

## The History of *Xenogears* and *Xenosaga*



Part 3: New Director

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### **Part 3: XENOSAGA II & III**

#### **A new stance -- series cut down to 1/3**

After *Episode I*, the staff at MSI decided to refresh the series and a transition within the company occurred. Hirohide Sugiura (CEO) said in a May 2003 interview that this transition had everything to do with both Monolith's structure and where they wanted to take the *Xenosaga* series in the future. He had begun to feel that game creators were getting older and there weren't many younger ones coming out and if that keeps up, we'd never see a shift to a new generation, which he didn't think was healthy from an industry standpoint. So he decided to change the structure starting with Monolith Soft, his own company. He wanted to free Takahashi of his old position and let him work more freely as a creator and act more as the supervisor and provider of the original story.



Hirohide Sugiura, CEO of MonolithSoft and Producer of *Episode I* (2003)

"I'll be stepping down from the producer role, Takahashi will drop the heavy-sounding job of executive vice president [of Monolith Soft], and another person will handle the direction this time," he continued. The new director turned out to be Koh Arai, who had previously worked on *Xenogears* as Chief Artistic Designer and on *Xenosaga Episode I* as Map Planning Director. Takahashi explains:

***"When you deal too long with a single project, I feel like it becomes harder to chase after new possibilities. I don't want to limit the Xenosaga series to its current state; instead I'd like to explore other genres and other possibilities."***

***"If you want to make a single game, that basically means you need to spend two or three years of your life completing it. However, with the world we're trying to display here, that's really nowhere near enough time. With Episode I, we've only managed to show about 20 percent of the complete scene.... and, of course, I always come up with new things I want to present in the middle of development, so it'd probably take me decades to finish everything if it keeps going like this. That's why I'm in the position I am now---I can work on presenting the world of Xenosaga in all sorts of different ways, unfettered by company management or anything else that doesn't have to do with creation."***

- Tetsuya Takahashi (*Famitsu Episode II Interview, 2003*)

Although Tetsuya Takahashi used to describe *Xenosaga* as a "six part series," after the release of *Episode I* the saga was never referred to as a 6-part story again. I already covered a lot of the problematique in Part 2, but some of it is worth repeating. The last thing Takahashi had stated was that there won't be an "Episode 6" at this time. Perhaps because of this statement, or because the reporter was mainly interested in "Episode V," the *Famitsu* magazine would wonder about the status of "episode III, IV, and V." There was never a direct question posed to Takahashi and Sugiura, or a direct answer to this question, but at the end of the interview Sugiura would say:

***"I guess the first thing Takahashi and I should do is thank [the fans] for waiting so long. I know a lot of them were worried sick that it wasn't going to come out at all, but don't worry--we are making the game. We couldn't have begun work on a Xenosaga sequel without the fervent support our fans have given us. Our plan is to continue with Episode III and IV later on, so please visit us during our public gathering in July."***

- Hirohide Sugiura (*Famitsu Episode II Interview, 2003*)

This is actually the only time *Episode IV* was mentioned, despite rumors that *Episode III* and *IV* were in development at the same time. It is actually from this very comment that the rumor originated, as we will examine when we get to the making of *Episode III*.

Sugiura specifically says that they will "continue with *Episode III* and *IV* later on," which implies only four episodes were planned from then on. A quote from *zenosaga.com*'s forum at the time also confirms it:

***"i remeber reading awhile back that Monolith had said they had signed with Namco to do 3 more xenosaga games."***

- Riverking (*zenosaga.com forum, 10-13-2003*)



*Xenosaga* as a 4-episode series at this point in time...

So at this point in time, May 2003, 5 episodes had shrunk down to merely 4 episodes. This further suggests that my hypothesis about the episodes now being shorter episodes - only covering the first story arc - is most likely correct. The fact that the saga was never referred to as a 6-episode story again from here on cannot be stressed enough, since while a lot of people assumed (and still assumes) that 6 episodes was still the plan all the way up till *Episode III*'s announcement, the fact that *Episode II* was not planned to end Shion's arc at the point it entered development effectively dispells this assumption.

In fact, in a Japanese interview with Koh Arai, the new director, Arai had clarified that Tetsuya Takahashi had "a new stance" on the series' further development. The stance, and the clarification that Arai had been given, was that the RPG *Xenosaga* was now the story of Shion. The interview with Arai had for the most part remained off the radar of the English-speaking internet, but a game reviewer named Chris Winkler would pass this bit of info along in his review of *Xenosaga Episode II* as well as responding to my E-mail when I asked him about it. Because the story was about Shion, it was also, in that sense, about KOS-MOS, since KOS-MOS plays an important part of the first story arc in relation to Shion. However, this should not be confused with Takahashi's earlier statement that KOS-MOS and chaos would appear in all the episodes, because he never specified that the story was about them, and having "a new stance" clearly implies a change of plan.

Takahashi himself would state in the May 2003 interview that *Xenosaga* was mainly about KOS-MOS and the Zohars<sup>1</sup>, but this would've been *after* he had already clarified it to Arai since he would have had to state that the series was now mainly about Shion (and KOS-MOS) before Arai started the planning and the development of new episodes.

**"...as far as the RPG *Xenosaga* goes, the story is mainly about KOS-MOS and the Zohars. However, we likely won't be dealing with the exact same KOS-MOS for the whole story... We'll also probably explore the inner emotions of Shion as well."**

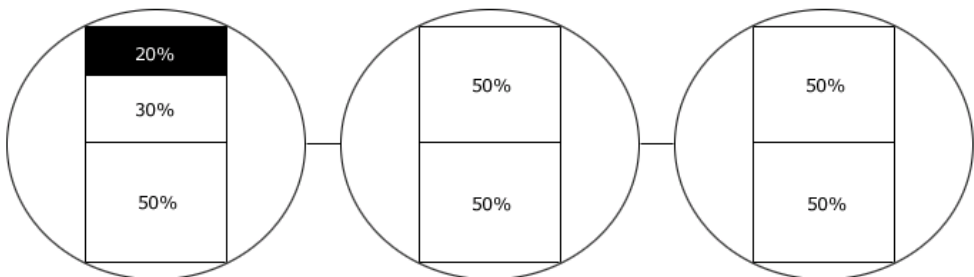
- Tetsuya Takahashi (*Famitsu Episode II Interview, 2003*)

<sup>1</sup>This can also be translated as simply "KOS-MOS and the Zohar," which perhaps makes more sense when you consider the fact that the Emulators don't play a big part in the story.

Thus, according to both Arai and Takahashi, the RPG *Xenosaga* was now "Shion's arc," which is indeed mainly about Shion, KOS-MOS and the Zohar. Thus no remake of "Fei's arc" or the final arc. And the series was now planned only as far as 4 episodes - which could only cover the first story arc. It makes sense, since *Episode I* only covered 20% of the complete scene (he says "scene," and scene usually refer to one setting; the context and environment in which something is set as part of history, not across multiple generations. If 20% referred to the entire series, then *Episode I* would've been as big as 1/5 of the entire story, which would mean that Takahashi wouldn't even need 6 episodes to tell it. That wouldn't make sense).

Thus they'd covered 20% with *Episode I* and would probably plan to cover 60% divided among 3 more episodes, which would be 80 percent of the complete scene, and cover the rest in spin-offs like *Pied Piper*, etc.

Now, let us examine the planning and development of *Episode II* and the continuation of the *Xenosaga* series more closely. In order to do that we need to go back to 2002, right after *Episode I* was released.



At that time Takahashi must've realized that he couldn't tell the entire 3 part series in just 6 episodes, and probably not even in 7 or 8 episodes at the rate he was going. That's why he decided to focus only on the first part - the story of Shion - and cancelled the rest of the series. Realizing that he only needed four more episodes to make up the remaining 80% of Shion's arc, he figured there wouldn't be an "*Episode VI*," and thus clarified in that video interview that there wouldn't be an *Episode VI* at this time.

Koh Arai stated in *Xenosaga II Weekly: Vol. 3* that the development period of *Episode II* "was a full 2 years," which would mean that *Episode II* went into development late spring/early summer of 2002. This means that Arai and others were entrusted with the series before *Xenosaga - Official Design Materials* - was released, which gives even more credence to that book having been written by someone who attended Takahashi's study groups:

**"In order to hear everyone's [collective] opinion during development and to avoid fundamental errors, [Takahashi] held study groups with everyone, [...]. Still, when you have this many people involved in making the game, some mistakes will always be made towards the end [of development]."**

- Tomohiro Hagiwara (Producer), *Xenosaga II Weekly: Vol. 3 interview*

**"It's absolutely necessary to have an explanatory briefing every time. I give them information directly instead of keeping it vague. Maybe you could say I'm instructing them...? For example, if I gather everyone who has to do with the scenario, I consider it a scenario briefing. If we write down things like scenes and**

**plans in a document, in the worst case scenario there's a chance it could leak. That's the kind of security I'm thinking about.**

**If I should die, we'd have a problem, wouldn't we? (Laughs) In that case, if they take a look inside the PC at my house... That PC is stand-alone, so even if someone tried to get a look at the data from the outside they wouldn't be able to. If that PC breaks, we're in big trouble.**

**But even if I said [I'm] 'instructing' them, I don't tell them what to do about every little thing. Instead, I say 'This is the recipe for the story, and you can cook it however you like.'**

- Tetsuya Takahashi, *Xenosaga II Weekly*: Vol. 3 interview

Tomohiro Hagiwara, a Namco staff Production Manager back on *Episode I*, would serve as Producer for *Episode II* instead of Sugiyura. Norihiko Yonesaka also returned, and would handle the scenario this time. These two, along with Arai, would make up the core of the "new team" that handled the series from then on.



Producer Tomohiro Hagiwara, Director Koh Arai, and Scenario Writer Norihiko Yonesaka (2004)

Apart from Arai, the only *Xenogears* team members returning would be Junya Ishigaki, Makoto Shimamoto and 2nd Production Designer Tadahiro Usuda. Hiroshi Uchiyama (3D designer) went on to work on MonolithSoft's *Baten Kaitos: Eternal Wings and the Lost Ocean* as did Yasuyuki Honne (art director) and Masato Kato who had now teamed up with MSI. What happened to Tanegashima Takashi is unknown, and Tsutomu Terada left and joined Capcom. Soraya Saga and Yasunori Mitsuda were not rehired. Kunihiko Tanaka would be credited in *Episode II*, but Soraya's FAQ implies he was actually not rehired. Possibly his credit merely reflects that some of his designs from *Episode I* appears in *Episode II* such as Allen, Ziggy, Margulis and others. Instead Mugitani became the series' primary illustrator and character designer, while Yuki Kajiura, Shinji Hosoe and the less known [Ayako Saso](#) would compose the music for *Episode II*. (Kajiura wrote music for the pre-rendered cutscenes, Hosoe wrote music for the interactive parts, and Saso wrote music for the real-time cutscenes [and Xenosaga Freaks](#).)

Mitsuda would state in his diary that it was "regrettable," but that he would still follow the series as a fan. Soraya Saga explained her situation in her infamous FAQ in 2005; "Supposedly previous story I wrote in the first episode did not appeal to the new team's taste. I'm working on freelance basis. If clients say they don't need my work anymore, that's all. No conflicts, no quarrels there were. A number of official comments from the new team mentioned Takahashi and I were marginally involved in the 2nd episode by contributing the first version of the script."

