

OPENING

Intro



Well folks, we finally made it: the first video this year about a game from my favorite weird, queer, and quirky visual novel horror studio: Black Cyc! From the *extremely* gay shipping simulator series Yami no Koe and the beautifully poignant horror of Gore Screaming Show, to the shockingly leftist FPS VN hybrid of Gun-Katana and other titles that range from having you date Cthulhu to breaking in a femboy [1], their back catalogue is without a doubt one of the most diverse in the entire eroge industry.

But what ties it all together is not just the incorporation of horror elements into all these narratives, but the way they often center complex women and queer characters as leading figures; perfectly capturing the traumaqueer audience before it even was one through narratives of escaping abuse, crushing oppressive systems, and living true to yourself with your found family.

Though Black Cyc was far from the only people doing these things in the 2000s, I feel like they were unrivaled in their frequency and quality thanks to the talents of all-star writers and artists like Izumi Ban'ya, Ueda Metawo, Kusakabe Matsuri, and Maruki Bunge – which made their post-2008 talent leak and subsequent 2011 husk-ification following a buyout by Ranba Amuse all the more depressing in retrospect. [1][2]

Through looking at their most important hits and foundational works, as well as what its creators made after and what's come from its equally off-beat spiritual successor Cyclet, I'd like to think I've given a pretty good sampler of what this so-called Evil Mad Brand is all about, even if I haven't touched on some titles I'd love to, such as MindeaD Blood and the Mugen Kairou series. But within all that, there's one particularly *huge* loose end I've hinted at many times which I've left untied until today.

Lodged between the releases of Gore Screaming Show in January 2006 and Gun-Katana in August 2007, is what is arguably one of the most ambitious visual novels made up to that point; a 40 hour long epic with nearly 40 endings, telling the 15-year-long story of a girl who lives through hell and finds her own happiness in the end, freed of the systems that bound her. It's also got lesbians, cyborgs, insect superpowers, a precious bug child, and tons of tentacles. *It's time for Extravaganza.*

The Story Begins



Released in October 2006 exclusively for Windows PCs in Japan, Extravaganza: Mushi Mederu Shoujo is a sorta-reimagining of 2003's Mushitsukai by the same staff; taking the world and setting of that five hour long game, and expanding it out into something that takes a full 40 hours to see all the way through - 50 if you include the cut chapter later released standalone... which you should.

While Mushitsukai is perfectly fine, Extravaganza - alongside the titles that sandwich it - is what I'd consider to form Black Cyc's holy trilogy. It's when the studio was at their peak with their best

talents, crafting new and original ideas with the experience to back them up; and in many ways, for better and for worse, it's the title that best represents that ambitious studio.

It follows the conflict between an ancient clan of insect-wielding assassins who reject modern society for forest-dwelling solitude, a company which forced their hand to intervene when it began exploiting their tool of choice to craft bioweapons, and a girl who finds herself stuck in the middle of it all due to one unlucky event changing her fate forever.

The tale of Yumemi - the girl who loses everything at the hands of an abusive man and the warfaring society he escaped, who herself escapes the hell he creates with only a little bug son at her side - is one of the most gripping in the entire medium, and goes some truly **wild** places to reach its heartfelt final conclusions through a complicated web of events.

It has *everything*; intense fantastical action, toxic yuri between severely damaged women, fascinating lore with grand thematic implications, feminist themes that critique and examine systems of oppression, shonen training arcs, morally ambiguous characters who change according to the world around them, ambitious gameplay systems, and a number of heart-rending moments that had me sobbing again, and again, and again.



Extravaganza makes for one of the most gripping stories in the entire medium, and one that I can recommend to almost anyone who can stomach the extreme content contained within. It's a title which, true to its name, is truly extra in every way... but for as much as I admire that ambition, it *is* also the game's downfall, as the mere five month development cycle and lack of budget did not treat it well.

