

These games are both in the same genre somehow. How did we get here?
(Left: *Sayonara o Oshiete*, Right: *Fushigi Densha*)

Genre is weird.

Sometimes, the definition of one is clear cut and can be generally agreed upon. A first person shooter is a shooter in first person, a third person shooter is a shooter in third person - you can't mistake one for the other at all. But other times it can be a bit muddy. Indie games as a broader genre are one example; it encompasses basically everything from a title made by one person to anything made by a team with no external publisher… so wait, does that make *Destiny* (2019 onwards) an indie game? I've seen people argue both for and against it, but something about it just feels spiritually wrong to me.

And those are probably the most interesting genres to me - the ones that have a vaguely agreed upon definition with a couple of defining titles, but then no one can widely agree on what fits into the genre beside it. There's often a lot of semantics with how we categorize things in these

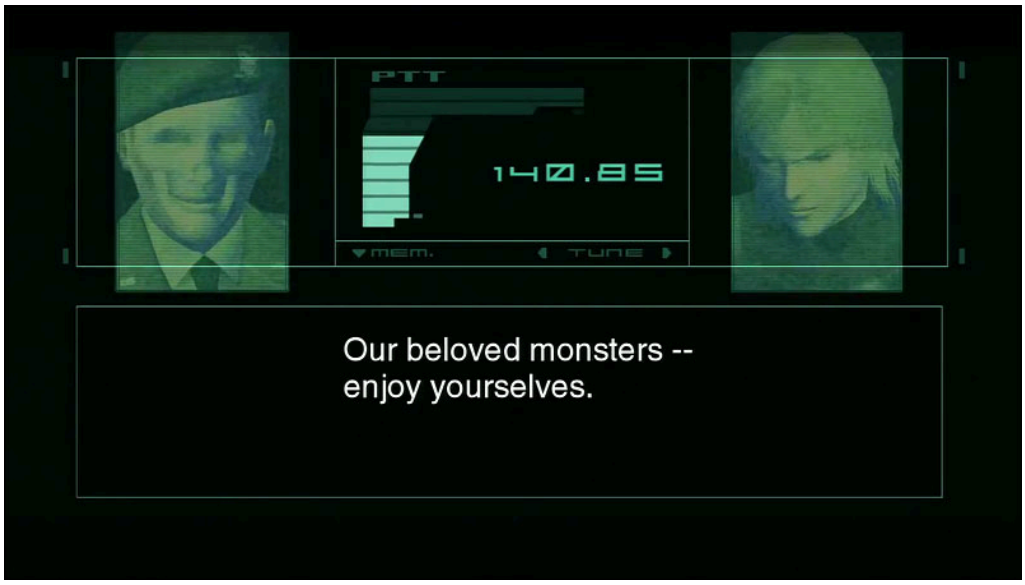
vaguer genres, and I think discussing those can help us to learn about how we label, categorize and describe media.

And if there is anything in the visual novel space that has more complexities than what a ‘denpa’ game is, then I’d be frankly shocked. It seems like no one can quite tell what it means anymore, and it doesn’t help that the origins of its definitions have been buried under a wall of falsehoods and omissions, especially in anglosphere spaces where many people aren’t even aware of the ties to old subcultures and magazines.

Of course you have the most directly related 電波系 (denpa-kei), a term referring to people with a specific kind of delusional conspiracy theorism, but you also have 鬼畜系 (kichiku-kei), made up of people captivated by the occultic and cruel. These two also have relations to the monthly adult manga magazine Garo, an issue of which contains the comic that would partly inspire the creation of 電波系 (denpa-kei) as a term.

As words and phrases do however, it’s morphed over time; from 電波系 (denpa-kei) came 電波 (denpa), originally referring to stories focusing on cults, school, mental illness, and conspiracies, such as in the genre defining *Shizuku* by *Leaf*, as well as the novel that inspired it, *Ohtsuki Kenji’s Omoide*. With more time came more deviation, and now it’s been morphed into something just generally referring to stories in which the world around characters goes mad.

…does that make *Metal Gear Solid 2* denpa?



May as well be.
(Metal Gear Solid 2)

Personally, I find it hard to agree with the labeling of many games as denpa, especially given its tendency to be applied retroactively to games never created as such. The last title I looked at, *Jisatsu 101*, is such a game, which seems especially odd given that most of the games

weirdness feels like it's borne out of the game being horrendously unfinished. It certainly pays tribute to and is aware of the origins of 電波 (denpa), but that doesn't make it title of that genre by it self.

Today's game, though? Today's game is… different. *Fushigi Densha* is something else. Not only do I think it fits the bill of denpa, but it also fits the bill of a genre that I have very little interest in discussing on YouTube for fear of my channel getting nuked from high orbit: nukige. It means, quite literally, jerking off game. Unlike a majority of games that fit in that genre, which exist purely as things to get off to, *Fushigi Densha* gives incentive to play if that's not what you're after.

