

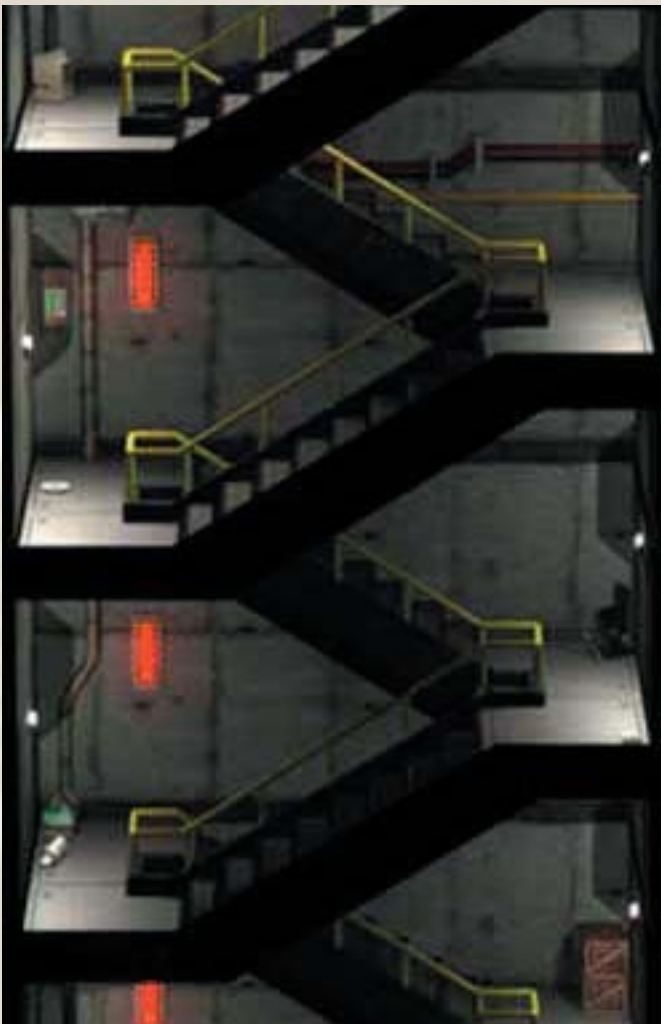
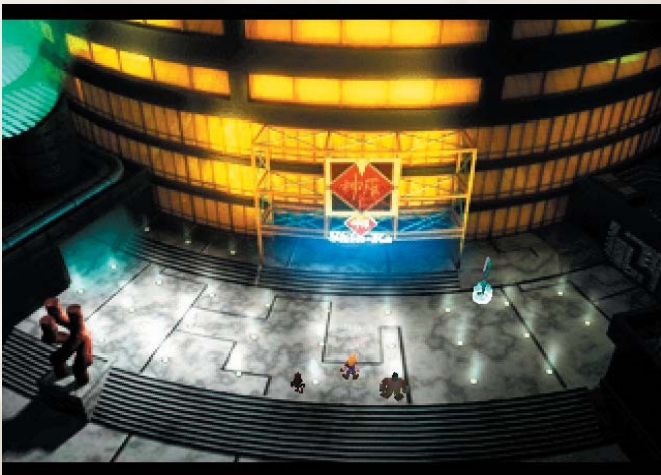




FINAL FANTASY VII

Chapter 7: To the top of Shinra Tower





Say, you must know this building well right?



Not really. Come to think of it, I believe this is the first time I've been to headquarters...



I have loads of intel about this building. Floors above the 60th are special, it is very difficult to get there even for Shinra employees. Security seems pretty low right now, let's go!



Wait a minute! Is your plan to enter like this, through the main door?



What? I'm going to fight and then I...



That won't work! We have to find another way...



There is no other way. If we continue to waste time like this, Aerith...



I know! But if we get caught here...



Shut up, both of you. We'll slip in quietly and that'll be it. Over here, there has to be an emergency exit.

They went around the building and found the emergency exit door...



Huh, do you really want to walk up sixty floors?



We have to help Aerith!



Once up there we'll be exhausted...



We don't have time to argue. I'm going!



Hey wait, don't go off alone!

The first floors were already very tiring...



I... don't understand why... we're climbing...



We don't want to... make a fuss... before we arrive... to save Aerith...



I doubt we can... save her without... a fuss!