Makoto Shimamoto continued not only as Battle Planner, but served as a Battle Design Director this time. Non-*Xenogears* team but ex-Square employees Norihiro Takami and Toshiaki Yajima remained, and Takami would serve as Art & Event Movie Director this time. Some newcomers on the previous game, such as Koh Kojima, also remained. This time Koh Kojima served as Battle Designer.



Battle Design Director Makoto Shimamoto (2004)

It is clear that somebody pushed for a lot of change in *Xenosaga*, and it seems to me that the biggest offender was Producer Tomohiro Hagiwara, who was originally from Namco staff, while Director Koh Arai would be secondary. Hagiwara expresses in the *Xenosaga II Weekly* magazine that "Rather than 'An unchanging Xenosaga', I wanted to aim for 'A constantly evolving Xenosaga'. If you restrict yourself to one method, you'll dwindle in the long run, so I also think it's important to use a method where I do things I haven't tried yet. I don't think you can progress without doing that. Of course, there's also cases where you'll need to use traditional methods to finish things up, [but] from my position, I can't authorize things that aren't possible within the schedule that's been decided, [...] Instead, if there are things we can do within the schedule, I want to apply as much effort as possible towards that."

It seems that everyone acknowledged that time was a major issue, and it seems that the *Xenosaga* staff simply

tried their best within the parent company's expectations when it came to development period and spending money. Though it needs to be acknowledged that Namco themselves didn't try to make changes to *Xenosaga*, unless you count Hagiwara pushing for "A constantly evolving *Xenosaga*" to be Namco. In her FAQ, Soraya would state that "The parent company [is not responsible to the changeover and] has been kind enough to allocate reasonable budgets, development times, and promotional campaigns for the series. I've been grateful to them for their help."

In regards to time, Takahashi would state that "we really don't have enough time to present all of [*Xenosaga*]," while Sugiura added "If we write it all down and save it, maybe someone will turn it into a work many decades from now. Like with Stanley Kubrick's movies (laughs)." He also stated that "long load times, play time being too short and being forced to watch movies all the time" were the main criticism of *Episode I* that left an impression. "All of those [issues] will be fixed in 'Episode II'. This time, 'pleasant play' will be the main proposition, and we will increase the parts of content where you control your character holding a controller."

Tetsuya Takahashi said "I finished writing the first draft of the plot and script last fall," in a message on MSI's website in the fall of 2003, which confirms that the first draft of the script for the original scenario for Shion's arc was finished in the fall of 2002. This was not just an outline, since Soraya states in her FAQ:

**# Soraya and Tetsuya Takahashi were marginally involved in the Episode II by contributing the first version of the script. (It was not a plot outline but a complete script including actual characters' lines.)**

Director Arai reflected on Takahashi and Soraya's original script and plot in the following quotes:

***"Takahashi's original plan for the scenario has an extraordinarily complex vision of the world, and that's good, but when it comes to knowing enough about and controlling that from the production side, it can be quite... It's a part [of development] we really have to put all of our strength into. Since it's been entrusted to us, this is an absolutely essential part. We decide how to put together what we call the "game parts" as part of our duties, but I really think we [also] have to take the utmost care to handle the feel of Takahashi's treasured characters properly.***

[...]

***Rather than being a game scenario, Takahashi's original work was just in the form of reading matter. Reconstructing this into an actual game was Yonesaka's role. It's kind of similar to how they make a movie from an original work. But as for story organization, Yonesaka handles directing the story. When it comes to directing camera angles and things like that, we mostly decide on that after discussing with the people in charge of storyboarding.***

***In the beginning when Yonesaka had written the scenario, he consulted with the graphics people, and Hagiwara when the situation called for it, to decide where to have gameplay parts and what parts would be cutscenes. At this [early] stage, when looking at the game as a whole, I was thinking about tempo and atmosphere. Actually, even if we had a new organization, it probably wasn't that different from before. On the last game, Takahashi was the one who brought everything together, but this time each section had a big framework, and we were told to use our own judgement within that framework, so..."***

- Koh Arai, *Xenosaga II Weekly*: Vol. 3

Yonesaka went on to explain, "This was my first experience of doing things this way. Since it was necessary when I presented my own interpretation of the story and characters and my reconstruction of the world vision as the scenario, I often went to Takahashi's study groups in the early days of development. We didn't have very many of them during the second half [of development], but I felt I had to keep going anyway, so... Honestly, even now I still worry about my interpretation of the characters."

***"Both back then and now, I'm thinking about nothing but *Xenosaga*, when I go to sleep and when I wake up, so it's probably already become a part of my life (Laughs). Since I've been making the concept for 'Episode II', and also been allowed to write the scenario after 'Episode I', I have a special affection [for the series]. I feel that the world of '*Xenosaga*' is something deeper than [just] fantasy. I still don't understand all of it, and I think it might take me years to arrive at Takahashi's level of insight."***

- Norihiko Yonesaka, *Xenosaga II Weekly*: Vol. 3

Arai also said, "The actual presentation method needed various adjustments in terms of things like time and cost, and the responsibility for that was entrusted to us. But by holding the study groups, [Takahashi] also had the goal of getting us to talk frankly and without restraint to each other from the beginning about the parts that constituted the 'soul' of the project, and what things each [member of] staff most wanted to do. On Takahashi's part, there were also things he wanted to do, so he had to tell us early on. We'd have a problem if he started telling us later, after all. (Laughs) Really, no matter how hard we worked on the game, I don't think it's possible for Takahashi to tell us the reasons behind everything he's thinking. That's how grand it is. But in turning it into a game, that's only a small part of the whole organization. But the fact that he has just that energy is what's charming about Takahashi, and I was very aware that this was the driving force behind this game."

As early as 2002 it had already been decided that Ziggy's backstory would be explored independently, either as

its own episode, or outside the PS2 episodes. And consequently Soraya Saga had to make some rewrites. "I rewrote The Pied Piper [script] free of charge. I haven't heard from the team since October 2002," she explained. In fact, as early as 2003 there were rumors floating around that she would be leaving after *Episode II*, which probably originated from her website, but nobody seemed to take notice of it at that time.

Monolith Soft also revealed in a press release in the summer of 2003, during a Monolith Soft conference event, that there were plans for the *Xenosaga* series to be novelized along with an Anime adaption.

**"Monolith soft also revealed that there are plans for the Xenosaga series to be novelized and also released as an anime. More details on the two projects will be announced in the near future."**

- GAME Watch, 2003-7-21



Mariko Suzuki, Rumi Shishido, Ai Maeda, Koh Arai and Tomohiro Hagiwara (MonolithSoft conference, Juli 2003)

On March 15, 2003, some game news website had reported that *Episode II*'s title would be "*Der Aufstieg Des Gottes*" which means "The Rise of God." This was obviously a joke, as it sounds forced in German and isn't a title by Nietzsche. It was probably invented by someone who expected Deus from *Xenogears* to make an appearance and wanted to create excitement. On June 18, 2003, the real title of *Episode II* was revealed to be *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*.

Arai and Hagiwara would later state in an interview with *Play* magazine that "We felt making the characters more realistic would help us break into the North American market. These changes also enabled us to create models with a wider range of emotions, allowing us to create cutscenes with expressions much richer than Episode I." On picking another composer they said "We chose Ms. Yuki Kajiura because we thought her mystical, mysterious sound was perfect for Episode II. We showed her the script and movies and let her use her imagination to freely create the music to fit. We really like what she came up with."

Kajiura herself would later say in an interview in 2009 that "I used background pictures and the worldview mainly for my inspiration. As for my work with Shinji Hosoe, I never actually met him, unfortunately, so we didn't work together on any pieces." (<http://www.originalsoundversion.com/anime-boston-2009-interview-with-kalafina-and-yuki-kajiura/>)



Composers Yuki Kajiura, Shinji Hosoe, and Ayako Saso (2004)

Shinji Hosoe and Ayako Saso tend to work together. Hosoe said in an interview with *RocketBaby*, "Ayako is the newcomer who came aboard when I did my company movement. [...] She is very dexterous. She knows a lot about music and can write any style of music. I want to follow her example."

He also commented on Yasunori Mitsuda, stating "His sensitivity is very wonderful. The depth of his musical knowledge about Northern Europe has charmed me very much. He is one of the musicians you respect."

Hosoe also said in an interview, regarding *Xenosaga II*, "I did the sounds for the gaming parts, not for movie parts. I think the sound is promising, and I created the sound in my own style and I think it turned out well. I don't know if I will be involved in the future series of *Xenosaga III* as it will depend on Namco to choose the sound creators." He later admitted his music was not well received and explained some of the technical issues he faced when asked if he regretted that his music for *Xenosaga II* was never released on CD:

***"I regret it if I think about it, since the music was much criticized on this title. I guess I cannot help it? I had predicted many problems for changing composers on a series like Xenosaga anyway.***

***I mainly worked with the PlayStation 2's built-in sound chip, SPU, for this game. Since the rest of the sound was in the CD quality, I completely slashed the orchestral sound while creating the music, in order to avoid the difference in sound quality as much as possible. It was a desperate measure because the given amount of the memory for the music was very low. It is even playable on the PlayStation 1!***

***Speaking of which, I regret why the sound balance turned out to be like that and also the direction for certain parts. We could technically release the soundtrack if there are demands, but perhaps it is kind of like pouring oil on to the fire?"***

- Shinji Hosoe, January 2010 (<http://www.squareenixmusic.com/features/interviews/shinjihosoe.shtml>)

On October 14, 2003, it was reported that the titles of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* and *Also Sprach Zarathustra* would be utilized for the remaining games, indirectly confirming that the *Xenosaga* series had now been cut down from 4 episodes to merely 3. As I said earlier, *Episode IV* was only mentioned once in May 2003. Thus it seems reasonable to assume that Takahashi expected Arai's *Episode II* to be longer at this point (October 2003) than it ended up being. Otherwise it'd be terrible planning.

A short while before that, the developers had left messages on the official website, where Takahashi would say that he expected the series to continue for 2-3 years, again confirming there would be only 3 episodes and no more story arcs. He also said "I made the first draft of the script, but I get really nervous when I think about how Arai is going to use the abilities of the Monolith staff for the first time to cook that recipe into a delicious game. Unlike [last] time, when I've been so busy, I'll rather be enjoying the launch of Episode 2 more from a user's position." When contemplating the future at this time, he would go on to say "after this my plan is first of all to tightly weave together the ongoing *Xenosaga* story. In any case, that's my top priority (laughs). After that, I don't really know at this point, but naturally one thing I'd like to do would be to make a supplement to *Xenosaga* itself to expand the *Xeno* world--a new work involving the time axis and characters." He would not get around to make something like that however.