It's confusing, it's often nonsensical, and the author said he wrote it while he was losing his mind. But at the same time, it's one of the funniest visual novels I've read, with a flood of memorable moments, amusing characters, wildly creative ero scenes that can be sentimental or downright goofy, and a genuinely interesting cyclical structure.

This is one of the very rare games I will say really feels like it deserves the retroactive label of 'denpa,' and not just because it so very clearly has roots in the Garo magazines of the past - though that does a lot for it. It feels like it was made from the ground up to be utter uncontained madness, with the protagonist being the only 'normal' person in the entire scenario, at least when he's not briefly losing his mind in the funniest ways possible. But that focus on comedy rather than horror is what separates this from other games categorized as denpa such as the aforementioned *Jisatsu*, or *Sayonara o Oshiete*, which this game has some very slight ties to.

The late Tadokoro Hinonari of *IDES, Cocktail Soft,* and *Sex 2* fame came on this time as a lead writer, rather than just an assistant as he did with *SayoOshi*, and Nagaoka Kenzou of prior *Ayayo-san* fame assisted with rough drafts of the art. The rest of the staff though? Good luck finding much on them other than the odd attribution here and there, as many of them used pseudonyms or disappeared following release.

I don't have much cool history or deep facts to brief y'all on like usual, so you're just gonna have to go into this the same way I did; about as blind as a bat, unaware of anything beyond the basic facts, and just here for the ride. So, let's all board the mysterious train together!



Choo-choo!

Fushigi Densha stars an unnamed protagonist; a fairly normal business man who one day, wakes up and finds himself in the mysterious town of むなどまり (Munadomari). Where is he? Where's work? Where's a phone to call work? He's too drunk to remember any of that, or whatever he was doing last night. With all the shops closed and nay a phone in sight, he finds he has no option but to walk around until he stumbles upon a train making its stop. Greeted by a near expressionless girl who goes only by 少女車掌 (shoujo shashou, lit. Train Attendant Girl), he soon finds himself boarding it with no places he knows on the schedule.

Each of the five places it stops briefly at are more bizarre than the one before, all with weird, unfamiliar, and otherworldly locales, inhabited by people with equally bizarre tales and quirky personalities. かみやざき (Kamiyazaki), a world of weird rules and wild technology, ひとみだに (Hitomidani), a town plagued by militarism and warfare, げんごんばら (Gengonbara), a colorful and cheerful place, いなしべ (Inashibe)、a seedy town with even seedier people, and おもいがはめ (Omoigahame), a land of sad, forgotten memories.

Of course, the protagonist has very little interest in any of this outside of just finding a telephone to call work with, but he gets wrapped up in it all anyways and finds himself fighting wars, getting his head replaced with a mushroom, answering questions about the state of the Earth, being thrown in jails, and of course - engaging in all sorts of lewd behavior, from being the subject of cock and ball torture to him and his inner consciousness split from him getting a double handjob.



Points for creativity.

When the train eventually reaches its' final stop of げんこうちょう (Genkouchou), the protagonist finds he's arrived too late to board the train back to his hometown, and so he heads to a local bar… only to get so drunk there that the dream repeats. Again, and again, and again, forgetting everything that happened the last time around, until he can somehow escape the loop, return to reality, and come back home to his loving wife.

Fushigi Densha's structure is... odd. In a move that's very unlike other games for the era, this is not a route based game - there are no paths to follow to get a certain girl, there are no choices that lock you into a specific ending out of a large variety of them, the goal instead is to go through some loops and see different scenes in the five locations based on choices you make.

Just for the true ending alone there's over 20 choices to make correctly, and the overall number is way too high for me to count. As the game locks you out from getting the true ending until you've done two full loops, and as each loop is only one to three hours long, you're incentivized to make as many of these as you can before concluding your adventure. It's not just for padding either, as behind each choice is the potential of learning something new about a character that might inform you better about their motivations and backstories.

If you're playing this game just for the goal of completion, then you're probably not gonna enjoy yourself- that's what I initially went for and I ended up getting confused why I wasn't able to speed through the whole game and why some things felt horribly disconnected. But once I chilled out and took the game on its own terms, relaxing and making choices just to see what could happen rather than what I thought would get me to the end, I was able to have a legitimately good time.



It’s genuinely impressive how much agency the player is given in this game.

This is a game that lives and dies by the moment to moment events, and particularly the characters that make them happen. Case in point: protag-kun here is a very normal man. In worlds filled with the most unhinged shit imaginable, he’s just a dude who wants to wake up, work his job, come home to a loving wife, and not deal with whatever any of this is.