Shut up... It doesn't help!



He he... So you too... you're fighting for someone else! ...I was wrong about you.



Who cares Barret.



He he, I just wanted to say, I misjudged you.



He he he...



What's so funny Tifa?



Huff... Puff... Do those stairs actually lead anywhere?



I don't know... Ask the stairs!



Wouldn't it be one of those endless staircases or something?



Of course not!

A bit later...



Are we there yet?



I don't know!

Even later...



Are we there soon?



Listen, stop asking me this question all the time! We are still far far far far, very far from arriving okay!?



Screw this, I'm going back down.



It's going to take as long as it did to go up...

Much much later...



What floor are we on?



I stopped counting...



What's even the point of having such large buildings? Shinra... sucks!

A lot later...



Huff! Puff! ...Marlene! Daddy wants to see you one last time...!



You're delirious Barret. Look, here we are!



F-finally... we arrived... N-never again! I never want to see stairs again in my life!



Things are gonna get serious now... Get ready!

As soon as they entered the door, three guards in heavy armor rushed towards them...



That's as far as you go!



Please step aside, we mean you no harm!



Ha ha, did you hear that? They mean us no harm...



I know your weak point, get out of the way!



Pffft... You're bluffing!



Still, the outfit he's wearing...



Shut up, we have to do our job!



As you wish...



Cloud focused on his lightning Materia. Out of thin air a gigantic lightning bolt struck one of the guards shattering the heavy armor revealing his true form: a thin and frail man...



Um... Well... Okay, that traitor is a SOLDIER... Let's retreat! They can't go up without this anyway!

The guard was holding a magnetic card...



Not so fast! Ah! There!

Tifa stole access card for the upper floor right from his hands...



You...! The president will be furious!



Let's fall back!!



They disappeared down the main staircase...



Alright, let's take the elevator...


They entered the elevator. When Cloud used the access card, only the 60th floor lit up on display... So that's where they went...




I have a feeling it's gonna be a lot more difficult to reach those last ten floors than climbing the stairs...








 Look, if we sneak behind these statues, we can reach that stairwell without being seen!


 Good idea. Cloud! You go first and let us know when the way is clear.


The operation went according to plan, they didn't get spotted. The 61st floor was a room filled with tables and chairs, large trees overlooking everything...

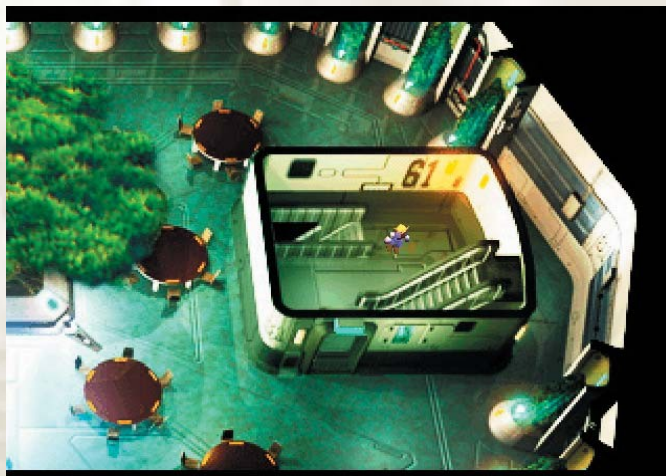
 That Shinra... We could accommodate ten families here, and what's this floor purpose? A place for empty discussions!

 Hey there! You three! I've never seen you around! What are you doing here?

 Um... Actually I...

 We're here for Aerith! We need to go upstairs, do you have a problem with that?

 Ooh, I see... So you guys must be...





...from Shinra Maintenance! We've been waiting for you for hours! Is Aerith the mayor's new assistant? Um... You don't have an access card do you?



We do, but only up to this floor, they must have made a mistake at reception...



How typical, people are so poorly paid that no one does their job properly... This card get you to the 65th floor. I really hope you can unclog those toilets, it's a real infection on the 66th... You will need to ask the mayor for the access card!



Thanks! See ya!



Yeah yeah...

They entered the elevator and selected the 65th floor...



Phew! That was close!



Yeah... Let's see what awaits us up there!



It's gone well so far, hasn't it?



Right... I have an idea for what's next... We should talk plain to the mayor.



Why is that?



Well, it's well known the mayor of Midgar doesn't get along too well with the president. If that's true, he must be mad at him about Sector 7... But it's quite the risk!