***"After that...hmm. There's been a marked decline in high fantasy-themed works lately, so I might want to try making something like that, or maybe something that takes place in the present day rather than SF...I feel like doing a variety of different things. I don't know whether or not I have any news about any of that for the users (laughs), but if I get the chance I'd definitely take the challenge."***

- Tetsuya Takahashi, *Xenosaga II "Who"*, 2003

Yonesaka would say in his message that "Since I'm such a modest person, you won't hear me saying something like 'But it's not what I've written!...' which could imply that others were tampering with the scenario during the course of production, while Director Arai said "the concepts this time for Episode II are to make it...Flashy!', 'Understandable!' and 'Easy to play!.'" Arai seemed to know already that the focus was "on Jr. in particular." It is likely that Takahashi wasn't aware of what exactly was going on with *Episode II* at this point, and that Soraya was aware of even less, since Soraya hadn't heard anything from the team since October 2002. She likely sent in her message from home, where she also left a message in English: "I'd like to sincerely thank you for your support. It is a great pleasure for us to bring out the episode II. Let the saga take you!" She would later take this message back in her FAQ:

**Q13. You said it is a great pleasure to bring out the Episode II. Wasn't it true? (01/30/05)**

**A13. It was supposed to be a great pleasure in the beginning. Even now I wish it were.**

Director Arai would end his message by saying:

***"As for the game systems... The main parts will basically be inherited from Episode 1. Of course there'll be a new essence, but I wouldn't presume to change the fundamentals. So, what I set out to do thoroughly was to 'Extend the good parts and get rid of the bad parts', which is a simple but significant 'evolution'.***

***Flashy action scenes with huge robots!***

***Event scenes with spectacular expressiveness!***

***Game scenes with a dramatic increase in tempo!***

***Anyway, I want a lot of people to play it. We will soon complete a new, immersive and addictive world of Xenosaga.***

***Look forward to it!!***

- Koh Arai, *Xenosaga II "Who"*, 2003

In November 2003, Soraya Saga, according to herself later, tried to hang herself from guilt following the suicide of her brother. Fortunately her own attempt failed. "I only bled from the nose and left eye. People asked me 'What happened? Your eye is so red!'. I said 'Uh, it's...an accident.'," Soraya said on her blog on Saturday March 12, 2005. The suicide of her brother left Soraya with a lot of guilt, probably for not noticing his depression or helping him, a guilt she still feels to this day. On her Twitter page in [late December 2009](#) she wrote "I still feel guilty about not having been able to save my brother's life, and wonder why I'm here without him." Her brother was also a game developer and had worked with Takahashi on *Chrono Trigger*.

In February 2004 Soraya saw a promotional video of *Episode II* by courtesy of another department. "And in April 2004, I learned what the adapted game was like," she explains further in her FAQ. Official announcements would read that *Episode II* had a new look, new sounds, easier story to read, and more explosions. Only two months until the release of *Episode II* on June 24, this came as a bit of a shock to Soraya, and, out of frustration and disappointment, she would state on her website that she had now "quit" the series, rather than just getting fired. She would state that her original script were left intact only very fragmentarily. "The scenes for analyzing Momo in the UMN administration center, memories of Sakura in Momo ENCEPHALON are tolerably faithful to the original."

From Soraya's FAQ:

**# You can see Soraya's mark she left to the Episode II in:**

- \* The conversation between Juli and Ziggy**
- \* Momo Encephalon (In first version, It was not Juli's idea of destroying Momo's memory, but a subcommitteeman's. Juli hesitated.)**
- \* The story about U.R.T.V. (with the exception of the chapters after Momo Encephalon and young Albedo's verbal abuse/violent acts against Sakura. They were added by Monolithsoft.)**
- \* Albedo's short speech about the higher dimension. (His last words "You look like you lost your sweetheart ... anyway I hate you both" were added by Monolithsoft.)**

Soraya also stated that *Episode II* had the same budget as *Episode I*.

Soraya was now no more than a person outside the project.

Takahashi saw the finished game at some point in late spring/early summer 2004. He would give his "official" thoughts in the *Xenosaga II Weekly* magazine by stating: "I had a look at the messages included with the quest parts, but other than that I let those in charge of the cutscenes and gameplay parts take care of their respective tasks, allowing the younger hands make what they wanted to for the most part. With Arai serving as director for the first time, everyone were very reliable/level-headed, so I think I'll be taking the same kind of role for 'Episode III'," again confirming there was only one more episode planned at this time. When asked how he felt about the finished game when he saw it he would go on to say: "I think they did a pretty good job. For one thing, they've become more used to/better at the cutscene parts, and the designers' great efforts are really showing. That, and Yonesaka's scenario. Soraya Saga and I made the base parts of the original scenario, while Yonesaka turned it into a volume suitable for a game, heavily compressed it and brought it all together, and he also did a very good job."

**Interviewer: So, are you saying the original plan for the "Episode II" scenario was much bigger?**

**Takahashi: Yes. But we're nonetheless planning to clearly depict and finish the main flow of the story featuring Shion, KOS-MOS and the others in "Episode II" and the upcoming "Episode III" that we've just started working on.**

One has to ask how honest Takahashi is being here. His and Soraya's reactions are so radically different it's awkward. And how can he not be frustrated about having to cram the rest of Shion's arc into just one more episode? *Episode II* and *Episode III* are, after all, so radically different that they cannot have planned them to be that different in length and style during the development of *Episode II* unless they were mad.

**Interviewer: Out of the entire history of the "Xenosaga" world, roughly how much does "Episode I" and "Episode II" make up?**

**Takahashi: Far from being a part worth mentioning, the drama parts in the games are something more like a momentary "checkpoint". Honestly, there are important modules before and after them. We have absolutely no idea whether we're going to make works based on those parts, so...we should probably finish "Episode III" first, right?**

**Interviewer: Since "Xenosaga" will end with "Episode III", do you have any future plans?**

**Takahashi: Actually, I feel like trying to do something for younger people, including children. After all, if we don't recruit younger users, I fear the entire industry will go under sooner or later. That might go against the image of Monolith Soft in peoples' minds, but someone has to do it, so...**

Soraya states in her FAQ that, due to the changed position, Takahashi didn't have the power to make any artistic decisions. Soraya also states "Soraya and Takahashi have been willing to help the new team if requested," which suggests that Takahashi couldn't make any calls on *Episode II*'s direction whatsoever after handing it over to Arai and Hagiwara, unless it was requested. That must have been the agreement, which is how positions within Japanese companies tend to work.

From a psychological standpoint, it is also possible that Takahashi had given into negativism following the



lackluster sales of *Episode I* and the unaccomplished 50% of story that *Episode I* should have covered. In other words he'd feel a resignation in that it wasn't worth making a fuss about. He might have been a little tired of it all anyway. (A manifestation of negativism would be such that anything Takahashi has chosen to do on the basis of true desire would now become, once an explicit project such as *Xenosaga*, a "should" that evokes a loss of motivation through internal rebellion. One who feels like it is a burden going to the office and meeting with people, as Takahashi had expressed in the *ODM*, will sooner or later want to escape from the burden of being in charge of everyone in the company who are working on the series.) Thus it is entirely possible that Takahashi "gave up," and resigned himself to the fact that *Xenosaga* would no longer go past "Shion's arc" and left the remaining games up to MSI to do whatever they wished with in order to make it somewhat successful.

After all, in the end we would not even get a *Xenosaga* novel written by Takahashi - something he should have been able to write.

In fact, in a quote from the "Iwata Aks" interview series on *Xenoblade Chronicles* in 2010, Takahashi would indirectly admit that he "gave up" on *Xenosaga* by comparing himself to a cricket from an old Japanese proverb that refers to anything which someone starts with great gusto, but quickly gives up on (and originated in the fact that the cricket is not a strong swimmer):

***"There's an old Japanese proverb about a cricket trying to swim across a river. At first it's swimming away happily, but halfway across, it just seems to give up. I'd worked on a lot of games up until [Xenoblade], and there were times when I've done the same. So this time [making Xenoblade], I was prepared to accept that I wouldn't be able to achieve all I'd set out to, and was mentally preparing myself to shift directions somewhat. But then Yamagami-san told me to see it through to the end, and I was really taken aback by this experience of Nintendo's willingness to keep working at something until they're satisfied the job is really done."***

- Tetsuya Takahashi (Iwata Aks - *Xenoblade Chronicles* 2010, Vol. 3: *The Development Process*, 1. *Seeing it Through to the End*)

Arai and Hagiwara would also acknowledge the lack of time, stating in the *Weekly* magazine: "I shouldn't be saying this, but there's a lot of instances where I think 'If only we had more time...'"

***"Each [member of] staff has a lot of things they want to do, I think. But when you're thinking about finishing a product, you have a rather limited amount of time to make it in. If you're making a work of art on your own, you can take 5 years, 10 years... But on the other hand, seeing what kind of presentation you can make within those kinds of limits I was talking about, that would be a show of skill in my opinion."***

- Tomohiro Hagiwara, *Xenosaga II Weekly*: Vol. 3 interview

Update Sep 2012: Since I wrote the above the following has been stated in recently translated interviews:

***"[...] we apologize for ending with 'Episode III'."***

- Hirohide Sugiura (stated in the same *Weekly* magazine around this time. Read the full interview [here](#).)

***"The original plan for Episode 2 can be roughly divided into three modules, with what we depicted in Episode 2 being one of them, and one of the remaining [modules] going into Episode 3. The last one is in Pied Piper, which while being Ziggy's story, is also important for giving valuable information on things like the Salvator and the Immigrant Fleet."***

- Tetsuya Takahashi (stated in the DS interview, now fully translated)

## Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Bose

On April 28, 2004, Namco released *Xenosaga Freaks* in Japan, a supplementary game including a *Xenosaga* themed word puzzle game based on Namco's *Mojipittan* called *Xenopittan*, a comical adventure game *Xenocomi*, the complete dictionary of terminology from *Episode I* enhanced with audio and video clips, and a playable demo of *Episode II*. *Xenocomi* was written by Yonesaka and appears to have been done on Hagiwara's initiative.

***"Before I knew it, [Xenocomi had] become something cool. (Laughs) It was [a result of] something I said myself, so I got what I deserved. It began with Hagiwara telling me to write an interesting story without minding if it was on the small side, but I just kept writing without thinking about it, and eventually it ended up at that size. I got carried away working all night, so I couldn't restrain myself."***

- Norihiko Yonesaka, *Xenosaga II Weekly*: Vol. 3 interview



The cover of *Xenosaga Freaks* (2004)

While fans had mixed reactions to *Episode I* (the consensus being that it felt "incomplete"), *Xenosaga II* was still (and therefore) something the fandom was highly looking forward to. When trailers and screenshots had been released people had mixed feelings about the redesigns and the two new composers Yuki Kajiura and Shinji Hosoe, feeling that Kunihiko Tanaka and Yasunori Mitsuda, who had been with the series since *Xenogears*, and in many ways defined the *Xeno*-verse's look and feel, were irreplaceable. As the game was released, Soraya Saga updated her work profile info frequently to reflect how little she and Takahashi had to do with the game, and even before the game was out she specified that the screenplay is "heavily adapted" by Monolith Soft.

*Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Bose* was released in Japan on June 24, 2004. The game, no longer following the original plan of finishing Shion's arc, proceeded to mainly focus on the story of the U.R.T.V.'s that Soraya Saga had created for the series. In other words, the second episode would have a new central protagonist, Jr., even though Shion had been established from the story arc's set-up to be the main character until the story arc's end.

The problem with this deviation in central character becomes evident when we again examine how *Xenosaga's* original scenario mirrors that of *Xenogears's* scenario. If anyone other than Fei would be the main character for a portion of *Xenogears's* story, then it would not last much longer than Bart's attempt to rescue Margie and free Aveh, or Billy's arc in the Aquvy portion of the game. Besides Fei and Shion, the other supporting characters don't have as much story to cover individually, which is why their arcs are more fitting of smaller games, like *Xenosaga: Pied Piper* on Vodafone for Ziggy's story. Indeed, Jr.'s arc doesn't cover much more than Billy's arc does in *Xenogears* once we examine the screenplays side by side. Consequently, *Episode II* doesn't actually cover more story than *Pied Piper* does.