Between an entire missing arc, paths that feel abrupt and short, and a final chapter that - while a spectacle - fails to fully resolve many of the themes the story was building, it's a game brimming with potential that wouldn't be realized until 10 years later, when the missing chapter was revamped for release as a sequel titled Mushigurui Hen. [2][3]

I'll be referring to them as a singular work simply called Extravaganza throughout this video, as these two really need to be taken together - though when referring to each game specifically, I'll be calling the original by it's shortening, Mushiai [5], and Mushigurui as... well, Mushigurui. But seriously, the latter takes the 2006 cult hit from a fascinating experiment with loose ends abound, to an altogether masterwork within the genre; a rich tale that was well worth waiting ten years to see the conclusion of for fans. So, let's all go on this journey together, and see what awaits in the world of Extravaganza.

THE GIRL WHO LOVED INSECTS

Synopsis



Extravaganza is set sometime in then-contemporary 2000s Japan, with one major twist: since the days of feudality, there's been one notable clan of assassins living in the shadows of society known as the Mushitsukai. Translating literally to "Insect Users," they wield the power of special bugs known as the Mushi (蟲), who are selectively bred for everything from healing wounds to acting as vicious warriors to be commanded by their owners.

The clan, comprised of numerous bloodlines who all rigorously train from the moment they're born, have continued to live alone in a special forest for hundreds of years, refusing to adapt to modern times and only interacting with the outside world when and where necessary... and some years ago in the early 2000s, something drastic came up when a man named Rengo fled the clan.

Banished from his home and unable to integrate into the world, he instead began collaborating in secret with a scientist known as Nishi, who's invested in experimenting on the Mushi as bioweapons with the funding of the pharmaceuticals megacorporation: Jinmu. Unfortunately, one of the combat trials he sends Rengo on ends in disaster, as he's confronted by a Mushitsukai in combat and loses, destroying the car a young girl's parents happened to be in in the process.

For the next month, that young girl - Yumemi Sakurai - lives through hell on Earth, as Rengo kidnaps her and turns her into a breeding vessel to birth more Mushi for his combat ventures,

including an egg which he stole upon fleeing, rumored by the clan to contain a unstoppable world-ending creature known as the Jyuumachuu.

Unfortunately for him, what Yumemi ends up giving birth to is a seemingly useless metallic blue bug that comes back from near-death after every beating he gives it, all to cling again to his mother... who eventually accepts him as her own son. Desperate to escape with her only surviving family in this world, she stabs Rengo to death after he's wounded in an encounter with the Mushitsukai's most powerful assassin, Ren, and leaves for good.

Scared but not alone, Yumemi finds herself venturing out into the world with only one thing known for sure: that no matter what, she *will* live and find her happy ending. And for five years after, this seems to be the road she's headed on, with her finding safe housing, a job she loves at the AnzU cafe run by the motherly Anzu Kagurazaka, and a daily routine with her beloved son.

And yet, one day, the echoes of five years past threaten to overturn her peace, as agents of Jinmu begin attacking her to steal away her mythical son, and the Mushitsukai themselves send Ren out once again protect Yumemi and perhaps bring her back to the village, as - if the prophecies are to be believed - the Jyuumachuu and its owner are to be too powerful to be left unmonitored in this world.

Will Yumemi fight back against the Mushitsukai to live a peaceful life, or join their archaic way of life? Will she aid Jinmu in their dark goals, or be a subject of their experiments? Or will her life veer some other way, influenced by hundreds of factors around her? And just what secrets is her beloved son holding – is he really a creature that can bring upon the end of the world? Only time will tell, and only one thing in it all is certain: Yumemi *will* survive to tell the tale... and her son is coming with her.

A Bug's World



If it's not already apparent, Mushiai has a very unique premise even for Black Cyc. First, structurally, it's a 15 year long story told over the course of *seven* story arcs in a ladder structure - a prologue five years before the main events, followed a three-part main story with two divergences, and finally an epilogue set 10 years later, which takes place after two of the possible conclusions to the main story.