We are on the 65th floor of the Shinra Tower, we took plenty of risk already. What's a little more? Let's follow your plan.

The elevator opened. They walked towards the office with "Domino, Mayor of the City of Midgar" in big letter above it. An assistant welcomed them..



Um... Are you...?



My name is Hart, how may I assist you?



We'd like to speak to the mayor!



I happen to be the deputy mayor. You can ask your questions directly to me.



We would like to see the mayor in person!



Hart? Who's there?



A peculiar group of people sir, they wish to talk to you!



Bring them in!



Mayor Domino, we should talk.



Oh I see, you must be the ones... Truthfully, mayor is merely a title, the city is in the hands of Shinra. I'm really just a glorified librarian keeping records for them!



Mr. Domino, we need to reach the top floor.



So you want my access card... Guess the password and I'll give it to you. It's a four letter word, it's at the core of the problem...



For 1000 gil I'll give you a hint!



Mako.



How did you...?!



Yes. I love hearing this word! Mako! Whoever has the most gets what they desire! Here is my access card. I never thought you would have found it on the first try. One truly can't judge a book by its cover.



That had to be the word. You are as rumor says. Still, you are the mayor of this city, elected by the people. You represent what remains of democracy in Shinra, never forget it.



Shinra is too powerful with their science, technology, politics, war... Even space is within their reach! They know no limits. Now get up there and make them suffer, maybe that will even the odds...



Once again, the small group found themselves in the elevator...



Who would have thought we'd find an ally on one of the top floors of Shinra Tower?



Things are getting serious. If I'm not mistaken, this is floor Shinra do their meetings. Get ready!

Discreetly Barret, Cloud and Tifa slid into the bathroom...



Eww! It reeks!



That's right, they thought we were the cleaners... They sure have a problem!



Make it quick, I'd like to get out of here!

Cloud headed towards one of the stalls...



No wonder... Considering what's in there...

Cloud flushed the toilet. As he did, he noticed an air vent right above his head...



Look, I found something!

The small group contorted themselves into the narrow air duct, ultimately making their way above the meeting room where the members of Shinra were indeed having a discussion.



Unbelievable!



We are really lucky...



Shush! Listen...

Reeve was speaking to the president...



We have the estimate of the cost from the damage in sector 7, taking into account all the facilities already implanted and all the investments, it is estimated at around ten billion gil... The cost of reconstruction is estimated at...



We are not going to rebuild.



What?



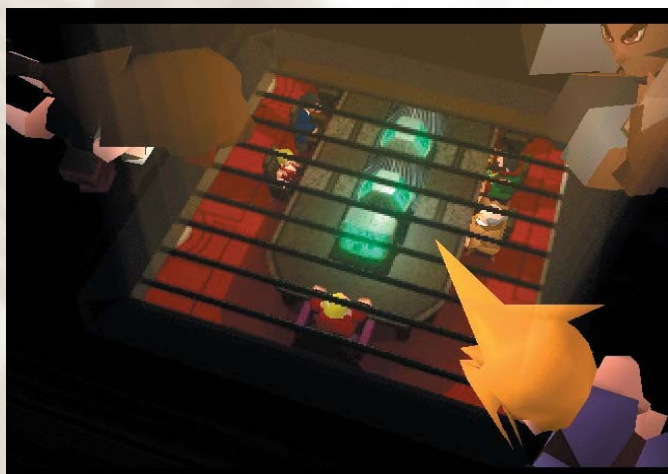
Sector 7 will remain as is. We resume the Neo-Midgar plan.

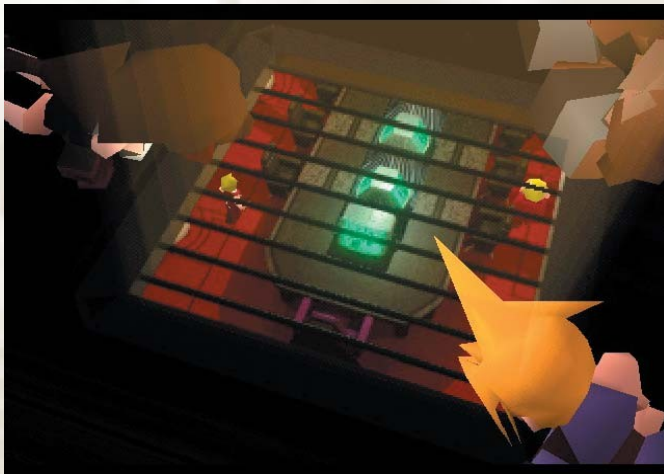


What about the Ancients?