If they needed to complete the remaining 80% of the story for Shion's arc in 3 more episodes and *Pied Piper*, then it makes sense that each of them would have to cover at least the same amount of story as *Episode I* did. However, when we examine *Episode II's* screenplay it is revealed that it does not even cover 20% of the story like *Episode I* did. It is extremely short, and merely corresponds to the Aquvy arc in *Xenogears*:

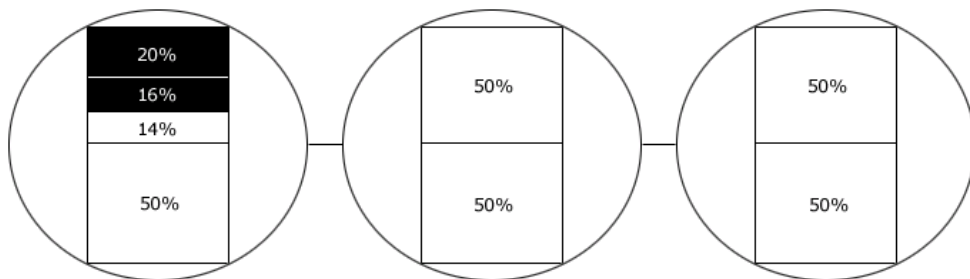
**XENOSAGA Episode II:**

**XENOGEARS:**

<b>Begins after escaping Proto-Merkabah in Ep.1</b>	<b>Continues after escaping a shot down Goliath</b>
U-TIC makes a move; subordinates of Margulis (Pellegri, Richard, and Hermann) attacks on 2nd Miltia.	Gebler makes a move; subordinates of Ramsus (Elements Dominia and Kelvena) attacks in Aquvy ocean.
Shion and the others eat lunch at Moby Dick's.	Fei and Elly eat food in the Thames' beer hall.
Shion's reunion with Jin. Drama, conflict.	Fei's reunion with Bart. Drama, conflict.
Albedo makes a move. MOMO is damaged and needs immediate help.	Ramsus makes a move. Fei is damaged and needs immediate help.
MOMO comatosed.	Fei comatosed.
Sakura's Domain / Rubedo arc begins.	Orphanage / Billy arc begins.
Fighting contaminated U.R.T.V.'s in Encephalon.	Fighting Wels in Reapers Ship.
Ormus stronghold.	Ethos church headquarters.
Labyrinthis - Old Miltia.	Ethos' Dig Site - Zeboim.
Battle with Margulis on bridge. Cecily and Cathe have been sealed for 14 years. Shion has a reaction.	Battle with Id on bridge. Emeraldal has been sealed for 4000 years. Elly has a reaction.
Confronting Sergius XVI ~ End of Jr.'s arc.	Confronting Inquisitor Stein ~ End of Billy's arc.
<b>Xenosaga Episode II Ends</b>	Xenogears continues...

Once you realize that *Episode II* ends at what corresponds to the end of the Aquvy arc before proceeding to Babel Tower, it becomes clear that not only does *Episode II* not cover as much as 20% of the complete scene, but that it doesn't even reach the mid-point of the story. I'll be generous and give *Episode II* an estimate of 16%

of the complete scene:



One more episode to go. MonolithSoft is making real progress here...

While the game was released in Japan, western fans started to wonder why there was so little talk about it, asking around if the game would be as intriguing as *Episode I*, or finally answer whether the series follows *Xenogears: Perfect Works* or not. But the truth seemed to be rather depressing for all *Xeno* fans. *Episode II* did neither wrap up Shion's arc nor give a satisfying continuation to the story. The game was much shorter than the first, had a rather poor sense of continuity, fans were again left with a cliffhanger, and looking back on the old *Episode I* trailers fans would soon realize that *Episode II* was nothing more than "the rest of *Episode I*" (and probably not even that). And this after two years of development (compared to *Episode I*'s development period of roughly one year).



Scenes cut from *Episode I*



*Xenosaga Episode II*

In Japan there were also negative reactions to *Episode II*. A Japanese fan on the fansite *Godsibb* would write in 2011, "In the past, Japan had many *Xenosaga* communities. But shortly after release of the Ep.2, they had closed most."

*Episode II* only sold 218,899 copies in its first two weeks. *Episode I* sold a little over 301,000 copies in the first couple weeks for a total of about 450,000 in Japanese sales. *Episode I* sold a little over 440,000 copies in America.

(Numbers taken from posts on the *zenosaga.com* forums at the time. Not sure how reliable they are.)

And while the game had been in development for two years, the game still felt rushed and had dummied out codes for shops and money that they seemingly didn't have time to implement.

**"*Xenosaga II* had dummied out code for shops and money.. The theory on this is that they were originally planning on having the shops, equipment, and what not. However they ran out of time, so they dummied out the shops/money, and quickly re-hashed the fighting system so equipment wouldn't matter. Probably one reason why the fighting system, while good in theory, seemed rushed and was flawed.. It was originally meant for equipment etc, but they had to quickly change it around and probably didn't have much testing time."**

- *Xenosaga* Fan

*Xenosaga: Pied Piper*, the 3 chapter-long cellphone-based game depicting the history of Ziggy 100 years before the start of *Episode I*, was released in Japan in July 2004. Soraya Saga at this point updates her blog again to mention that she and Takahashi worked on *Pied Piper*'s original story and it was only "mildly adapted" by Monolith Soft. Then, as the final chapter is about to be released, she supposedly updates with specific scenes Monolith Soft added that weren't in the original script. Unfortunately I haven't seen this scenes list from Soraya, and nobody seems to have saved it so I can't examine them. But a fan at the time said the following:

**"Takahashi and his wife Soraya Saga wrote the design plans and screenplays on *Episode I* and then Takahashi**

directed the game using his key staff from Xenogears to create the same feel, worldview and atmosphere. *XS Ep1* is crafted with love and even featured an awesome Limited Edition Box version with an excellent action figure, a pretty nifty keychain, a designs book and a binder.

After *XS Ep1* "flopped" in Japan, and I say flop not as a speculation but as a QUOTE from a Dengeki interview with the *XS* staff that said "Yes the sales have been disappointing, but we promise we will not forget the fans.", the entire *Xenosaga* momentum DIED. We're talking about a game series that was planned to be out once every year for 6 years and this was mentioned in a press release. The game had tons of advertising and whatnot in Japan. After it failed to meet sales expectation the entire engine died.

Fast-forward a few months, *Xenosaga Freaks* is released, a series of minigames and graphical adventure comedies packed with a *XS Ep2* demo. It's obvious *MLSI* is milking the series now and making it less serious than it should be. But no harm done, it's all in good fun, *XS Ep2* will NOT disappoint!

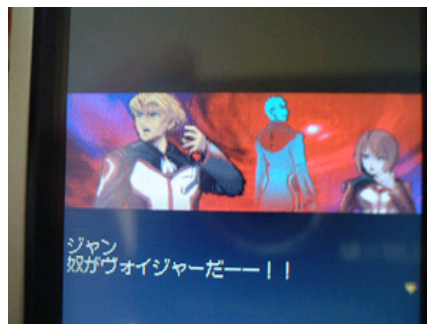
Fast-forward a few more months. *XS Ep2* is released. It sucks donkey balls. It's 20 hours long. The game feels nothing like *XS Ep1*. The battle engine is retardedly slow. There are NO minigames. The writing stinks. Takahashi isn't even credited with the actual screenplay. The cutscenes feel far more actiony and the new characters have zero development. The project screams rush-out-of-the-door development. To add insult to injury, the even MORE expensive Limited Edition Box for *XS Ep2* features what can only be described as a figure that was DELIBERATELY made disgustingly ugly. At this point, Soraya Saga is already bitching about it on her blog. She updates her work profile info frequently to reflect how little she and Takahashi had to do with the game. Even before the game is out she specifies that the screenplay is "heavily adapted" by Monolithsoft. One of the two key persons responsible for what the series is is telling us herself "it was taken out of my hands".

Subsequently Soraya Saga declares that she has QUIT the series, and as all fans will notice, there's no "Official Designs Materials" book like there was for Episode 1. Why? Because books like that are usually put together by the core development team based on how much more they have to offer to fans from working on the project. Obviously there was no love at all in *XS Ep2*, this is not speculation, this is from reading how jaded and angry the creators are at Monolith.

Moving right along, *XS Ep2* flops terribly in Japan, and Monolithsoft announces *XS Pied Piper*. A game they bill as WRITTEN BY ORIGINAL CREATOR TETSUYA TAKAHASHI. Wow! But wait, it's a fucking cellphone game. I guess they don't want to give him much budget. Anyway the game supposedly has awesome writing and so forth. Soraya Saga at this point updates her blog again to mention that she and Takahashi worked on *Pied Piper*'s original story and it was only "mildly adapted" by Monolithsoft. Then as the final chapter is about to be released, she updates with specific scenes Monolithsoft added that weren't in the original script. These are consistent with some pretty random WTF events in *XS Ep2* which made fans pretty pissed because of their poor implementation and writing."

- Duckroll (Zenosaga.com forums, 2005)

While there is some conjecture in this citation, it exemplifies the kind of impression a lot of fans had of the series at the time. Western fans didn't know that Takahashi had "a new stance" and that *Xenosaga* would now only be "Shion's arc" - so the slow pace, especially for fans of *Xenogears* and the *Perfect Works* outline, was unbearable. And there would indeed not be a follow up to *Episode I*'s neat *Official Design Materials* book, instead there would be analysis in official guides, starting with *Episode II*'s "Official Complete Guide." There appeared to be not much of interest in the *Episode II* guide though besides a list of terminology to make up for the lack of an in-game database this time.

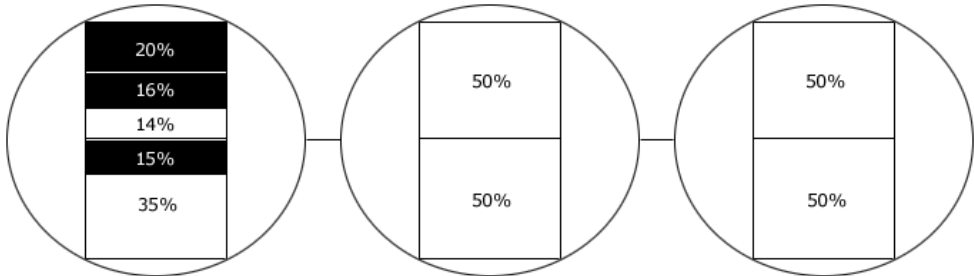


Screenshot of *Xenosaga: Pied Piper* (2004)

The purpose of Ziggy's flashback was to develop the back stories of some of the most important yet rarely felt presences in the *Xenosaga* series, including Ziggy, chaos, Wilhelm, Voyager and Dr. Dmitri Yuriev. It centered on Sauer and his team as they track a serial killer known only by the hacker alias "Voyager," who kills his victims using the U.M.N. network. Putting this flashback into an obscure Cellphone game took away some of the

'scope' the series should've brought by seeing various eras of the T.C. technology as well as render Ziggy and Voyager's presence in *Episode III* almost meaningless.