This is reflected in the prose of the game, which is decidedly less an objective narration of what’s happening around our lead and more just his internal monologue. It gets interrupted by trailing thoughts, sometimes it makes barely any sense, other times things that happen in the world around him drive him utterly mad for a brief period of time, and you get to see it all in first person.

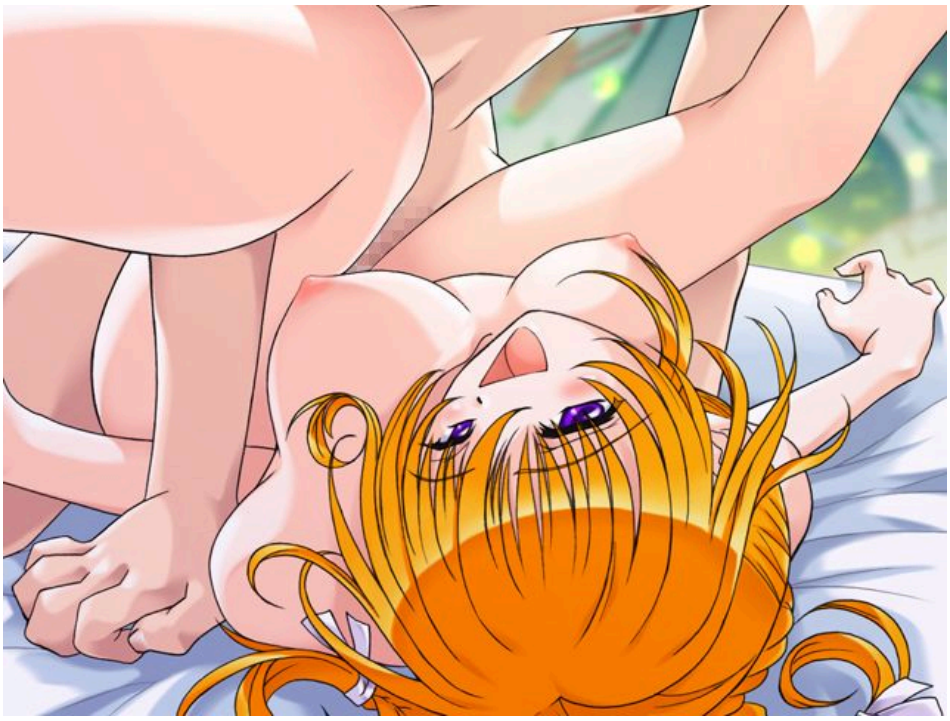
Given how trying to objectively and accurately describe a lot of the environments and events of this game is an insurmountable task, I think the choice for the game to be written like this works out well, both from a descriptive and a comedic stand point. A majority of the monologuing provides an entertaining ‘straight guy’ sort of contrast to the absurdity, which only makes it funnier when that falls apart and you get to watch his slow descent into realizing he’s a masochist who likes CBT.

He’s also, shockingly, not a creepy or horny character. Aside from what takes place in Omoigahame, which is framed as bad and it’s debatable if the main character was a part of anything that happens there or not, most scenes are consensual. He also, thankfully, doesn’t spend the duration of the game gazing at and harassing the women, and his general thought

process with sex pretty much just comes down to him doing what he's gotta do to get back home.

Unfortunately for him, or maybe fortunately for everyone playing, that path home is paved with a whole host of characters from each of the towns the train stops at. You have the cabaret lady Konatsu who stays in for the whole adventure, student and UFO thief Chihiro, the guerilla resistance fighter Che, the clown Namida, the mistress Jun, and the high school crush Momoko.

Out of all of them, probably my favorite is Namida, mostly just for being a ball of sunshine who's extremely happy to talk to people about her paintings, and has probably the most unhinged reactions to literally everything that can happen to protag-kun in Gengonbara. Got his inner consciousness split from himself after eating a piece of weird meat? What better thing to do with this than give both of them a handjob! Got his head replaced with a mushroom to solve his headache? Time to go paint on the sky and have sex in a sky bed!



The prose during this scene is something special.

It sounds surreal out of context, but it somehow all tracks as you're playing it, especially as she isn't… really all that phased by what's happening? And while the main character questions things somewhat regularly, it never feels like it's in a way where the game is winking at the viewer about how silly and goofy everything is, which grants it a level of sincerity that absurd comedy is often missing nowadays. This isn't to say that everything that happens in this game is that fucking weird, much of it a lot more normal or at least played off as such… which isn't saying a lot, but still.

Che's section is significantly more grounded and, oddly enough, is a sort of 'what if' scenario of the Cuban Revolution in which a gender-swapped Che Guevara survives rather than Castro, dealing with a longing for him in the form of romance. I… guess that's also weird in its own way, but it's one of the most fleshed out sections in the game with some shockingly good romantic chemistry, and themes that tie into something I'll be talking about later.

