





FINAL FANTASY VII

Chapter 2: The town with no day or night





At the foot of the theater displaying the play "Loveless", a strange girl was contemplating a Mako energy leak. When she saw Cloud looking at her, she walked over to him.



Excuse me, could you explain to me what just happened?

The strange girl carried a basket of flowers on her arm.



I don't know... Um, uh. Hey, you like flowers? They are quite rare in Midgar!



Oh? Are you talking about these flowers? You like them? They are only one gil!



I'll take one!



Oh thank you, there you go!

A little embarrassed to look at each other in silence, they went their separate ways... Cloud continued on his path, thoughtful. He gazed at an Avalanche graffiti that overlooked the square...



"Do not be fooled by Shinra anymore, Mako energy is not eternal! The planet draws its existence from the Mako, the end is near! Planet Protectors: Avalanche"

Cloud couldn't believe it. This story of the planet, the deaths in the explosion, SOLDIER, everything was a blur in his mind. Fortunately, that wasn't why he was following Avalanche. For the money of course, but also because it was in Midgar that someone recognized him...



Suddenly, someone yelled...



It's him! Catch him!

Cloud turned around and saw guards blocking every exits... But the sound of the train echoing from under the bridge gave him an idea...



I don't have time to waste with you low-grade soldiers!

And he jumped the bandwagon.



The small Avalanche team was gathered in one of the cars, they had waited for Cloud on the platform until the last possible minute...



Cloud didn't make it in time...



Cloud... You don't think he's...dead?

Barret, irritated, banged on a crate.



Surely not!



Cloud...





Umh...Barret, do you think Cloud would have fought for Avalanche til the end...?



And how am I supposed to know? Do I look like I can read minds? Hmph! If you guys weren't all so...



Um... Barret, about our money...?

Barret knocked on the crate once more.



Uh, nothing...sorry.

Another bang, coming from the roof of the wagon. The small team looked at each other...



Barret, was that...?

Suddenly the door opened, it was Cloud...



Cloud!!!



Yeah, yeah, I'm late.



Indeed you are!!! And you come last minute to show-off?!



It's not the coup of the century, Barret. I have my ways, take it or leave it.



Screw you Cloud, everyone here was worried! Don't you care about others or what?



Hmm... You were worried about me? Touching.



What the...!? I will remember it when I pay you! Alright guys, let's shake up! Train is almost there. Follow me, we're changing car!

Barret walked through the door.



Hey, Cloud! You were *awesome* back there!



Hehe... Cloud... I bet it will be even better next time!

Biggs and Wedge walked through the door, Cloud found himself alone with Jessie...



Oh! Cloud, your face is pitch black! Let me rub that out...



Cleaning his face, Jessie was making eyes at him...



Thanks for helping me back there...

Cloud and Jessie went and changed wagon. Meanwhile Barret was clearing everyone out of the next car.



Last train for Sector 8. We are approaching Sector 7, the train graveyard. We will arrive around 12:23 Midgar Standard Time.

Cloud approached Jessie who was looking at an information screen.



Hey, Cloud, wanna look at this with me? This is a 3D map of the Midgar train network. I'll explain how it works. I love all kinds of gadgets... bombs... monitors... Okay, it's about to start.

Cloud let himself be guided by Jessie, she was much nicer to listen to than Barret...



Here is a complete model of the city of Midgar at 1:10,000 scale. The top plate is rising 300 meters above ground. There's a load-bearing structure at the center, the railroad goes around it in a spiral in order to climb to the top... Um... the reactor 01 that we made... uh... explode, was in the north section. Then there is number 2, number 3, and so on up to 8! The eight reactors provide electricity to Midgar. I've heard that sectors used to have a name, but nobody in Midgar remembers them, everyone calls each sectors by their number. That's the kind of place Midgar is. It's your first time here I believe?



Actually, I've been here before, but I didn't know all that...



Phew... Here's the next part! Look, this is the line we are on. We're approaching the checkpoint. At each checkpoint, an identification system scans the train and checks our ID cards, they establish a profile of each passengers thanks to the central data system at the Shinra office center. Hum... since everyone knows we look suspicious, we use fake cards, of my making hehe...





Suddenly, an alarm buzzed in the train...