But as they were only going to make one more "episode," Takahashi probably realized they would have to cut corners some more. With *Pied Piper*, regardless of how it was told, would at least cover a few more percent of the complete scene. I'll give it 15% and place them where *Pied Piper* fits in according to the mirroring with *Xenogears*:



This, however, still leaves 49% untold, which is half of the story arc. Because of this it is not surprising that Takahashi would state in the *Weekly* magazine that "I think we'll release more sideways expansions [of the story] like [*Pied Piper*] from now on. These [will be] elaborations on the main flow [of the story]. The main premise is to make each of them independently in an enjoyable manner, and by connecting each module with a vertical and horizontal thread, you should be able to gain a deeper understanding...that's how I feel about it. I think there will probably be various developments like that in the time before we're able to release 'Episode III', so I'd like you to look forward to that while you're waiting."



Tetsuya Takahashi, trying to make it seem like everything is going well (2004)

On January 15, 2004, Shion's voice actress Lia Sargent was interviewed by *Anime Dream* (<http://www.animedream.com/ad/interviews/view/1808>) where she was asked:

**Anime Dream: Are you aware that *Xenosaga 2* is in the work right now, and will you return to the role as Shion Uzuki, if asked again?**

**Lia Sargent: Sure I would. And no, I wasn't.**

Why Lia Sargent wasn't asked to return for *Episode II* remains a mystery. Instead the less experienced Olivia Hack would voice Shion for *Episode II*. Several other new voice actors, including Ali Hillis who would voice Mary and Shelley Godwin for *Episode II* and *III*, were brought in instead of the old ones. Ali Hillis comments on her work in an interview with *The Gaming Liberty.com* in 2011:

**"When I did *Xenosaga I* had experience with the wonderful company that was making that game and the audio engineers that were working on it too at a little recording studio called Cup of Tea- it's my favourite name of a recording studio! Cup of Tea, I love it!**

**When I did *Xenosaga I* really wasn't privy to the fact that you could make a career out of doing voice over for videogames. I wasn't even sure what that game was because we were putting the words into flaps- we were doing ADR- instead of being able to use our own inflections and our own timing. We had to try and make our words fit into the Japanese flaps. I had never done that before and I had never done a game before so the only voice over things I'd done before that were commercials and doing my own ADR for my own films. Like, we're doing a scene in *Kiss, Kiss, Bang, Bang* or *Must Love Dogs* and an aeroplane flies over head and we have to re-record the lines in the studio. So that was basically the extent of my experience with that kind of thing .**

**That was really a huge challenge and I wasn't really sure what I was supposed to do. I wasn't sure about the style, was I supposed to make these characters real? were they supposed to be more cartoony? I just wasn't sure. When I go back and listen to *Xenosaga I* really had no clue what I was doing. Well now I play Karin in series and games of *Naruto* so now I know how to do it and it's a whole different ball game. But I hope, I hope when the fans listen to Karin and look back to *Xenosaga* they'll see that I have developed. It could be funny to listen back to it. I'd love to go back and take another crack at *Xenosaga*, those guys were so**

**good to me, sent me my free game and everything."**

- Ali Hillis, August 24th, 2011 (<http://thegamingliberty.com/index.php/2011/08/24/liara-tsoni-speaks-an-interview-with-ali-hillis-part-1/>)

In another interview with *The Nerd Appropriate* she said:

**"I stumbled into the video game industry...literally... A wonderful friend of mine introduced me to a V/O agent and I started auditioning for things and ... I did Xenosaga a long time ago and didn't even know what it was, really. It was kind of just a job and I didn't even really understand what I was doing. (The job was) also ADR (automated dialogue replacement) or having to put English words into the Japanese mouths for that game."**

- Ali Hillis, June 17, 2011 (<http://www.nerdappropriate.com/2011/06/17/mass-effects-ali-hillis-the-nerd-appropriate-interview-w-exclusive-liara-tsoni-wallpaper/>)

The North American version of *Episode II* would get rid of some of the really bad Hosoe music and replace it with silence or Kajiura tracks, but the dub was of much lower quality than *Episode I* with few Voice Actors returning to give it a sense of continuity. One of the few who were consistent during the course of the three episodes was Richard Epcar who played Ziggy:

**"I really love Ziggy too because of the pathos of the role. He's a great character to play as an actor-because there are many levels to him. We don't have a lot of time to prepare in voice work. We basically cold read everything and do it when we're in the booth-we don't get to read the script beforehand."**

- Richard Epcar, March 17, 2008 (<http://www.juniorscave.com/RichardEpcar.html>)

Enter 2005, with the U.S. release of *Episode II* closing in. After IGN and other gaming sites in January 2005 finally caught wind of the fact that Soraya Saga "quit" the series (as written on her site) a ton of Western fans started bugging her by using the easy to use mail interface she had on her site *FRIDGE* back then.

**"How could you desert the series? You Traitor!"**

- Xenosaga Fan

**"Why could you make such a stupid decision to leave?"**

- Xenosaga Fan

**"Do you have a marital problem?"**

- Xenosaga Fan

**"Did Takahashi send you home?"**

- Xenosaga Fan

**"Your leaving doesn't really matter. Episode II will go well in America."**

- Xenosaga Fan

**"You may be an expensive artist. So they kicked you out. Isn't it?"**

- Xenosaga Fan

This is when she posted her FAQ that most fans are familiar with.

Soraya thus went on to clarify "this is not a breaking news. The fact has long been known well in Japanese game players because it can be seen in official articles about the game. I wonder why people suddenly have an interest in the matter. I have no intention of announcing this loudly. And I sincerely hope people would leave me and my site in peace. Can you imagine what it feels like to be reported worldwide that "Look! That woman lost her job because her writing may have been so boring!?" I never [quit the series]. A couple of years ago, the new team had decided to refresh the series. Simply I was one of unneeded things." She later changed the last sentence to "Simply I was one of the people not invited to the new voyage."

**"My average annual income has been less than one-tenth of company employees' annual income. Do you think it's expensive?"**

**Thank you for letting me realize my worthlessness. Enjoy Episode II."**

- Soraya, 2005

Soraya then went on to reveal a depressive, self-defeating and "masochistic character," as Karen Horney would've described it, in which there's a poor self-image, a disposition to suffer more than is necessary, a great dependency on the love of others, a chronic sense of rejection, and a tendency to discontent. You'll find all of this being expressed in what she wrote from that time, such as:

"Thank you. But I know well the saga no longer needs Saga. Don't worry. It will go on."

"I had lost confidence in my own ability in past several years. Your messages have let me know that a lot of people are loving the game."

A person who feels the need of acknowledgement that she is unable to give herself from a sense of feeling worthless and lacking will often spend a lot of time complaining about how awful things are and trying to get

others to do something about it. And the use of pain, in fact, can be a type of vindictiveness and an unconscious hope of obtaining love through suffering. I believe this is one factor to consider when interpreting her behavior from that time and why she came across as emotional and "unstable" to a lot of people. Some fans became quite concerned for her well-being. Of course, to gain more sympathy (and love), it is just textbook ennea-type 4 that she would then go on to tell the story about her brother and her attempted suicide that occurred back in November 2003 (and it should be noted that she had already gotten a lot of encouraging letters from fans at this point):

**"A perfect world**

***The world without me will be beautiful.  
These days I feel that way. Like my brother did.***

***Actually, I tried to hang myself in November 2003. (Not literally but literally.) Unfortunately, it failed. I only bled from the nose and left eye. People asked me "What happened? Your eye is so red!". I said "Uh, it's...an accident."***

***In the past couple of months, I've been said as if I'm a traitor, a deserter, and a lame duck. A deserter? You can call me a garbage rather than a deserter. Please be patient awhile till a stain (=me) will be removed from the world."***

- Soraya (Saturday March 12, 2005)

Of course, this caused the outbreak of quite the circus among fans, some of whom blamed other fans for writing insensitive questions and comments to Soraya, and others who became even more angry at MSI than they already were. Even Tetsuya Takahashi was called "a bastard" for possibly treating his wife badly. The rumors were endless and getting out of hand, although a few suspected she was just going for attention:

***"I think Soraya Saga can STFU with all of this class-A attention whoring bullshit. That attitude is uncalled for considering how many people have apparently wasted their time writing her messages filled with "I love you" and "Thanks for your contributions." Oh, sure, she'll get her fair share of "Fuck off," and "I hate your fucking guts you fucking traitor" - but isn't that the price you pay when obsessive gaming otakus are an e-mail away?"***

- Xenosaga Fan, zenosaga.com forum, 2005

Soraya then realized she had to calm down and after people asked her if she was kicked out because of mental instability she quickly deleted the "A perfect world" post cited above and replaced it with:

**"Young gentlemen.**

***Please stop spreading false rumors that I was kicked off because of a mental instability. You're getting it wrong way up. And please refrain from making mistaken assumptions.***

***No offense to anyone or anything. But you would know how it depresses your feeling, if you lost an egg you've been hatching for so many years. I had been really looking forward to see a flight of our dreams."***

- Soraya

The "mistaken assumptions" above is, of course, referring to the fact that she got depressed and attempted suicide long *after* she got kicked off the team, not while working on *Episode I*, and primarily because of her brother's suicide. Not because of being fired. However, Soraya wasn't done yet. She finally replaced the first FAQ with a new one, this time posting a list of scenes that she claimed had been deleted by Monolith Soft:

**# The first version of the script by Soraya and Takahashi was not religiously or politically sensitive. It had just harmless chapters like:**

- \* *Ziggy's past history (as seen in The Pied Piper)*
- \* *U.R.T.V.'s past history (as seen in the Episode II)*
- \* *Shion's past history with Febronja (removed)*
- \* *Jr's rapid growing (removed)*
- \* *Both juvenile and grown-up Jr. switching available in the battle (removed)*
- \* *The ghost of the old Miltia (removed)*
- \* *The death of Sakura (removed)*
- \* *Brief reunion with grown-up Citrine (removed)*
- \* *Gaignun vs Zohar emulators (removed)*
- \* *Jr.'s transformation/overdrive (removed)*
- \* *Jr. & Albedo vs U-DO vs KOS-MOS 3rd armament (removed)*
- \* *Shion's spiritual seeking/witnessing/awakening (removed)*
- \* *The truth about KOS-MOS (removed)*
- \* *Conversation between chaos and the red cloak man (removed)*
- \* *Conversation between Nephilim and the boy with the blocks (removed)*
- \* *An antimatter annihilation of Albedo (removed)*

**# Removed chapter/events were rejected/deleted subjects. It's highly unlikely to be shown in the future Episode.**

It should be noted here that when Soraya says the script by them "was not religiously or politically sensitive,"

she is responding to fans asking if MSI deleted scenes because they thought they would be too controversial, and not that their original script didn't have chaos and KOS-MOS be Yeshua and Mary Magdalene as some have interpreted this in later years (because when fans today read the ver.2 FAQ without reading the ver.1 FAQ or understand the pre-*Episode III* context when no fan knew that KOS-MOS was Mary Magdalene, they miss the point of the question/statement). Even in their original script KOS-MOS was always going to be Mary Magdalene.