Sitting somewhere in-between the absurd and the normal is the lovely conductor herself. She loves her station. She's expressionless, smug, and interrupts protag-kun's rest between stops to tell him stories or ask questions - some of them are fairly simple, others are more abstract, but all end up having some sort of conclusion or thoughts therein that feel as if they're hinting at some grander theme or point to the adventure.

She also seems to know a lot more about the main character than she lets on - accusing him of being a liar, knowing his wife's name, and a lot of other things you wouldn't expect a girl he met just a few hours ago to be aware of. That then brings into question, just who is she? Is she but one of many figures in our cast, or does she have some deep ties to the main character?



Train, train, I loo-ove my station~!

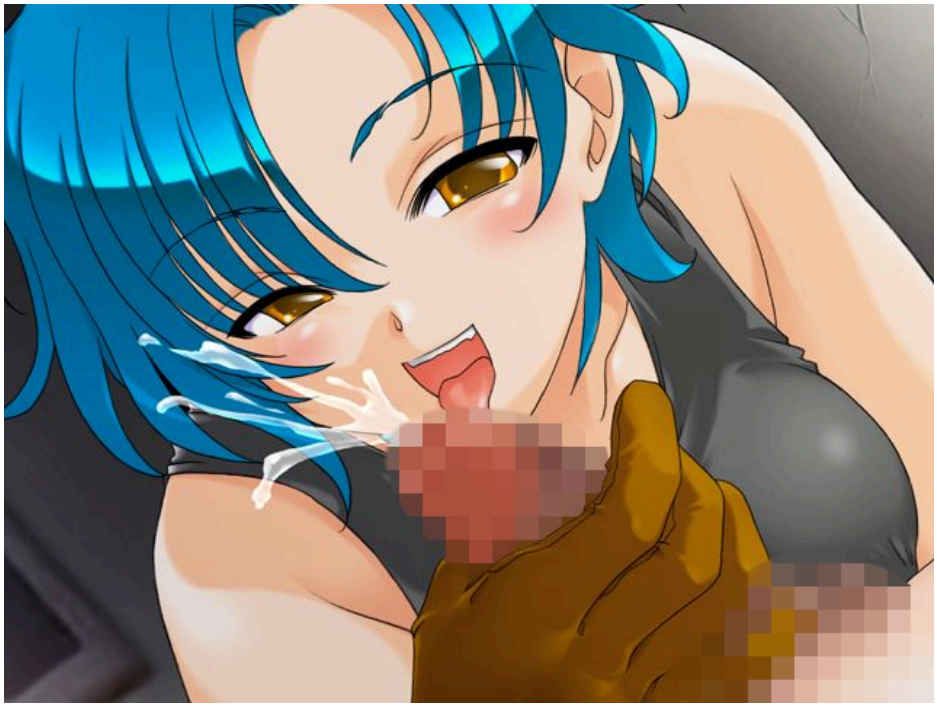
Those and some other major character questions get resolved, at least for the few that have dilemmas to resolve, but it's worth noting there isn't overall much in the way of character development here.They're all still charming from the moment you meet them though, if not just because of how off-beat each of them feel in contrast to each other. If everyone was as grounded as Che or as unwaveringly fucking bizarre as Namida then it'd start to feel samey, but there's good variety in both characters and the weird scenarios they find themselves in.

And then, there's the elephant cock in the room, the ero scenes. While quite a few are your average hetero sex, a lot also have absurd and comedic setups and otherwise things you wouldn't see many other places, like the aforementioned double handjob, or the main character getting pegged and bullied for having bowel issues, or eating a girl out while pondering about life.

What really sells these scenes is that, much like the rest of the game, none of this is really treated like a joke. The characters are taking this all completely seriously, and so the humor comes from the absurdity of the scenarios themselves - this man is completely earnest in his realization that he enjoys being completely subservient to two women, and that's okay.

As someone used to seeing people shit on others' kinks or turn them into running jokes in friend groups, it genuinely makes me happy to see a game that shines a spotlight on just how weird a lot of things we enjoy are without ever shaming the acts or calling the people who engage with it bad. This is not to say that every scene is perfect or actually interesting though.

Those scenes that do fall into the category of normal het sex are, flatly, boring, and I found myself just wanting to skim and skip through them to get them over with, especially since there is… a very large abundance of ero content here. I called this game a nukige earlier and it absolutely deserves that label; depending on your choices and reading speed, you could easily be running into h-scenes every 15 minutes.



Getting to have sex with Che Guevara IS pretty cool though.

This is particularly a big issue with the final route, which features a lot more vanilla scenes as a sort of 'reward' for sticking through everything, I guess. From a story standpoint, they feel

conclusive and fine enough, but with exception to Namidas' scene they're lacking in the same wit much of the rest of the game has, and if judged purely from an erotic standpoint… well, I think they're just kinda boring. They're not poorly written, it's just that without wacky set ups or some absurd acts in the scenes, they're very… average. Still, the skip button exists for a reason, and when the content works, it's a genuinely great celebration of the weird and unusual.

