very nice when you get tired of working! (Laughs)

Inukai: Everyone wanted something to cheer them up a little [lit.: an oasis of the heart]. [Playing around like that] was soothing.

Was that character that troublesome!?
The evolution of character design

Interviewer: When you're designing characters, there's always something that turns out completely different from how it began. How about in Xenosaga's case?

Takahashi: Ziggy was that way. The first thing Kunihiko Tanaka-kun came up with was an older man with a much rougher face, who also looked very much like the main character of "Eliminator", a very "B" movie that was a parody of "Terminator". He looked a bit like Dolph Lundgren, I guess. The robotic parts on his shoulders were much bigger, and he looked completely like a robot from the neck down. In the end I had Tanaka-kun draw something based on a design from our designers.

Tetsuya Takahashi
Writer, Director

Interviewer: I see. Any other examples?

Takahashi: KOS-MOS [in katakana this time for some reason] was the character Tanaka-kun had the most trouble with. We'd had an idea of her basic form for a long time, but we hadn't decided on her hair or body design. After trying any number of Tanaka-kun's prototypes, we got mecha designer Mugitani-kun to do a design for us, and Tanaka-kun finished it up. So her design was a colloboration between the two of them.

Inukai: At first, KOS-MOS' clothes were supposed to be closed at the front with a zipper. But with a zipper we'd have to make the insides of her clothes too, we'd need to use more polygons, and so for various reasons, in the end we decided to leave them open as a gimmick [not entirely sure about that last part there].

Takami: We even made serious plans for the inside of that torso section. She would be like a mechanical doll.

Takahashi: Since Mugitani-san [yes, now he's suddenly "-san"] was so meticulous in his design work, we had a lot of sketches of KOS-MOS. Moving on, Shion was definitely another character Tanaka-kun struggled with. We started with the initial concept of "glasses", but once you make a character wear glasses, he or she becomes less main character-like. It's an image more associated with minor characters. The results of our efforts to overcome the problem of that "plainness" can be seen in things like the decorations on the front of her uniform, or her hairstyle with three braids. But somehow, she ended up being a bit plain anyway. (Strained laugh)

Takami: Before we settled on those three braids, we went through various versions of her hairstyle. Such as a short cut, or waves [there's probably a correct English term for this, but I can't find it right now].

Takahashi: When it comes to all those sketches we've got left, I think I'd like to gradually make them available to the public if I get the chance.

Interviewer: And conversely, are there any characters who didn't change much at all?

Takahashi: Jr. and chaos. chaos didn't change at all from the initial stages.

A manic main character
Do Shion's glasses hide a secret!?

Interviewer: Speaking of your struggles in desigining Shion, despite being the same gender (the interviewer is a

woman), I find my eyes drawn to her cleavage rather than her face, so…(Laughs)

Takahashi: It's been like that since the beginning. Early on, [they] were quick to cut polygons, so it had to be more…I even had to tell those working on it to make it deeper.

Takami: Event-wise, too, there's a lot of instances where the camera focuses on the pendant on her chest, so it's probably natural…

Inukai: Come to think of it, no one has really called us out on those breasts before now. (Laughs) I wonder if everyone really thought it was right [to make them that way]. Those who were working on that were sitting right behind me, and whenever I happened to look that way, I'd always see them working on cleavage. (Laughs) They were very meticulous about their work, down to the details.

Matsuyama: By the way, Shion is near-sighted, right?

Hiroshi Matsuyama
Event Effects Designer

Takahashi: No, that's not correct. There's something about those glasses you can look forward to [finding out].

Inukai: You mean how they'd sparkle or transform? Or that they'd fold together? (Laughs) [Really unsure about that last one, literally means "intergration or "unification"]

Takami: Didn't we also have some plans earlier on that those glasses would "change shape based on the wearer's emotions"?

Takahashi: Mm, that's right. Those were holographic glasses, so they'd be able to freely change their form. On a closer look, you'd notice they didn't have temples either. When they weren't projecting the lenses, there wouldn't be anything but the bridge of the glasses.

Matsuyama: So how would you put those on your face, then?

Inukai: You'd just have to get them stuck to your nose! (Laughs)

Everyone: (Laughs)

Interviewer: But come to think of it, the holographic monitors also float in the air, so… I'm waiting to see if this mystery will be cleared up some day!