The Promised Land will soon be ours. Increase Mako production by 15%.





Yay! Increase in production! Increase in production! And please include the space program in the budget!



Reeve and Scarlet will split the additional revenue from the increased production.



If we do that, we will lose people's trust.



Everything will be fine. Citizens will continue to consume Mako like the ignorant people they are.



Gya ha ha! After all, it was us who saved Sector 7 from Avalanche!

A mysterious man, thin and pale, entered the room...



Hojo, how is the girl?



As a specimen, she is inferior to her mother. Comparisons with Ifalna show a difference of 18%.



How long will the research take?



120 years for all I know. A human life would not be enough, nor the life of a specimen for that matter. That is why I propose we breed a new one capable of supporting longer research.



And the Promised Land? Will she delay our plans?



Hmm, that remains to be seen. Her mother was resilient but she also had weaknesses...



Well, this meeting is over.

Scarlet was the last to leave the room, she glanced towards the air duct where our friends were...



It stinks!

Cloud, Barret and Tifa let out a long sigh, then resumed the conversation...



They were talking about Aerith...



Let's follow them, at a distance!



They came down from the air duct without making any noise, Hojo seemed thoughtful and walked behind the other members of Shinra. Cloud, Barret and Tifa took advantage of the opportunity to sneak through the automatic doors of the staircase which led to the 67th floor...



Hojo...



I remember him. He is the head of Shinra's Science and Research Division. Have you met him, Cloud?



This is the first time I've seen him... This is what he looks like then!

They headed silently towards the laboratory where Hojo and his assistant were...



Is this today's specimen?



Yes, we will start right away. Take it to the next level.

A red feline stood in the glass cage... The assistant set off to carry out Hojo's orders...



My precious specimen...

Once Hojo left, the group came out of their hiding place...



Precious specimen? Is it going to be used for a biological experiment?

But Cloud was more intrigued by the armored half-sphere which seemed to contain something dangerous... He could feel its pulsations more and more as he approached the glass of the door... A word, a name, echoed in his mind...

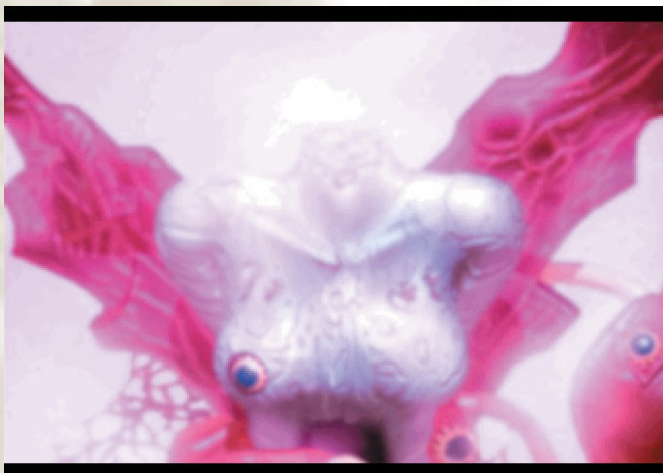


Jenova...

A headless body laid lifeless in the box... Cloud heard a whistling sound, his vision turned red, but the voice remained silent... He was seized with an extremely violent headache. Barret approached him...



What the hell Cloud! What's wrong with you!?





Cloud stumbled backwards, Tifa caught him...



Sephiroth... Jenova... they brought it here...!



Cloud, hang on!



Did you see it?

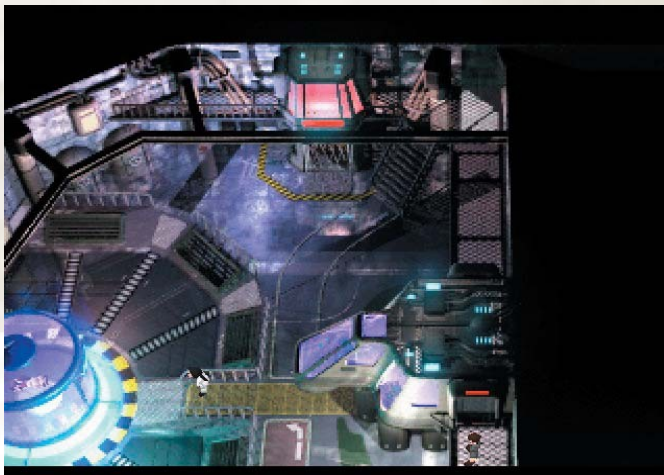


See what?