Of course, the statement that these cut events were rejected/deleted subjects and "unlikely to be shown in the future Episode" was most likely another attempt by Soraya to incite hostility towards the new team that had rejected her. Many of those scenes did end up in *Episode III*, and once you recognize the similarity of *Episode II* to that of the Aquvy arc in *Xenogears* you know that *Episode II* couldn't have deviated too much from the original scenario (many of the scenes did appear in the trailers for *Episode I*) and it also couldn't have contained all of those scenes Soraya listed, such as "The ghost of the old Miltia" or "Shion's spiritual awakening." In fact, Soraya would later remove this statement before the FAQ disappeared from her site completely (as it appeared MSI would reach out to Soraya, stating that she had to remove the list of deleted scenes she had posted in her FAQ, which they probably got wind of after the Japanese fanbase got wind of it since it was posted exclusively in the English section of her site).

Despite the fact that *Episode I* had never been released in Europe, Sony and Namco decided to release *Xenosaga II* - the first time a *Xeno* title reached Europe. In order to explain the events prior, the title was released in a special "Collectors Limited Edition" box that contained a 3-hour DVD featuring edited cut-scenes from the first game. It didn't sell though, and *Episode III* would not see a European release.

*Xenosaga: The Animation*, an anime based on *Episode I*, premiered on TV Asahi in Japan on January 5, 2005. The anime had already been announced in 2003 along with a novelization, but the official Japanese *Xenosaga* novel book would only cover half of *Episode II* (of all things) before it would be discontinued, and it was written by someone named Tadashi Aizawa. "Since [Namco Bandai] have copyright, Takahashi cannot bring out [a *Xenosaga* novel]," a Japanese fan said on a forum in 2011, but whether or not that is the only explanation for Takahashi's lack of involvement in a novel remains unknown. But either way it is both disappointing and strange that Tetsuya Takahashi didn't decide to be involved in either of these at all, and that the Anime would only be a retelling of *Episode I*, and the novel a retelling of *Episode II*.



An open page from inside of the *Xenosaga II* novel by Tadashi Aizawa (2005)

Apart from the Anime and the novel, MSI also registered titles such as *Xenosaga: Frontier* and *Xenosaga: Exceed* which were never realized. No matter how hard MonolithSoft tried to sell the series, consumers just weren't buying and only the core fanbase remained...and they weren't exactly overjoyed.

**"There is an article that lists [Xenosaga: Frontier and Exceed] along with other new titles that have been registered. I just looked over that article some more and it says something about the DS for them both. Maybe they are DS games."**

- BK (*Zenosaga.com* forums, 2004)

Takahashi stated later in an interview for *Xenosaga I-II* on *namco-ch.net* that "everything about the anime, we left it to the production committee. While we were relieved with their choices, there was also a sense of "They beat us to him [Yuichiro Takeda]."

Takahashi wanted Takeda onboard for the DS game, so had to put the production on halt until the Anime was completely finished. Takeda is an anime scenario writer, most well known for his work on *GAO-GAI-GAR*, *Banner of the Stars*, and *Zipang*. He was also the editing supervisor for *Xenosaga OUTER FILE*.

Tetsuya Takahashi and Yuichiro Takeda had known each other for almost 10 years, but would not have a serious collaboration work until *Xenosaga I-II* for DS. "Apart from [*Xenosaga OUTER FILE*], we've just kept in touch with email about topics we're both interested in - it has been a private acquaintance. However, this time (*Xeno I-II*), in the company when we were deciding who to do the scenario, after some serious consideration, we decided to have Mr. Takeda do it," explains Takahashi. "Only after we made our staff choices did we learn that



Mr Takeda's also working on the anime storyboard." Takeda clarifies, "Actually, at that time, they (the anime committee) had no idea that I was playing the game [*Episode I*] and also working on the scenario for the drama CD, but simply looked around randomly and asked 'Is there a scenario writer with strong background in SF and mecha, and likes games?' Then I was dragged over by coincidence."



*Xenosaga The Animation* (2005)

Neither the Anime or *Episode II* were received well, and it would seem that Takahashi himself would feel that there was a need to do a complete re-analysis and re-construction of the anime and the PS2 games. The fact that the DS game was put on hold would turn out to be a good thing, as Takahashi himself would now acknowledge.

### A(nother) remake

Work on *Xenosaga I-II* for Nintendo DS would begin sometime during the spring of 2005, having been postponed until Yuichiro Takeda had finished working on *Xenosaga The Animation*. In 2004 MSI had already registered titles for the DS, namely *Xenosaga: Frontier* and *Xenosaga: Exceed*, so it is possible that these two titles were merely working titles for what became *Xenosaga I-II*. It is also possible that *Frontier* and/or *Exceed* would have covered something like the 'Gnosis Terrorism' (as touched on in *A Missing Year*) but was later aborted in favor of a much needed remake of *Episode II*. But nothing is certain. The following is an excerpt from the interview for *Xenosaga I-II* on [namco-ch.net](http://namco-ch.net):

**Interviewer:** *So the story for the game and the anime were being worked on concurrently?*

**Takahashi:** *Nope. Because this is a completely separate project, so we put it on halt until the work on the anime's completely finished. Of course this puts us on a bit of a strain for time, because this allowed a further understanding of the background settings, and also there was a need to do a complete re-analysis and re-construction of the anime and the original game, so we believed this is actually a plus for working on the scenario for Xenosaga I-II.*

**Takeda:** *That is indeed true. While the writing of the scenario for a game and anime is quite different, both requires a good look at the original work again, and also a deeper understanding of the settings. During that period of working on the anime...for about 6 months, I went to Namco once every week to discuss things. When the work on the anime was about to be done, I thought, "Hmm...looks like my time with Xenosaga is almost over..." and I was feeling a little sad. Obviously I was wrong, because then they asked me "Would you please work on the scenario for the game too." This time, for this project, it took more than 6 months, and I have to go to Monolith Soft to discuss things two every week...(LOL)*

*Xenosaga I-II* was released on Mars 30, 2006 on the Nintendo DS and was a retelling of the first two episodes. The game's script was by Yuichiro Takeda and supervised by Tetsuya Takahashi who made several additions not seen in the PS2 episodes, and some ideas from *Xenosaga The Animation* were reused again here. Some major changes had thus been made to the storyline without changing the pre-existing elements which the first games had already laid out. Some scenarios had been edited and some new but minor characters had been included. The "Episode I" part is mostly the same. The Proto Merkabah dungeon was merged with the Song of Nephilim and the Pope (Patriarch in the U.S. version) shows up earlier. The "Episode II" portion of the game now focused on Shion, much like the PS2 *Episode I* rather than Jr., expanding and enhancing the storyline to fill in some of the holes caused by *Episode II*, allowing for a better understanding of the plot and reducing the amount of questions that would otherwise be unanswered in *Episode III*. However, the original script/scenario for *Episode II* that included Jr. growing up, and other bits, were not restored.

Hiroshi Takeuchi (*Cowboy Bebop*) was responsible for character art, which was promised to be "closer to the

anime version." Music for the game was composed by Kousuke Yamashita, who scored the soundtrack for *Xenosaga The Animation*.



Screenshot from *Xenosaga I-II* on the Nintendo DS (2006)

At this point it seems that Tetsuya Takahashi had perhaps reclaimed some control. He would end up being credited as "Author" and "Music coordinator" for *Episode III* instead of merely "original Author." With *Episode II* clearly not being popular with fans, Arai and the new team - along with Tetsuya Takahashi - made the decision to make the final episode very pleasing to fans. The database was back, as was the anime look in addition to more cutscenes using traditional textboxes like in *Xenogears* with a lot of *Xenogears* easter eggs - to the point that it is hard to tell if all of the references to *Xenogears* were always planned to appear that way. For those who might wonder why Takahashi didn't direct *Episode III* himself: my best guess is that Takahashi had resigned himself from being too involved with the series. Everything points to this, especially the 2010 *Xenoblade Chronicles* interviews. As will be examined, Tetsuya Takahashi was already moving on from *Xenosaga* before *Episode III* was even out in stores. He must've simply been too tired of the *Xenosaga* project since he didn't even bother with the novel or to write *I-II* by himself.

And so *Episode III* is finally unveiled and revealed to be "the end of the series" with the selling phrase "every single mystery in the *Xenosaga* series shall be unveiled..." As per fan complaints the trailers released this time did not show every single major event from the game like the *Episode II* trailers did, the database was back - supervised by Takahashi himself (also participating in the coordination of the music), and the character design mixed the anime-ish look of *Episode I* with the realistic design of *Episode II* in an effort to make everyone happy. Music was all done by Yuki Kajiura this time, and the scenario/screenplay was again by Norihiko Yonesaka who had written the scenario for *Episode II* and the first episode of *Xenosaga The ANIMATION*.

(For the similar reason Masato Kato was credited with "script" instead of "instruction" on *Xenogears* by SQUARE America, this time Erina Hashimoto was credited with "script" instead of "instruction" (she was credited as a Planner in *Soma Bringer*) and that's why *Internet Movie Database* incorrectly credits her with the screenplay. Erina Hashimoto was *not* the screenplay writer.)

Rumor during *Episode III*'s development, as mentioned earlier, was that *Episode III* and *IV* was in development at the same time. This is false. *Episode IV* had only been mentioned in the May 2003 interview during the unveiling of *Episode II* where Sugiura said the plan was to continue with *Episode III* and *IV* later on. However, *Episode III* and *IV* must have already merged into one game (the current *Episode III*) as early as October 2003 when MSI only registered two more Nietzsche titles. In 2004 it was clear from the interviews that *Episode III* would end the series. Not being aware of these untranslated interviews at the time, or that this meant the end of the series as a whole - since nobody had properly understood Takahashi's "new stance" on the series at that time, fans assumed that *Episode IV* was still a go, and that *Xenosaga's* 6 episodes would be 2 story arcs (two trilogies) with *Episode IV* being the start of a new story arc. Of course, given what we know now this doesn't make any sense since it contradicts everything that had previously been stated by the creators. There is also no reason why they would start *Episode IV*, if it was the beginning of a new story arc, while working on *Episode III* for the PS2 generation's last year. If they started a new story arc they would surely have waited until the PS3 generation to launch it. At any rate, we know pretty much for a fact that *Episode IV* was the rest of Shion's arc back in May 2003, so when the news came that *Episode III* and *IV* (a.k.a. "the rest of the episodes") were crammed into *Episode III* (supposedly, I don't know if I ever saw this particular report myself), they just referred to the rest of Shion's story arc. Not the original 3 story arcs that were planned in 2001. The other two story arcs had been cancelled before May 2003, and possibly as early as 2002. Since the first game only covered 20% of the first arc, it was no longer conceivable that the entire saga could have been told in 6 episodes.

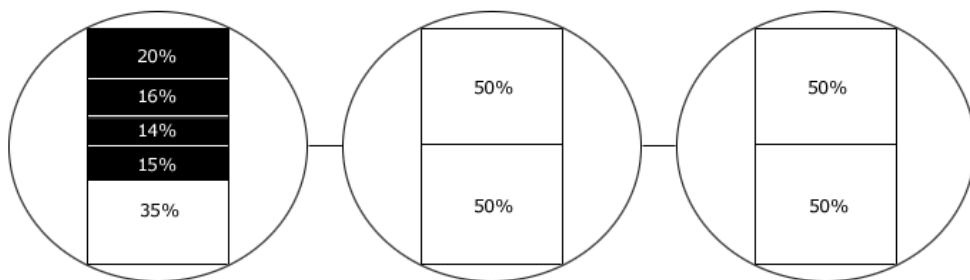
However, not all the story would fit into the DS game and *Episode III*, so MSI had to release the background story for Nephilim and 'The U.M.N. Gnosis Terrorism' as an event taking place between *Episode II* and *III* under the name of *Xenosaga II to III: A Missing Year ~A Fragment of Truth Sealed in the UMN~* on the official Japanese site in the form of a series of flash movies released in chapters during the final weeks leading up to the Japanese release of *Episode III*.