A lot of Fushigi Densha's weirdness can be owed to the works that inspired it. As I mentioned in the intro of this video, the comics of the Garo magazine had a lot of influence on the beginning of denpa, and this game pays tribute in its own way by having a mood and atmosphere that feels rather reminiscent of those. Most particularly, the works of Yoshiharu Tsuge.

Neijishiki, or Screw Style, is his most well known work - it stars a young man hunting for a doctor to fix an artery cut by a jellyfish, wandering through a village he doesn't know, boarding a mysterious train running backwards that leads him right back into the village, and eventually getting a valve attached to the damaged artery by a gynecologist, all while artwork evoking images of post-war Japan fill the pages. It's an important cult classic, and a few elements - some literal and some literary - are clear inspirations for Fushigi Densha. The looping train, the eclectic and bizarre village, and the weird and bizarre visual style both are going for.



We love Garo-kei here.
(Nejishiki)

If games were judged entirely on how abstract and bizarre their visuals are, then Fushigi Densha would be a runner up for greatest game of all time alongside Cruelty Squad and Hylics. Some places look relatively normal, but they still feel out of place when you just came out of the Quality Level 1 JPEG Town, or the fisheye lens train, or… well, whatever げんごんばら is.



what

For as much as I love games that look just, fucking gorgeous, like a lot of newer visual novels or many PC-98 games, there's something to be said for a game that is as unabashedly weird as this. It's honestly disappointing to me that these kinds of styles seem to be reserved for the indie game scene nowadays; there aren't that many big games that go all in on being shamelessly surreal, and I'd love to see what a game with this kind of aesthetic could look like with a bigger budget.

I would be congratulating the artists responsible for all this, but I sadly couldn't tell you who they are. There's one person credited as Tanaka who I can't find anything on online, and another under Gao, which is Nagaoka Kenzou - but according to his Twitter, he only did the rough sketches of the CGs.

"When I did my roughs, I couldn't get a hold of him and that annoyed me so much that I never cleaned up my drawings. I also asked him not to credit me, hence the weird credit. Afterwards, I asked him "What was the hold up?", and it turned out he was being held in detention lmao. (He was innocent.)"

(Translation courtesy of @kastelwrites)

Keeping with that theme, it's similarly mysterious as to who the hell composed the music here. The credit in game goes to SIS Works, who I presume are a group of musicians, but there's nothing on them besides a handful of credits ending in Fushigi Densha… and man, what a way to go out. The score to this game is wildly creative, incredibly bizarre, quite varied, and despite only having ten tracks, somehow never gets tiring to listen to.

What stands out to me the most in it is the instrumentation - while a couple tracks sound like your standard visual novel fare for the era, those are far outweighed by ones blasting out a mix of sitars, traditional Japanese percussion, hip hop drums and bass, wailing electric guitars, and any other mix of things you wouldn't expect to be hearing. It's a perfect, eclectic combination of oddities that blends well with the atmosphere and heightens the mood of moments, be that emotional or comedic.



https://youtu.be/hK_VBF5kabo?list=PLy52oDNK1N60jfDMZvpgERm6jX-uxKTSC
This shit *slaps.*

I suppose 'eclectic' is the best way to describe *Fushigi Densha* in a single word, and almost definitely on purpose. The art makes having no one style a style in and of it self, the music bashes together a billion disparate elements into a seamless whole, and the story is but a collection of lightly tied together tales. To quote from Tadokoro's twitter, "To sum it up, "No context, no meaning". To be mad is to be merry and bright." But that's not to say the game has no themes or no meaning - even if it's not intended.
(Translation courtesy of @kastelwrites)

I don't think it's possible for a work to have no meaning, even if that meaning is something we give that work ourselves. The beliefs, views, and cultural background of authors always shine through in their works, and our own histories and studies inform how we view what slivers make it through the cracks of an otherwise meaningless work.

So when Tadokoro or any artist says something like what was quoted, I don't think that's a free pass to not examine it and look deeper in, as we can still derive meaning and ideas from the parts of himself and his ideology he put into his work. A 2003 visual novel about having absurdly weird sex is no exception to being peered into, and I think by doing so we can find some pretty cool things to ponder on.

From here on I'll be getting into spoilers for both general events and the true route of the game, though how much that matters for this game I don't really know, since the real joy of playing this game comes from seeing all of the crazy shit first hand. Still, here's the time to stop reading if you don't wanna get spoiled.



Some scenery to behold and barricade off the spoilers section.

Before I get into the analysis, lemme give a recap of the plot to set some grounds to work off of. Each loop of the game until the final one starts and ends the same way - protag-kun wakes up wasted in a mysterious town, boards a mysterious train, and goes on the ride, having regular sexual encounters with various characters he meets along the way, before the train ride is over, and he finds himself back in reality, only to get drunk on a fancy new Russian drunk the bartender got in, and repeat it all over again.