Speak of the devil! When this alarm stops, the control will be over... Sometimes my cards don't work. Makes you immediately wonder what kind of foe is going show up!

The alarm stopped. Barret addressed Cloud.



Look Cloud, you can see the surface from here... That town, it has no day or night! If that damn plate wasn't there, we'd see the sky!



A floating city... What an unusual sight!



Eh? I never thought I would hear that from you... You are full of surprises. The upper world... a city on a plate... It's because of this darn pizza that thousands of people are suffering in the polluted air of the slums! All this to run those reactors that suck the planet energy!



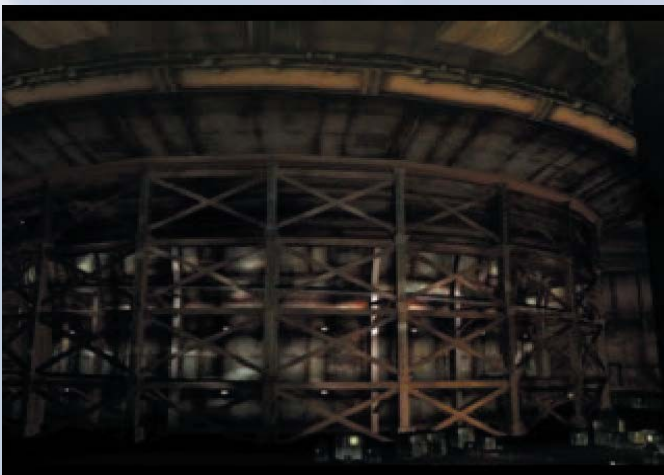
Why don't the slum people go up to the plate?



I don't know. Maybe they don't have enough money or maybe they love their land, no matter how polluted it is.



I get it. Nobody chooses to live in slums. It's like this train, it can only go where the tracks lead...