It's moving... Is it still alive?

Barret looked through the window.



Damn, where is the head? This is all nonsense, let's continue, we have to find Aerith!



Cloud, will you be okay?



Yes I think. Let's take this freight elevator.

They arrived on the 68th floor... Aerith was in a glass cage which was located just above that of the 67th.



Aerith!



Hmm? Who are you people?!



We're coming to get Aerith!



Intruders... So frivolous! Are you here to kill me? I wouldn't do that if I were you. The material here is extremely sensible. You wouldn't be able to use it without me.



Just you wait Hojo!



Be rational now before acting too rashly. Now, let's bring in today's specimen!

The red feline arrived in Aerith's cage. She screamed for help while looking at Cloud, while the beast showed its fangs and slowly approached its prey...



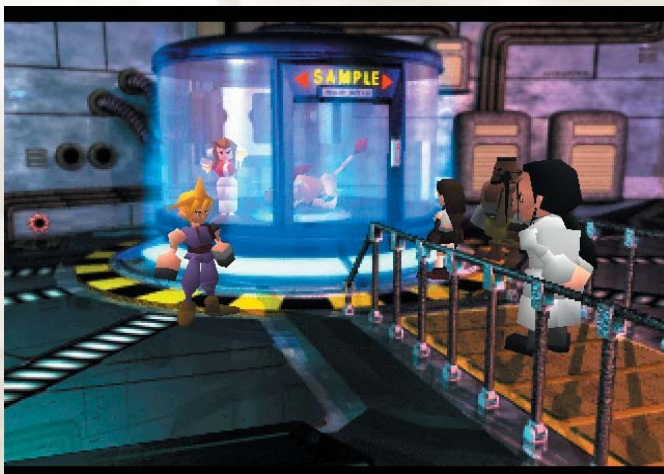
Why are you doing this Hojo!?

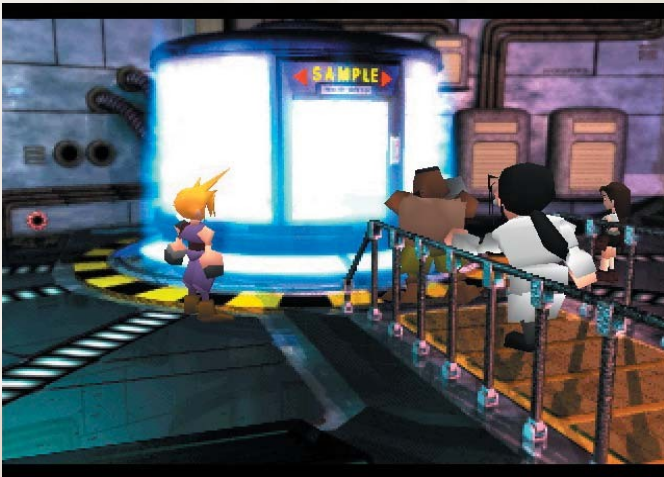


I'm just providing a helping hand to endangered species... Both of them... If I don't do something, those animals will disappear.



Aerith is a human being!





You will to pay Hojo! Back off everyone!

Barret shot at the cage with his gun arm.



Haha! Useless, this glass is unbreakable!



Oh yeah?

Barret aimed at the lock instead, it opened.



What...? Stop! What are you doing? My precious specimens!

The red feline pounced on Hojo.



This is our chance Aerith!



Thanks Cloud!

Something cracked... behind the cage, it was one of the pods. A growling escaped from it...



No! This specimen is extremely dangerous!



This monster is strong, I will help you.



What? It spoke?



We'll talk later, as long as you want.



Do you have a name?



Red XIII is the name Hojo gave me. It doesn't mean anything to me, call me what you want.

The monster exploded its container with a huge roar. Red XIII pounced on him, planting his fangs in his throat, Cloud rushed with all his might with his sword while Barret shot him from the side... The formless monster exhaled its last breath.