Various monitors
Here you can see the attention to detail in the graphics even in the feel of the monitor images,
including things like noisy scan lines and color conditions. Even if you've regretfully missed it before,
look out for it if you play through the game again!

Very elaborate plans for the smallest details
There were even five different kinds of curry rice!?

Interviewer: Including things like Shion's glasses, your plans even for the smaller details were fairly elaborate, weren't they?

Inukai: Yes, we really did dilligently plan even the little things. Such as designing the ammunition cartridges for the guns.

Takahashi: It's hard to notice, but on the connection gear there's a D-pad and buttons. That's because we had plans at one point to make a one-hand RPG controller, and so we based it on that design. In the end, those plans didn't come to fruition, but I personally still like that controller even now. It's not too late yet, so I wonder if there's a company somewhere that would make it for us?

Takami: Yeah. I want one too. Someone make it for us!!
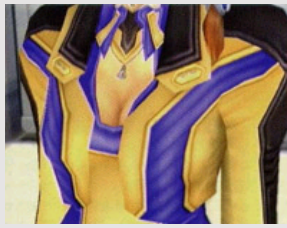
The much-fixated-on cleavage

In the shape of a game controller

Inukai: Also, it's really small, so you might not be able to see it, but if you hold the connection gear after getting the destruction plugin and press the square button standing next to an obstacle, it'll be destroyed if you push the button [in some way], since the connection gear will appear in your hand.

Matsuyama: You should really [something] even when you're carrying curry rice, right? (Laughs)

[It's the same word I'm unsure about in both of those sentences, and unfortunately I didn't manage to find it anywhere. Sorry about that.]

Inukai: That's right. (Laughs) Speaking of curry rice, we've actually got as many as five different kinds: "Curry that's just been served", "Half-eaten curry", "Curry with only a little left", and "Plate with curry".

Takami: There's also the "Curry-filled spoon". The guy who was doing the textures was complaining about that, saying "Why do I have to keep making curry rice?". (Laughs)

Takahashi: We had plans to include meal scenes from the beginning. When we were thinking about what the characters should be eating, since both Takami and I are the kind of people who don't mind eating curry rice 3 times a day 365 days a year, we figured it had to be curry rice.

Interviewer: I was wondering what was with the curry rice. I see. By the way, you also had the monitors show totally different things based on their type, right?

Inukai: I'm glad you asked! We might have the most in gaming history, with 130 different types. That's enough to give you a nosebleed...I'm not exaggerating, I actually worked so hard on it I got one.

Matsuyama: The characters shown on the monitors absolutely mean something, too. There's a meaning in the scene with MOMO's cross-section too. In the scene during the opening when KOS-MOS activates, we used about 200 layers [of them].

Takahashi: We put a lot of effort into things you might not even notice.

Inukai: Using 200 layers for one monitor was something we did for special scenes, but even minor ones had at least 20 layers. Also, since we weren't allowed to use the same design [over and over], the Woglinde and the Elsa had their own designs that followed from their respective design styles.

Takami: It's probably much more elaborate than making a movie. It's something you might not notice when watching casually, but there's quite a few movies with designs that aren't very solid.

Takahashi: Actually, the telephone monitor in Shion's room doesn't just lightly float; her conversation partners are carefully lip-synched too. Since the monitor itself moves that way, they can become hard to understand [if we don't].

Inukai: Also, we painstakingly rendered and lighted the written characters on the monitor, then replaced the snapshots [?] while rotating them, so actually it involved a lot of work in various ways!

Who are your favorite characters? Be honest with us, now!

Interviewer: I'd like to talk a little about characters now. First off, what characters are your favorites, things like that...?

Takahashi: Well, that would clearly be MOMO for Takami, MOMO for Inukai, and MOMO for Matsuyama too. (Laughs)

Everyone: (Laughs)

Takami: I kind of like KOS-MOS, so...

Inukai: I like the operator girls on the Woglinde. Girls with blonde hair and thick eyebrows are so cute! Also, Miyuki is popular among the entire staff. She's very strong. She might even be more popular than Shion!? (Laughs)

Takami: Speaking of characters with hidden popularity, how about Pellegri?

Takahashi: Mm, she's kind of secretly popular.

Inukai: So does that mean you keep a picture of her in one of your inner pockets and sometimes look at it and grin? (Laughs) Also, you said everyone likes her, but for my part I've definitely never said I do.