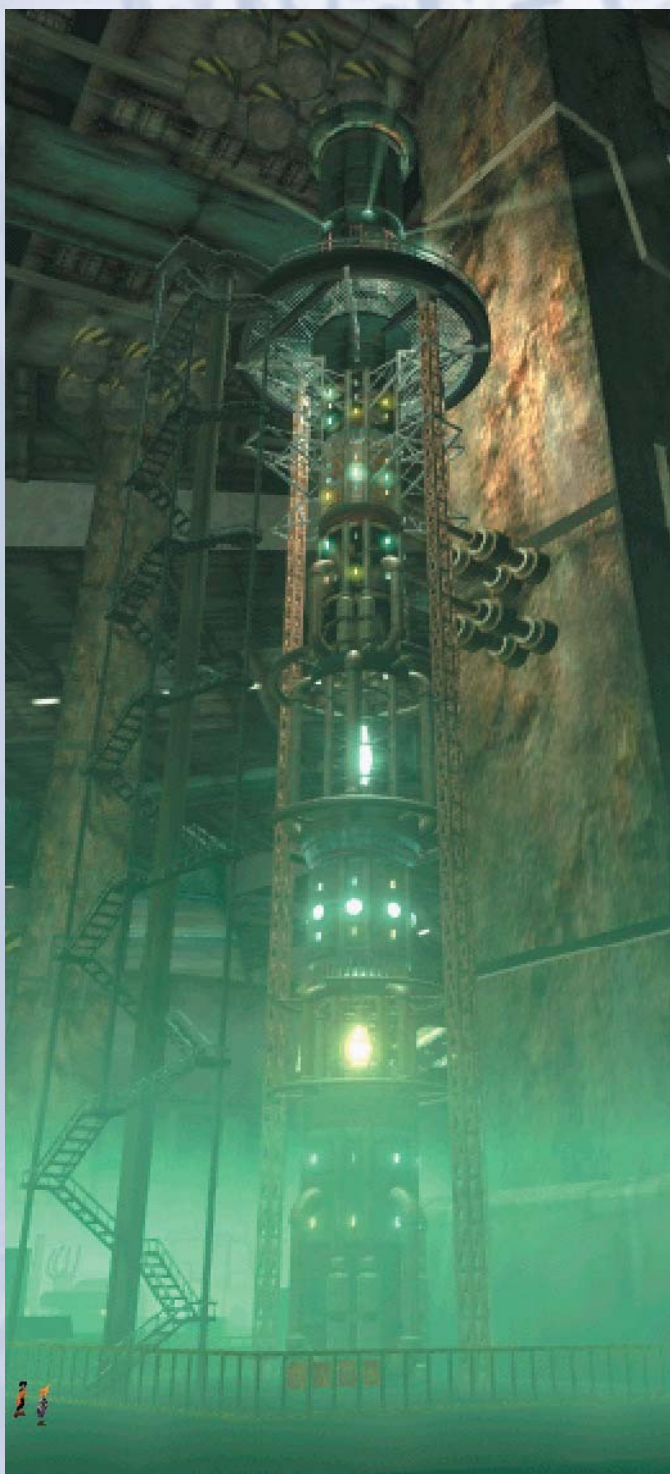


The train finally arrived at the sector 7 station...



Okay, everyone off the train!!! This mission was a success. But don't rest too soon, the worst is yet to come! Did this explosion frighten you? Because the next one will be even bigger!!! Come on, let's hurry to the hideout!





Cloud paused on the way, fascinated by the height of the pillar which supported the plate on which lived the high society people of Midgar... A man spoke to him.



It's gigantic, isn't it? Could you imagine, if this thing were to collapse, everyone in the slums would be reduced to dust! Hey, it's been a long time since I've seen anyone look at the pillar like that!



The hideout in question was the bar "Seventh Heaven" in the Sector 7 slums. Barret entered first, clearing the bar patrons while pretending to be drunk. He then came out of the bar and let Biggs, Wedge and Jessie in but denied Cloud access. After staring at him, he gave him a smirk...



Okay, I'll let you say hello to her first, go ahead.



That's nice of you, but I don't know what you're talking about.



Don't make me regret my kindness...





Inside, a ten-year-old girl in a little pink dress rushed to the door.



Daddy...? Oh... It's not my daddy...

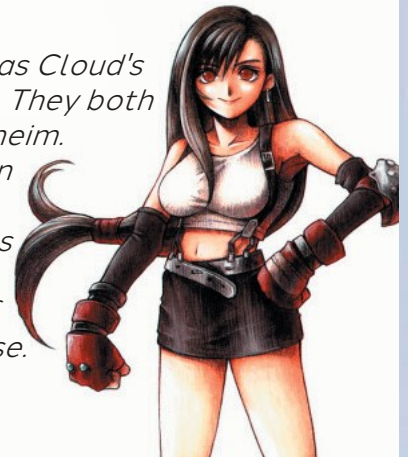


Marlene! Don't you say hello to Cloud? Welcome Cloud! How was the mission? Did you fight with Barret?



Only a little...

Tifa Lockheart, the bartender, was Cloud's childhood friend. They both grew up in Nibelheim. Tifa met Barret in Midgar while traveling and was convinced of the righteousness of Avalanche's cause.



I was worried... I know you've always been a capable fighter but... Well... I was anxious.



Tifa, this is for you...



Hey, is that a flower? How nice of you... There are so few of them in the slums... Thank you!



It's not much...



I should fill the bar with flowers... Here Marlene, find a nice place for it!



Barret entered.



Daddy, welcome back!!!



Is everything alright, Barret?



Yes, very good! Okay guys, we're going down to the hideout to start the briefing!

The whole team made their way to the pinball machine in the corner of the bar, Barret gave it a good kick. The pinball machine turned out to be an elevator to the basement. Cloud decided to have a drink with Tifa before going down to join the others...



How about a nice cocktail?



Gladly, I'm parched. Something refreshing would do nicely!



I'll prepare that right away!

Thoughtful, Tifa prepared her special cocktail. She handed it to Cloud.



You know, it's good you came back safe and sound.



But what do you all have? This job was not that complicated...



I guess not... After all, you were a SOLDIER. Make sure to get paid by Barret.



Don't worry, I'm getting to know the boor!



Cloud... Are you feeling okay?



...Yes, why?



It's just, you look a little tired... You better go, the others are surely waiting for you.

Cloud went down to the basement thanks to the pinball machine...



Hey Cloud, I was wondering... Were there any SOLDIERs back at reactor 01?



None, I'm positive!



What's with the smug face...



Barret, had someone from SOLDIER been against us, we wouldn't be asking ourselves that question, believe me.



Don't be too quick to think I'm impressed because you were in SOLDIER.



...