What is interesting about the "Missing Year" scenario is that it roughly corresponds to the Mid-point of the story arc as a whole. Thus *Episode III* and *Pied Piper* covers the entire second half of the intended story arc (50%), which surely must mean it had to be somewhat abridged, even while resorting to textbox cutscenes.

**XENOSAGA ~A Missing Year~:****XENOGEARs:**

<b>Begins after Jr.'s arc in Ep.2</b>	<b>Continues after Billy's arc in Aquvy</b>
Gnosis Terrorism.	Babel Tower.
Introduces new "aggressive" female character: Doctus.	Introduces new "aggressive" female character: Maria.
<b>Mid-point context shift</b>	<b>Mid-point context shift</b>
Scientia. New information enters the story that changes the contextual experience and understanding of the conflict for Shion. Shion learns the truth about Vector and learns of her father's involvement with U-TIC.	Shevat. New information enters the story that changes the contextual experience and understanding of the conflict for Fei. They learn the truth about Solaris, the surface dwellers, and their history.
Story arc of little girl and her father - Nephilim (Almadel) and Grimoire.	Story arc of little girl and her father - Maria Balthasar and Nikolai.
<b>A Missing Year Ends</b>	Xenogears continues...

While the *A Missing Year* scenario is technically pretty short as a flash movie adaption written by Yonesaka from Takahashi's original scenario (as the credits reveal Takahashi to be the Original Author), it would probably have been a pretty long segment if it was told as originally envisioned. It could easily have been the size of *Episode II* or *Pied Piper* (and some of it was probably moved to the DS remake of *Episode II*) and so I regard it as 14 percent of the complete scene at least, leaving 35% for *Episode III*:



At some point during this time, MonolithSoft rehired Soraya Saga to write the scenario for *Soma Bringer*, a Nintendo DS RPG that would be released in 2008 and was produced by Takahashi. This coincides with the point in time that Takahashi came up with the idea for a unique world setting that would be the basis for *Monado: Beginning of the World (Xenoblade Chronicles)*, "after a meeting about *Soma Bringer*" as stated in the Famitsu interview at the time of *Xenoblade*'s unveiling in early 2010. "It seemed like it would be enjoyable to adventure on top of the body of a giant god," Takahashi told the magazine. He immediately returned to the office, wrote up a design document, and showed it to a number of other people, getting a positive reaction in the process.

In order to better get the point across about his plan, he had one of the Monolith staffers, Yasuyuki Honne, create a model of the two gods in their final resting position, and while *Xenosaga Episode III* was released in Japan on July 6, 2006, Monolith made the models during that same month:

**Iwata:** Now, this project all began with Takahashi-san's concept that it would be interesting to have people living on the bodies of two giant gods.

**Takahashi:** Yes, that's right. We began by making models of the two titanic gods, Bionis and Meconis, and the planning developed from there.

**Iwata:** At what point did you make the models?

**Takahashi:** In July of 2006.

**Iwata:** July 2006 would make it prior to the release of Wii.

The next thing Monolith had to decide was the nature of the game system for this idea, and what kind of story to come up with. But we will return to *Monado/Xenoblade* later.

About three months before *Xenosaga Episode III* was out, Monolith released a demo of the game in Japan, featuring the database and some entries were available for the demo. However, some snooping was done on the disc and the entire database appeared to be coded on it. By unlocking it from the code of the disc some major spoilerific material was found. Although nobody had time to translate the entire database to English, the

fans who looked at quick translations would know the truth about Heinlein, chaos, KOS-MOS, Nephilim and Abel while Japanese fans had the entire plot spoiled three months before the game was even out. Some fans would scream "MSI you lose!!" at MonolithSoft in a final cry of disgust at the painful "epic failure" that was *Xenosaga*, while other fans speculated that the full database was intentionally placed on the *Xenosaga III* demo CD in order to promote the very epic content of the final episode. Though I think we can rule out the idea that it was intentional.

This blunder was big enough to be mentioned on the Japanese *Xenosaga* Wikipedia page and has most certainly contributed to the future attitude of Monolith that this kind of story-heavy game development has reached a "dead end."

## Episode III: Also Sprach Zarathustra

And so we finally arrive at what would be the final installment in the series. The end of the series at "*Episode III*" can be looked at in one of two ways when examining the saga as a whole. From the point of view of the original 3 story arcs and 6 episode plan, the current *Episode III* becomes one more "extended" episode of the first story arc, which would make the series 7 episodes long in total if it were to be continued with the other two story arcs. On the other hand, if we acknowledge that "refreshed" *Xenosaga* was only 4 episodes covering a single story arc, then the current *Episode III* becomes a "condensed" episode that incorporated the plot of the "post-2003 *Episode IV*" into itself. But even with 3 episodes the story arc is not a complete experience without *Pied Piper* and *A Missing Year*, so, in a sense, the story arc is already more like five episodes.

On June 4, 2008, Soraya Saga responded to a fan on her *deviantART* guestbook with the following comment:

**"The love for the series is always in my thoughts. I hope someday we can have an opportunity to show other episodes + our version of episode III (strange to say, it's so different from the official III :D )."**

- Solaryear Jun 4, 2008, 5:03:26 PM

This comment has been brought up a lot in recent discussions and evaluations of *Episode III*, and at first glance it seems that Soraya is referring to the fact that since *Episode III* was still handled by Koh Arai and Norihiko Yonesaka, it ended up very different from the original second half of "Shion's arc" (i.e. the original *Episode II* from the 6 episode plan). However, if Soraya is really referring to the original 6 episode plan in this comment, which seems most likely, then her comment that their version of *Episode III* was "so different" may actually be referring to the original *Episode III* - the first part of the second story arc (Abel and Nephilim's arc) - which would indeed be very different from "the official III." Thus, it is entirely possible that *Episode III* did make Takahashi's original story justice, except for the fact that it was *Episode III* instead of *Episode II*. This is further somewhat supported by the following quote from the *Siliconera* interview:

**"It's so complicated. To fill the unexpected gap that was generated in the episode II, the subsequent plot had to shift its course to some extent from where it was supposed to be. There were many major changes, but what's done cannot be undone, so there's no looking back on those might-have-beens."**

- Soraya Saga (Interview with *Siliconera*, 2010)

And so, because we cannot be sure, I'm going to assume that the *Episode III* we got did in fact not deviate too much from the original scenario of the second half of Shion's story arc. And the fact that this last episode still managed to mirror a lot of the screenplay from *Xenogears*, "Takahashi-style", lends some credence to this fact. As does the "leaked documents" concerning spoilers of Wilhelm, Abel, and Nephilim that came true, along with some of the keywords from the first trailer (Mary Magdalene), and it had been stated in one of Mugitani's art books that Zarathustra was always meant to be the last boss in this story arc.

### **XENOSAGA Episode III**

### **XENOGEARS:**

<b>Begins after Scientia arc</b>	<b>Continues after Shevat...</b>
<b>Act III - attack</b>	<b>Act III - attack</b>
Time for hero to step up and get down to business. Proactive attack to solve the problem at hand.	Time for hero to step up and get down to business. Proactive attack to solve the problem at hand.
Fifth Jerusalem / Rennes-Le-Chateau arc.	Solaris (Etrenank) arc.
Ends with destruction of KOS-MOS.	Ends with destruction of Weltall.
	<b>Disc 1 Ends / Disc 2 Begins</b>
Shion dreams of Kevin.	Fei dreams of Elly / Elly dreams of Fei.
Ghost of Old Miltia - KOS-MOS is restored and upgraded.	Taura's House - Weltall is restored and upgraded.
Infiltrating Labyrinthos.	Infiltrating Mass-Driver Facility (narrated).

People in Labyrinthos on Old Miltia are being treated and used.	Mutated people in Soylient Facilities are being treated and used (narrated).
Attempt to control fear.	Attempt to control grief.
Febronja reaching out to Virgil.	Elly reaching out to mutated people.
Professor Mizrahi obstructs the antagonists goal/progress, and is assassinated.	Emperor Cain obstructs the antagonists goal/progress, and is assassinated.
Wilhelm and Kevin monitoring progress.	Krelian and Gazel monitoring progress.
Abel's Ark arc (includes Merkabah).	Mahanon and Merkava arc (narrated).
Wilhelm, a god-like being that has existed since man's origin, reveals the truth about religion and Margulis' purpose.	Miang, a god-like being that has existed since man's origin, reveals the truth about religion and Ramsus' purpose.
Margulis' spirit and sense of purpose is broken.	Ramsus' spirit and sense of purpose is broken.
Planet Michtam.	Flashback of 500 years ago. (Episode IV fragments)
Canaan sacrifices himself for his comrades.	Sophia sacrifices herself for her comrades.
Mary Magdalene and Shion/Maiden arc.	Bethlehem / Zohar arc.
Final appearance of T-Elos. T-Elos: <i>"You've finally awakened. Now that Mary's will has awakened within KOS-MOS, I will take it inside me and complete my resurrection, as the true Mary Magdalene."</i>	Final appearance of Grahf. Grahf: <i>"You have awakened. This body is now useless to me. Now I must return to my original body... the reincarnation of my body that you inhabit."</i>
<b>Plot point two</b>	<b>Plot point two</b>
Zarathustra / Kevin / Wilhelm.	Zohar / Wave Existence / Excalibur II.
The final injection of new information into the story, after which no new expository information enters, and which puts a final piece of narrative information in play that gives the hero everything needed to become the primary catalyst in the story's conclusion.	The final injection of new information into the story, after which no new expository information enters, and which puts a final piece of narrative information in play that gives the hero everything needed to become the primary catalyst in the story's conclusion.
You can smell the ending just around the corner...	You can smell the ending just around the corner...
<b>Act IV - resolution</b>	<b>Act IV - resolution</b>
Hero transitions from an attacking warrior to a selfless, heroic and even martyr-like champion in terms of solving the inherent dramatic problem the story is portraying.	Hero transitions from an attacking warrior to a selfless, heroic and even martyr-like champion in terms of solving the inherent dramatic problem the story is portraying.
Ending movie.	Ending movie.
KOS-MOS is in the last shot before the credits.	Weltall (Xenogears) is in the last shot before the credits.
<b>Credits</b>	<b>Credits</b>
Last shot: KOS-MOS and Lost Jerusalem.	Last shot: Kadomony and the land of genesis.

From comparing the screenplay, we can conclude that *Episode III* probably is what it mostly should have been, and the much more meaty storyline compared to the previous episodes - mostly corresponding to the epic events on *Xenogears'* infamous Disc 2 - naturally made the last game a fan favorite.

This time Western fans didn't have to wait long for the North American release of *Episode III* since the localization team had been working alongside the Japanese production in order to bring it out quicker. Unfortunately the U.S. game was heavily edited. The last game was pretty much a bloodbath, and so to remove all traces of blood, even when it played a pivotal part when young Shion tries to "put it back" in her mother, became jarringly annoying and showed very little regard for the game's artistic integrity.