Takahashi: It seems like Namco president Nakamura got a good impression from MOMO, too. When he was looking at battles and event scenes the other day, he said "Ah, so that girl must be MOMO-chan, right?", sounding pleased. (Laughs)

Everyone: Oh, really? (Laughs)

MOMO, who has had to go through so much unexpected hardship, is the crystallization of everyone's "desire"!?

Inukai: Speaking of MOMO, while they made sure the camera angles wouldn't show her underpants during battles, they can still clearly be seen during cutscenes. (Laughs)

Takami: That's because they end up visible no matter where you place the camera. That's how small her skirt is.

Inukai: Ah. Usually, they're visible, but that made the battle designer angry. [At least I think it's just one person, but I can't be entirely sure]
When he was checking his finished camera work and ended up seeing them even at a casual glance, he'd confront us, asking "Is this really okay?" in a strict tone. Cutscene parts aside, maybe he thought "At least I'll hold back [on the panty shots] for the parts I'm working on". It looks like he has his own personal image of MOMO, I guess. (Laughs) This project is the kind where everyone's so fixated on it, or rather, it's a game that represents a [something] gathering of something like "desire". [Looks like another slangy or informal word there I can't find there, sorry about that]

Takami: As someone who looks at the graphics as a whole, there are probably many other things I notice or forget rather than those underpants... If you look really hard, you'll naturally end up catching a glimpse of them.

Takahashi: MOMO's been through a lot, not just talking about her appearance... Just from the quest event made by one of the girls in Planning, her personality changed completely. She's strangely energetic and upbeat, and I think that might be the designer imbuing her with her own dreams. And when I asked that girl "Which character do you like the most?", she replied "MOMO!". (Laughs)
As long as it's confined to battle scenes, it's okay if [characters'] personalities slip a little if people enjoy that, but when I had to focus on the playing parts and [something], the personalities definitely have to match up with the original story. [A little unsure, but that should be the gist of it]

Inukai: As a character, MOMO was laden with many different kinds of hopes and expectations. But the designers who worked on her told me they really enjoyed it.

Takahashi: To me, she's a character I wish people would judge more by what's inside her than by her appearance. She never loses her resolve, and she doesn't complain. She courageously goes on and does her best, so...
I can understand how people are captivated by her appearance, but please do pay attention to her personality too.

Notable characters you wouldn't think would fit with the staff's personalities are also created [Should be something like that, but these headlines are always a bit tricky]

Interviewer: How about the male characters?

Matsuyama: When I tried playing the game, I grew fond of Jr. Yeah, he's a good guy, he's cool.

Inukai: Every time I see him doing his technique where he flips a coin and aims at an enemy, I think "If you keep doing that, you won't be able to aim normally anymore!". (Laughs)

Interviewer: Was there any particular inspiration for the [battle] techniques?

Takahashi: The designer who was in charge of those is a big fan of movies from Hong Kong. Maybe there actually is something to it, but I think it's rather manic stuff. Even in the specification documents, he'd write things that made absolutely no sense to the uninitiated. (Laughs) But thanks to all that, I think the characters' individual personalities stand out well during battles.

Takami: As for male characters, Allen is nice. It was pretty interesting to see how he got pushed around. In the beginning, he was supposed to be a very ordinary character, but as we got further into development, everyone in the staff wanted to comfort him for some reason...(Laughs) And so he somehow became the character he is.

Takahashi: As for Allen, I think he benefited from voice actor Hirata Hiroaki-san's good performance. Hirata-san too interpreted Allen as this kind of background character* from the beginning. As the story went on, he started by thinking "Huh?", but ended up understanding that "This...isn't this a bit stupid!?". (Laughs)

Everyone: (Laughs)

Inukai: Allen really comes alive by the second half. He's really a great guy, and he might be the kind of character that can easily change everyone else...

Takahashi: If you don't include a character like that, [the story] becomes too stiff.

Interviewer: Even the minor characters have quite a bit of charm, don't they?

Inukai: Absolutely, since the staff really poured a lot of love into the characters no matter how minor they were. They worked hard on figuring out the sections of the presentation, making sure their personalities fit them, and so on. So that meant we could create living characters without the director's direct input.

Takahashi: Actually, I eventually started thinking that this would probably be a good way to let characters I didn't have any big plans for initially be more active in the story.