Barret, visibly upset, gave his punching bag a good pounding...



Okay it's true, you are very strong. Probably all in SOLDIER are. But don't forget, Avalanche is feeding you now! Don't hang on to Shinra!





Hang on to Shinra? You asked me a question and I answered, that's all!... I'm going up, I want to talk about my money!

Tifa came down with the elevator...



Wait... Cloud!



Tifa! Let him go, he apparently can't let go of Shinra!



Shut-up Barret! I don't give a crap about Shinra! But don't get me wrong, I don't care about Avalanche or the planet either!

Barret clinched his jaws and completely annihilated his punching bag. As Cloud made his way back upstairs ready to leave, Tifa caught up to him.



Cloud, I'm asking you to join us...



Sorry Tifa...



The planet is dying! Slowly but surely, she's dying. We have to do something!



Then let Barret and his eco-friends take care of it. It's not my problem.



So... You really are leaving...? Did you forget your childhood friend? Is that all you have to say to me?!



But Tifa, I... Sorry.



Did you also forget your promise?



My promise?



So you *did* forget. Remember Cloud, seven years ago, in Nibelheim...



...



Don't you remember? That night at the water tower...



Oh yeah!... Back then... I thought you would never come. I was waiting for a while and I was starting to get cold...



Seven years ago, in Nibelheim.



Sorry I'm late. You wanted to talk to me about something?



Coming spring... I'm leaving for Midgar.



...All the guys are leaving town.



Yeah, but I'm not like them. I'm not leaving just to get a job. I want to join SOLDIER. I want to become the best there is, like Sephiroth!



...The great Sephiroth...? But it has to be terribly difficult to join SOLDIER, isn't it?



...That's why... I probably won't be back for a while.



If you get strong, will you be in the papers?



I'll try.



Hey, let's make a promise. Um... If you become famous and things get bad for me... You'll come and save me, alright?



What?



If I'm ever in trouble, my hero will come and save me. I'd like to experience that at least once...



Huh...?



Come on! Promise me!



Fine... I promise.

At that moment a shooting star split the sky of Nibelheim. Seven years later, in Midgar sector 7.



Do you remember now... our promise?



I'm no hero, let alone famous. I can't keep that... promise.



But you achieved your childhood dream, right? You joined SOLDIER! So you have to keep your promise!

Barret came back up with the pinball-elevator.



Wait a minute Mister SOLDIER! A promise is a promise! Here, catch!

Barret gave 1,500 gils to Cloud.



That's what you call a pay? Don't make me laugh...



Cloud! Will you...?



You got a new mission? I'll take care of it for 3,000 gils.



WHAT...!?

Tifa jumped at Barret and whispered in his ear.



Say yes, say yes...! We really need help, isn't it?



Huh?...What?!... But this money... it's for Marlene schooling, I... Cloud! 2,000 gils!



Alright... You got yourself a deal...





Oh thank you Cloud!

Barret growled once more, but Tifa flashed a radiant smile.




The next day, Cloud woke up alone in the basement, the others were upstairs. He took the elevator and disembarked right at the start of the briefing.


 Our next target is reactor 5. First we sneak to the station without being spotted. I'll explain the next part on the train. Hey Cloud! Before the start of this mission, I'd like to ask you something... I uh... I have a materia and I don't really know... um... how it works? Could you teach me?


 ...Hmm. Materia, Barret, are gifts of nature, they allow us to command the elements. If you place it on a certain kind metal and that metal comes into contact with your skin, you can use certain powers.


 That's what the slots on our weapons are for, isn't it?


 Exactly. Each materia has a different color, depending on its effect. You can make lightning strike, heal a wound, I've even heard you can summon sacred creatures...


 And this blue materia, what is it for?


 Those are a bit special. The most common for example, called "All", allows you to use another materia on several targets at the same time, it is required however for those two materia to be linked together.

 So if I pair a green materia "Cure" with a blue "All", I can heal multiple people at once?

 Yes. But it can go even further... Certain associations are said to be able to make you almost invincible. Unfortunately the stronger your materia are, the more taxing they are on your body...

 Ah! That's why my hands are scalding... Well... You'll be in charge of the materia for this mission!

 I come with you this time. Marlene, can you hold down the fort while we are gone?

 Okay! Good luck!

The group set off for the station platform.