Interviews from creator Tetsuya Takahashi or even Director Koh Arai were rare (downright nonexistent) after *Episode II* and Namco Bandai spoke for the game instead:

***"We aimed to make the time between the Japan launch and the US launch shorter than in the past Xenosaga titles so fans in North America would be able to play the game sooner. We think fans will be really satisfied with the game, and will be happy to play it many months sooner than they would have had to wait otherwise."***

- Namco Bandai, 2006

Why there weren't any interviews for *Episode III* is unknown, but fan disappointment based on *Episode II* probably made them hide in shame. It seems pretty clear that they only wanted to wrap it up. Koh Arai had already expressed a desire to move on after *Episode III*:

**"Since I've been involved with this project for such a long time, I think I want to do something totally different after 'Episode III'... Of course I like this project and I enjoy working on it, but if you keep doing the same thing you can start getting dissatisfied with the monotony. I have a lot of good junior staff working with me who'd provide a lot of new strength, so I want to try my hand at various challenges."**

- Koh Arai, *Xenosaga II Weekly: Vol 3 interview* (2004)

The subtitle *Also sprach Zarathustra* means "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" and is the title of Nietzsche's most famous work of philosophy, which introduced the Übermensch (overmen) and popularized the phrase "God is dead" - a phrase frequently used in the *Episode III* trailers. Composer Yuki Kajiura said that *Episode III* wasn't harder to compose even if she had to do much more music by herself this time.

**OSV: What is the back story and inspiration for "Promised Pain" from *Xenosaga III*?**

**Kajiura: It was used as the song for the last battle. There was such a long history for the individual characters. They have such a heavy history to it and its times three now, being the third game in the series so I felt I had to cover all of [their history] when creating the theme.**

However, despite it mostly being hardcore fans who played *Episode III*, a lot of gamers were not happy with how the last installment wrapped up. The dub was still inferior to *Episode I*, and perhaps because the voice acting was now being done over dialogue-boxes rather than full cinema as in the previous episodes, even the good actors like Crispin Freeman seemed to be unable to make it sound natural. The over-sexualized outfits for KOS-MOS threw the seriousness of the game off even moreso than *Episode I*. While *Xenogears* had had an equal amount of over-sexualized outfits they had been less in-your-face than those in *Xenosaga* because of the sprites and lesser graphics capabilities. The character designer for *Episode II* and *III* (as well as the original designer for KOS-MOS), Mugitani Kouichi (Choco), is in part a hentai artist with a sexual predilection for armed lolita maids.

**"Maybe the next installment of the series will get the same artists working on *Soulcalibur IV*. Then the silicone will surely hit the fan i say."**

- *Xenosaga Fan*

The battle system in *Episode III* had also become more traditional and it was as if everything had taken a step back and *Xenosaga* was now just another JRPG only with a much more convoluted story and featuring a crazy database to help anyone who might get lost in it. KOS-MOS' connection to Rennes-Le-Chateau and Mary Magdalene was also not received well and sometimes even referred to as a "Deus ex Machina" by some fans despite the fact that it had been foreshadowed since the very first *Xenosaga* trailer back in 2001.

**"*Xenosaga Episode III* should conclude with a quiz on the plot of the series. Double or nothing says nobody would pass. This is a sprawling mess of an RPG, ending a story that arguably goes down as the most ambitious narrative in gaming history. The frightening part is, it claims that title even after cutting its planned running length in half. [Actually, cutting its planned running length to merely 1/3.]**

**[...] To even try making sense of it all, prior experience with the series is required. If you don't know your U-DO from your U-TIC, don't bother, and dedicated followers of the first two episodes might still have trouble. There's a sizable gap in the storyline between episode II and III, filled by one short flashback and a recap in the database menu. It feels as if an entire Episode Two-and-a-Half wound up trashed on the cutting-room floor."**

- D. F. Smith, *Xenosaga Episode III: Also Sprach Zarathustra review* (G4tv.com), 2006

An observation many fans had was how much of *Episode III* seemed to be influenced by the *Star Wars* prequel films. The political manipulation that Wilhelm pulls by playing both sides in the conflict mirrored the actions of *Star Wars*' Chancellor Palpatine, and Kevin's loss of his mother and sacrificing the rest of the world for a perfect and safe world with Shion resembled Anakin's story with his mother Shmi and wife Padme. However, since both Miang and Wilhelm are also mirrored in the way they manipulate both sides in a conflict, it is unlikely that Takahashi pulled Wilhelm's political maneuverings from the *Star Wars* prequels, and more likely that he pulled them from mirroring Miang. The scene where Kevin the Testament betrays Wilhelm to save Shion, however, was certainly a homage to the redemption of Anakin in *Return of the Jedi*, but fans didn't find it too flattering for the saga and complained that this was the second time a masked/caped villain in the *Xeno* series pulled a Darth Vader.

*Xenosaga III* ends with a shot that references the iconic shot in *2001: A Space Odyssey* with the Earth, the Moon and the Sun lined up. The same shot was also referenced at the end of *Ideon: Be Invoked*, a 1982 Space Opera theatrical anime feature by Yoshiyuki Tomino (the creator of *Gundam*), a film that also served as an influence for Hideaki Anno's *The End of Evangelion* theatrical film. But while *Be Invoked* isn't all that similar to *Evangelion* it is pretty similar to *Xenosaga III* in that there are two "alien races" fighting each other, even though it's painfully obvious they are both the same human beings that share a common origin, and at the end all of them die and their spirits are brought to Earth which begins a new "genesis" - complete with a shot that references *2001: A Space Odyssey* and symbolic of the sunrise of a new dawn of mankind. While *2001* was definitely the main influence, perhaps *Ideon: Be Invoked* was also an influence on Tetsuya Takahashi.

At this point, many fans tried to get petitions and other movements going to get the series to continue, and a reboot of the *Xeno* series has also been demanded by many Japanese players. But as has been revealed since then, we now know that Tetsuya Takahashi was already moving on to *Monado: Beginning of the World* before *Episode III* was even out in stores. Having worked on "*Monado*" since, up to its release in 2010, it would have been impossible to have gotten anything more in the *Xenosaga* series between that time. Furthermore, Hirohide Sugiura had already stated in the *Episode II* Weekly magazine that they were ending the series with *Episode III* and that only in five or ten years time he'd like to revisit *Xenosaga* again. Some more comments on all this coming up, along with a few curious rumors and comments that have appeared since *Episode III*, not least of which have come from Soraya Saga herself.

(The first rumor started at the *Xenosaga* forums on Namco's official NA site where someone said that "*Xenosaga* is rumored to have "*Xenosaga Episode IV-Magdeline's Dawn*" coming by 2010," which would turn out to be false as MSI and Takahashi was now working on *Monado* which was released as "*Xenoblade*" in 2010.)

## Complete and Perfect Guide

*Episode III*'s equivalent of *Xenogears: Perfect Works~The Real Thing~* and *Xenosaga -Official Design Materials-*, the *Xenosaga III Complete Guide* and the *Xenosaga III Perfect Guide* were translated from 2006-2007 (though not a 100% completely) thanks to the effort of a fan, Jinx, and was of tremendous help to fans in understanding the *Xenosaga* universe better, although a great many things were still confusing regarding the game's world.



The cover of *Xenosaga Episode III: Complete Guide*

On April 26, 2007, it was announced that Namco would transfer 80% of its 96% stake in Monolith Soft to Nintendo, effective May 1, 2007. As reason for the move, the firm cited considerations involving the future growth of the Monolith studio and the desire to strengthen its relationship with Nintendo in the console software business.

***"On Nintendo platforms, the developer brought Xenosaga I&II to the DS and also supported the GameCube through Baten Kaitos and its sequel. More recently, it is developing the Wii title Disaster: Day of Crisis for Nintendo.***

***This isn't the end of relations between Monolith and Bandai Namco, though. In addition to retaining a 16% stake in the developer, Bandai Namco says that it will continue to make use of the studio for planning and development. What this means for the Xenosaga series is anyone's guess at this point, but we'll let you know if we hear anything.***

- Anoop Gantayat, April 26, 2007

Satoru Iwata, the President of Nintendo, explained the Monolith purchase in another statement:

***"In the case of Monolith Software, Mr. Sugiura, the president, and Nintendo have a long-term relationship. How Mr. Sugiura thinks is close to how Nintendo thinks. The software Mr. Sugiura would like to create is in line with what Nintendo would like to have for its platform. So, we thought that Nintendo should support this idea, and we decided to take action."***

- Anoop Gantayat, April 26, 2007

Namco would continue to feature KOS-MOS and T-elos as cameos in some of their various fighting games.

On November 9, 2007 [Soraya Saga](#) became a member of [DeviantArt](#) and started [talking to fans](#) under the name of 'Solaryear' where she said that she and Takahashi hadn't forgotten the series and that they hoped to one day have the opportunity to show other episodes of *Xenosaga*, as cited earlier. She also drew an interesting

artwork for *Xenogears*' 10th anniversary in 2008.

An interesting rumor appeared in 2008, when Soraya seemingly hinted that they were working on something *Xenosaga* related that never materialized. Back then she had written on her CV, following the release of *Soma Bringer*, that she was working on Co-writing a story/script that was in pre-production, and the only time she has ever co-wrote the story and script have been for *Xenogears* and *Xenosaga*. This would not turn out to be *Monado/Xenoblade* because she was not involved with that game. She also made the following comment on her BBS at this time while fans were talking about the music of Yasunori Mitsuda:

***Soraya Saga: I wish I could see a sight of Durandal docking with Excalibur with music by him.***

***Fan: Durandal docking with Excalibur!?!?!!!!!***

***Soraya Saga: I won't tell in detail.***

While this wasn't proof of anything, it seemed to suggest that a new *Xenosaga* game was in the works. But after a while the pre-production project Soraya had listed was removed and the comment about Durandal and Excalibur slowly fell into oblivion. Since there was definitely no *Xenosaga* game in the works while Takahashi was working on *Monado*, and as Sugiura had made it clear they were taking a break from *Xenosaga*, the project Soraya had listed as being in pre-production with herself as Co-writer remains a mystery.

On deviantART at the time, Soraya also responded to a frustrated fan who wondered why there was so much hush-hush around the series, to which Soraya replied: "There's no great hush-hush. :D Just because when I speak about "commercial products", sometimes it has to go through so many channels. (and getting clearance takes very long time...) As for [*Xenogears*] manga, novel or anime, if Square/Enix wants, anything goes. But seemingly now they have plenty of other merchandise to sell, So no one knows what will happen," and when asked if she expect something to be made in the future she responded with, "I can't say other than that it's up in the air for now."

Then, in 2009 she replied to a fan with the following enigmatic comment:

***"Thank you for visiting.***

***I'd rather leave anything about Xeno untold till Zohar awakes again. :)"***

- Solaryear (deviantART Jul 3, 2009)

While at the time it sounded promising, like a hint of something to come involving Zohar (i.e. *Xenosaga*) along with the previous hints surrounding Soraya's mysterious pre-production project, in the wake of *Xenoblade* (which didn't involve Zohar or Soraya) many fans dismiss this as having been merely a "cute" or silly comment. She wouldn't talk about "Xeno" even after *Xenoblade*'s release.

Continue to **Part 4: MONOLITHSOFT AND NINTENDO**

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