Aerith, are you okay?



I'm fine, don't worry.



Thanks for helping us Red XIII.



What are you?



Good question. One difficult answer. I am what you see... Let's get out of here, that's what matter most right now.



Thank you guys, you came to rescue me!



I apologize for what happened in the cage, I was only fooling Hojo.



Okay, let's get out of here!



In the elevator everyone!



Five of us will never fit in there...



I'll take the elevator and make sure the way is clear! You guys discreetly take the stairs to the 66th!

Cloud took the elevator and the group headed towards the stairs. Suddenly, the elevator stopped on the 67th floor. Two Turks, Tseng and Rude, went in. Cloud was all alone...



...A...a trap!!



You must have had the time of your life! You enjoyed it ?



What the...!

The entire group was captured by the Turks. It was as prisoners that they reached the 70th floor, President Shinra's office.



We've all been fooled!



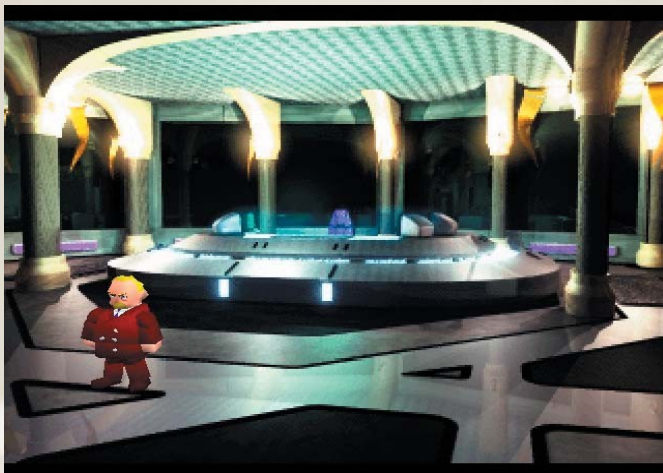
Where is Aerith?



In a safe place! She is an important descendant of the Ancients...



What's that story about Ancients? You got us, you can at least explain that!



Haven't you heard of them? They called themselves the Cetras. They lived thousands of years ago. They are a forgotten page of history now.



Is this girl a descendant of the Cetras?



Yes, the Cetras, or the Ancients, are said to be able guide us to the Promised Land. I placed a lot of hope in her.



The promised land? Isn't this just a legend?



Entertaining conversation. Know that ensuring the veracity of what you call... legend can prove to be worthwhile. The Promised Land is a fertile one... So if the land is fertile...



There is a lot of Mako!



Precisely. This is why we will run the reactors at their maximum and earn a lot of money. This is where Neo-Midgar will be built, the new glory of Shinra!



In your dreams, you scum!



Didn't you know? Money and power is what make dreams come true! Well, that concludes this meeting.



Wait, I still have a lot to say to you!

But the Turks took the small group away by force..



Feel free to address any complaints to one of my assistants.

They were put in jail, the armored doors barely let sound through. Cloud was with Tifa in one cell, Barret and Red XIII in another, Aerith was alone in hers.



Cloud! Tifa! Aerith! Can you hear me?



Yes Barret, we hear you. Speak!



Shinra believes that the Promised Land contains Mako energy. This means that if they find it, the planet will dry out even faster. We'll need more assistance, we can't let them do it!



Aerith, you are safe and sound?



Yes, I'm alright. I knew you would come get me.



I'm your bodyguard, remember?



I do... But I will not be able to pay you!



It doesn't matter...



I know! If we get out of here alive, you'll get a date with me!



...Oh I see how it is...



...!? Tifa! You are there too!



Yes, excuse me!



I... uh... Sorry!



Aerith, let me ask you. Does the Promised Land really exist?



I'm not sure... All I know is that Cetras can speak with the planet and one day they will all return to the Promised Land which shall bring supreme happiness.



What could that mean?



Other than words... I don't know.



Speak with the planet...? What could she be saying?



There are too many people and noise, that's why I'm unable to understand.



What? Do you hear it now?



I've only heard it in the church. My mother said that Midgar is no longer safe... My real mother. She wanted me to leave Midgar, to commune with the planet and find my Promised Land. Those were mother's words.



...Old man...



Old man?! Hahaha! What are you saying? Gah... Forget I said anything...



We're all tired, let's get some sleep...