It's not clear how many times this has happened before the game has begun for the player - it could be his first loop, it could be his thousandth, but either way he's trapped in this purgatory until he can successfully do what must be done at each of the five stops. None of these end in a way that's particularly favorable for our protagonist though.

With Chihiro, he gets her mother to retract her disownage of her after she stole her UFO, and goes through a marriage ceremony as ordained by Paragilia, a God-like entity she worships and briefly mentions in another path. This ends in failure however, as after the two have heart-to-heart sex inside her, Pargilia rejects the marriage on the grounds protag-kun has no name.

With Che, he gets to fight in the guerilla war against the militants alongside her, realize the horrors of war, and have sex with her in a very earnest, loving way, helping her to move on from the spectre of Castros' death looming over her. Such a nice thing doesn't last long as she soon has to go out and fight in the war, with him needing to leave to get back on the train.

For Namida, this means protag-kun getting his head replaced with a mushroom head, painting cute things alongside her, and eventually having sex in a bed in the clouds. As soon as they're finished, she seemingly disappears without a trace. For Jun, the mistress of Inashibe, this means having her top and satisfying her urges. Once she's done, he's left wanting more, even wanting to work for her, but is denied that opportunity.

And for Momoko, this means protag-kun reliving the entire memory of abuse he, or someone with the same name as him, inflicted on Momoko. From stealing her panties with a group of shitty and rowdy men, to taking invasive and illicit photographs, to blackmailing her, to the conclusion of her arc at a party with a sad, empty atmosphere, as she deals with her abuse and protag-kun has to accept the harm he caused her.

Between each of these, the train conductor is regularly telling stories and asking questions about protag-kun. Is he married? What does he dream for? Why has he forgotten everything? Why does he betray her? She even peppers in facts about herself - she talks about an unfaithful husband, and when talking about marriage, she says she too will be married 'in the future.'

Other characters, too, pepper protag-kun with questions and philosophy - early on, the cabaret girl and sole other passenger, Konatsu, remarks about names to the main character. She claims they don't really mean anything - it has no bearing on the person it's given to, it doesn't define them. Another character expounds on this later by saying it's just a social convention to simplify things.

While none of this makes… any sort of sense on the first few runs, I do think some of it clicks into place at the end. On the very last stop back at reality, the conductor invites protag-kun to have sex, both basking in the pale moonlight; she says they 'finally came together,'' before the two separate and he remembers everything, his wife of three years, his name Takahashi, his job, and makes his way back home.

He's greeted by his wife Sayuri - the two chat for a bit about him being out of contact for a short period, joking about him thinking about and being with other girls, before she pulls out a gift for him from one of their neighbors: that same Russian drink that the bartender had.



I really like this CG for some reason, and I'm not sure why.

There's a lot to try and unpack here, but I first want to go into a particular part of the story that stuck out to me. A recurring element that comes up throughout each of these stories is the matter of a 'name' and what it means to a person and for those around them. If you ask Konatsu, the cabaret girl, she says that a name really has no meaning in a literal sense; it doesn't determine anything about the person who's assigned it.

This isn't to say names have no meaning however, as in a more abstract sense, they serve a purpose in the form of memory and association. Take for instance the name Takahashi, what the man at the beach refers to protag-kun as. Maybe by itself it's not anything, but to that man, there's a number of associations that come with it. The guy who stole panties, the guy he's friends with, and so on. Names one, major part of how we remember people and separate them from the countless people we pass by every day.

If one doesn't have a name, then they're nothing but a nameless face. You can be someone, sure - the train conductor clearly knows who protag-kun is even though he doesn't know his own name. But he doesn't have any identity of his own without his own name. Once protag-kun reaches the end of their journey in a given location and is reminded of the trains impending departure, they 'snap out' of the identity they were given and go back to this nameless, wandering figure.

Basically, my interpretation of all this is that an identity given to someone by someone else is fleeting and impermanent when compared to one that one discovers for themselves. It's only once we discover our own identity, our own being, that we can truly exist as something more than a thing passing through a series of alien and nonsensical worlds.



“What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet.”

While everyone is going to take this idea in different directions, for me personally, this idea of finding identity in a confusing world resonated with me on a level that I doubt Tadokoro ever considered; the experience as a trans person. Not to say that this game is some wild trans metaphor, but because the entire idea of ‘assigned identity’ and how a name contributes to ‘the self’ reminded me a lot of my own experiences for much of my life and early on in transition.

While gender dysphoria primarily and CPTSD secondarily kept me from portraying any strong self-image in real life, where I had to confront my own unhappiness with my physical form every day, many people still had an image of me in their mind. It was of someone who just went with the flow and didn’t care about anything, someone who was quiet and closeted about themselves, someone who was selfless to a fault.