Were there any characters with a model or [clear] inspiration?
Tell us! Director Takahashi!

Interviewer: Are there any characters in this game who were modelled on someone in particular?

Takahashi: Yes. I also use people I know for that. (Laughs)
How about Hammer and Tony? The inspiration for Hammer was the same as in my earlier game, but this time he appeared as a human. And the model for Tony was a friend with the same name. But his personality is completely different from the Tony on the Elsa.

Inukai: Tony-san is the director's Airsoft friend. This might be a bit of digression, but the director can be really immature during Airsoft games! He'll come out of the woods waving his hands and laughing, and when you think he's probably on your side and feel safe, you'll suddenly hear "bangbangbangbang" as he's gunning you down. Seriously! (Laughs)

Takahashi: Er, I don't do that, do I? (Laughs)

Interviewer: This is a military-related question for director Takahashi: Is the Galactic Federation army based on any paritcular [real-world] army?

Takahashi: It's basically has the same organizatorial shape as the American military, with a few local squads mixed in. The Federation itself does have its own squads, but Miltia also has its own separate army, which I think is quite reminiscent of the US army.

Inukai: Social class also plays a big role. Virgil has worked his way up, which might be why he's stuck as a liutenant. He might have done great things in the past, but since he can't seem to get promoted to a commander...

Takahashi: But being an AGWS pilot is about as tough as being a fighter pilot, so I'd think they're the same kind of elite.

Interviewer: Are there any characters you'd be happy if readers of this magazine would notice?

Takahashi: Yes. There's the people that's already been mentioned with enthusiasm. [Pretty unsure about this sentence, so it could be a bit off. Sorry about that]
Apart from that, I personally quite like "The person with an X mark on their face", so I wanted to mention that. After that, there might be other "characters I'd be happy if people would notice". There are also things like hidden bosses, so please be on the lookout for them.

We're wondering about the future!
Where will "Xenosaga" go from here!?

Interviewer: Now I'd like to talk a little more about the story, if you don't mind.

Takahashi: In such a long work, what moves each character along becomes its own thing. So I think it'd be a good idea to see the first game this way [lit.: see it that way this time]. Later, the story will become increasingly heavy. Especially regarding Ziggy. I intend to elaborate on that in the next episode. Personally, I kind of like the relationship between Ziggy and Juli.
Also, when it comes to Ziggy's behavior towards MOMO, not just towards a girl but towards children in general, I enjoy writing the script for that relationship since I have children myself. But once the story involves children, you can't really do any cruel things [to them]. Things like killing them is absolutely out of the question. Really, it'd be uncomfortably close to doing it to my own children.

Inukai: I think it gets more interesting when you look somewhere like the creation materials and see the "Backbone of the deeper parts" of the various characters. Each of them has their own burden to bear, and they proceed one by one according to their values, and all that coming together is one of the interesting things about "Xenosaga" in my opinion.

Takahashi: Making this game wasn't like making a single movie. I'd rather think of it as something like one season of an ongoing drama, maybe... For example, if this was, say, "X-Files", "Episode 1" would be the first season. With this structure, the truth about things that might seem mysterious at first is gradually revealed as the seasons go on.

Interviewer: I see, and we look forward to seeing how it will continue. Next, please give us a few words to sum things up.

Inukai: Enjoy Ziggy's manliness. He does have eyebrows, they're just very thin. (Laughs) One of the selling points is how any character can become the strongest if you raise them right so focus on any character you want.

Matsuyama: Along with everyone, I made 7 hours' worth of cutscenes that stand up to any other game, so please watch them. Also, please do try to discover what MOMO is hiding.

Inukai: When a dog appears in the game, please keep an eye out for it. (Laughs)

Interviewer: Takami-san, you have a dog, right?

Takami: Yes. He's really a good dog.

Takahashi: As for making our first game as a new organization, each member of staff took on their responsibilities one by one, and every section chief really worked above and beyond the call of duty. By always thinking "What are we able to do?" and making the best choices, we were able to achieve the kind of attention to detail we've been talking about today. If you could share some of that feeling by playing the game... Furthermore, I would like us to be able to bring the visual aspects and the game aspects, all of it, together in a good way in the future as well. [I think, a little unsure about this one]

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Image captions

Allen: Doormat

Ziggy: Cool!!

MOMO: Truly an idol (note)

(See the original Japanese interview here: page 1, 2, 3.)

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