There’s grains of truth in there of course, but on the whole, that image that people attempted to project onto me never really ‘felt’ like me. Especially not when compared to how I portrayed myself online, where I didn’t have to worry about discontent with my physical body and living situation. Online, I was much more in control of things, open about my emotions, and able to talk back at least a little. Put simply, I was able to find myself, experiment, and grow, without people expecting me to meet their idea of my personality.

And once I finally accepted my being trans, the disconnect between how I wanted to be seen and how I was seen started to shrink. Transition allowed me to be happier, more confident in myself, and over time - find myself and who I really am, and not who people told me I was. I grew from someone who had a vague, foggy, and barricaded idea of who they were, into someone who broke those walls and became a whole person.

For me at least, the way that protag-kun has to go through these bizarre, arbitrary, and absurd circumstances, through these senseless experiences and unfamiliar lands in order to finally find himself, felt weirdly relatable to that entire experience. Those bizarre experiences are part of us finding who we are, and some may make no sense, everything we experience collectively adds up to give us our own identity.



Learning oneself is exhausting.
(Black Rock Shooter OVA)

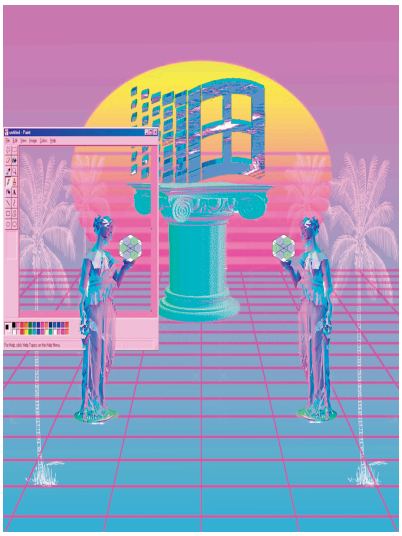
However, this interpretation, while valid, doesn't explain everything about the game. The most glaring omission here is what's happening with shashou; all of those questions about cheating and adultery conclude in a very… bizarre way with the ending, as protag-kun's wife, Sayuri, looks suspiciously similar to the shashou.

My understanding, based on her talking about 'being married in the future, her husband being a 'cheater,' is that the shashou is some younger dream form of Sayuri, one who's obsessive over the faithfulness of her husband to an unhealthy extent.

The mere idea of him being in this dream world and having sex with other women is upsetting to her; as the shashou says, she doesn't want her husband to even be fantasizing about other women as he swore just to love her. So then the question I suppose it's asking the player is, what breaks faithfulness in a monogamous relationship? What do these fantasies mean in the context of a relationship? And just what is it we're yearning for when we imagine, and why?

I think this question of why we yearn, and what for, is something that exists at the heart of Fushigi Densha's story, and to explore this, I want to look at the game through a completely different angle. When I was talking about this game with my friend Kastel and they were proof-reading the first draft of this script, they brought up their view of the game as it relates to *Mark Fisher*'s concept of Lost Futures, which ended up fascinating me so much that I had to both reiterate and build off of it.

Fisher's concept is thus: our thinking is constrained by capitalism, unable to imagine an end to it, yet we still live in recognition that other possibilities could have existed. All futures that capitalism takes from us or has promised seem untenable, canceled, and so we constantly imagine and see alternate possibilities and futures. This is something reflected in movements and aesthetics like vaporwave that seek to extrapolate on 'good' futures, comforting ones based in nostalgia.



This never really existed in its yearned for time, did it?
(Evolution, by Daniel Oliva Barbero)

This is also, partly, why concepts such as fascism and the theories of Marx are compelling in very different but equally strong ways; the former represents a possible ideal nation made up of only 'the good people,' that strives for a simultaneous past and future that cannot exist, yet evokes a comforting nostalgia. This, of course, cannot truly exist because fascism will eat itself and kill all, but the nostalgic fantasy doesn't have to concern itself with this. The latter represents a chance for revolution, a framework to both exist outside of the capitalist non-future we're trapped in, and to examine it.

Fushigi Densha is obsessed with its own canceled futures. The life our main character lives is, seemingly, a boring and uninteresting one. He's the neoliberal ideal; a salaryman with a well paying job and a loving wife who lives with him together in a cozy home. This is the reality they live in now, but doesn't it make sense to want to know if something else exists?

And so all those two can do is fantasize and dream, trapped in a perpetual loop of different possibilities and fantasies that perhaps they could have had if they weren't strapped to each other. All of these dreams are nostalgic, comforting, or explorative in different ways. Many of them let the main character explore himself and his sexuality in ways he perhaps could have were he not married at this point. Could that future have been happier? Would he have been a more complete person?

Some like Namida offer him a chance to explore a part of him that he's expected to abandon; pure, childish fun. Wouldn't it be nice if one was still afforded the ability to engage in this after adulthood, rather than conform and work? Or perhaps, what about Che's story, which offers us a glimpse into what may have happened had Che survived in place of Castro in the Cuban Revolution - could history have changed for the better for all of us?

In the end, all we can do is think about these possibilities, romancing them with nostalgia and rose tinted glasses as lost futures we'll never get to experience. And because they never happened, we can imagine them as far better than they may have ever been. We all want to go back to safer, happier times; even if that means we have to invent them.

This can be argued to extend as far as the games UI; it's over the top and full of flourishes in a way that doesn't resemble other games from the early 2000s, it feels far closer to something you would see in perhaps a PC-98 title, what some may think of as a golden age. It's nostalgic, it's comforting, it reminds us that there's a 'good' time that once existed, and maybe in another world, that would keep existing.



Games like *Ever17* from the year 2002 (left) represent a more 'modern' UI compared to *FushiDen*.

Even the art as a whole is bizarrely nostalgic, obsessed with pictures of figures of the past, of styles of artists long gone, in a way not unlike the way in which people fetishize the art of the PC-98 now. As I talk about in my *Possessioner* video, it's 'unfamiliar' and 'new' for many people, a simultaneous past and future they could never experience - and for many, still cannot experience. It's tantalizing for its possibilities and its newness, yet seen as something to yearn for by many as a world we never got to have.

Fushigi Densha is nostalgia. It's the yearning for a time gone, the yearning for times that could have been, for worlds we were denied. Yet no matter how much we think about this, as long as our thinking is limited by capitalism as ideology and psychology, we must always return to it. Fantasy cannot last forever, theory cannot last forever, nostalgia cannot last forever, happiness cannot last forever, in the end we'll always go back to being the salaryman with a wife and a bottle of vodka.

…

I don't know which of these two interpretations is more valid - the game as a metaphor for the search for identity or the game as a metaphor for our desire for nostalgia and futures we will never have. And certainly, both cannot exist at the same time, as one requires the ending to be hopeful while the other requires it to be a sad reinforcement of our economic and psychological status quo. But I think the fact this game can be understood both of these ways, as well as many more, is what makes it so fascinating to me.

In summary… this is one of the weirdest games I've ever played. The plot often makes little sense, the world the game is set in is nonsensical and bizarre, the music is wildly creative and off-beat, and the art looks like what would have happened if *Picasso* consumed mass amounts of anime, yet within all of that chaos is something incredibly mesmerizing and captivating.

Out of every game I've reviewed so far, this is probably the one I've had the hardest time coming up with anything to say about since the game *really* does not try to give the game any clear, overarching meaning. And yet, depending on your knowledge, and your own experiences, it's possible to walk away with something meaningful and genuinely insightful.

Both of the take aways I got from the game - one expanding on something a friend provided, and another made by myself - are things I'll be thinking about a lot. Even without that however, I still think *Fushigi Densha* is a legitimately great ride just because of how chill and absurd it is. It's rare you find a visual novel that so explicitly wants you to layback and vibe, and is confident enough in itself to throw some wild shit your way to digest and laugh at.

Following the release of this game, the DigiAnime brand would release one more game before quietly fading into the distance, with their parent company - Digi Anime Corproration - continuing to release games under different labels. While most just pumped out fairly unremarkable nukige, one of interest is Abel, headed by *Hiroyuki Kanno* of *YU-NO* and *EVE Burst Error* fame.



I'll play this game eventually, I swear.
(EVE Burst Error R)

I can't speak to the quality of those titles, but as I was doing research for this video I found that I apparently had a bookmark for one of Abel's titles, Mystreet. I'm 99% sure I only did that for the artwork, though the games *are* readily available for purchase, so maybe I'll do a video on them some day.

Speaking of being readily available to purchase, this game is WAY easier to get your hands on than most titles I've covered on my channel. Unlike *Jisatsu 101*, whose second hand copies require you to sell an arm, leg, kidney, and eye for, *Fushigi Densha* is readily available for purchase from DLSite for just under 3,000 yen, or about $20… dollars… as I write this, good god the yen has fallen.

It's also a fairly breezy read in Japanese; most of the language used is simple, the game plays nice with texthookers, and it's almost fully voice acted with great work by some big names that eroge fans might recognize, like *Maki Midori, Shion Miyabi*, and *Oono Marina*. It… honestly surprises me this game hasn't been translated yet given its fairly short length and easy text.

If you have a weekend free to read a game during and just need to decompress from the normal world, then I definitely recommend giving this game a try. It's nonsensical, it's bizarre, it's wild, and my god is it beautiful for all of those things.



This concludes our ride on the Fushigi Densha. All passengers, please grab your things and take care!