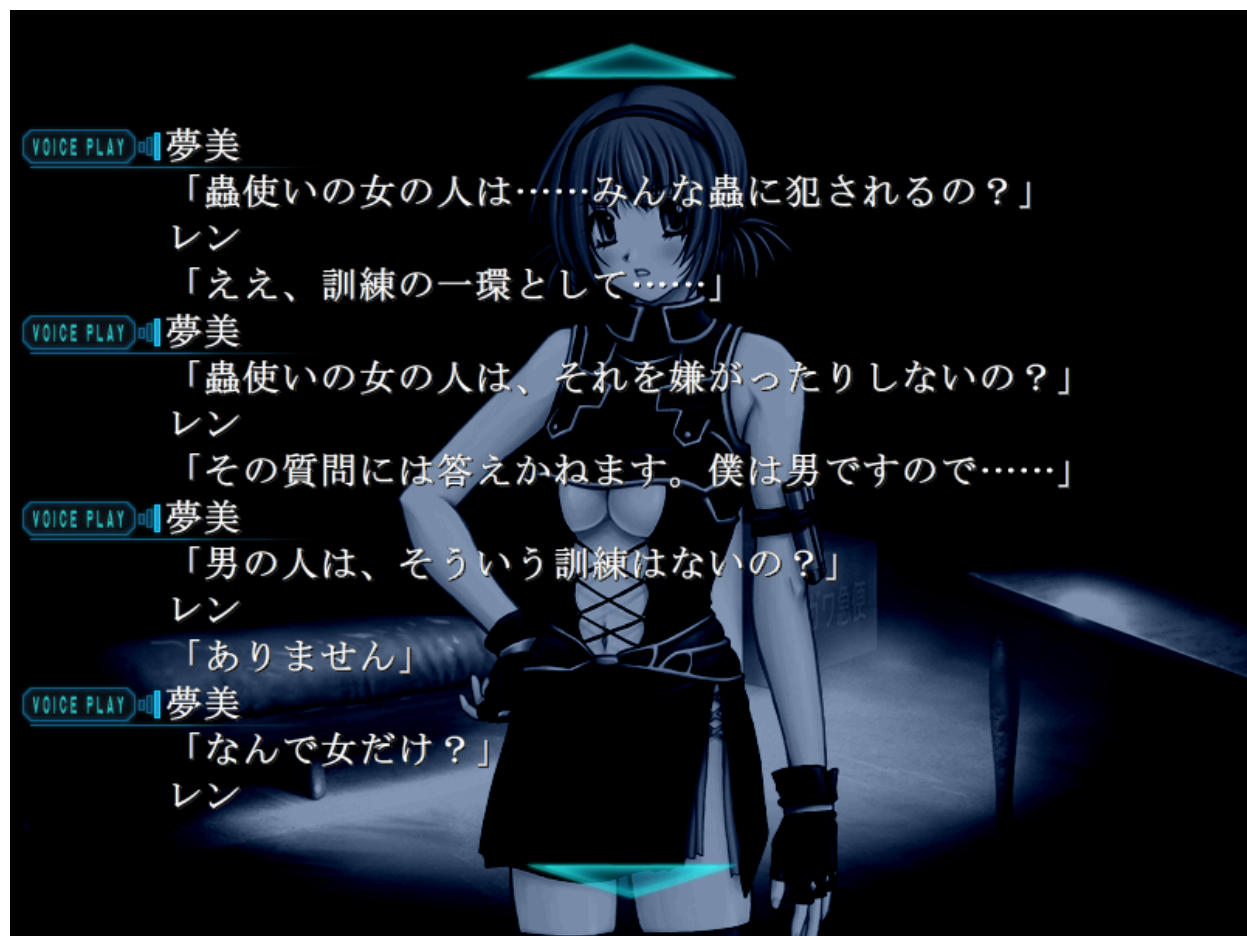
And second, the core crux of the story being the relationship between a girl and her insect baby feels wild on paper, even for them. But Ban'ya does what Ban'ya does best, and manages to turn even the most wild of concepts into a vessel for deeply human characters and fascinating low fantasy worldbuilding.

As mentioned prior, it's mostly similar to contemporary 2000s Japan with your flip phones and cars and high rise buildings, but there's little sci-fi and fantastical elements that intrude on it. Cyborgs and half-humans of all kinds, rule-of-cool weaponry, wild science experiments, and most importantly, the addition of Mushi and the Mushitsukai.

They're established early on to be a brutal, ruthless group of people, who take the power structures present throughout Japanese history and the myth of the Samurai's adherence to a code of honor to an extreme. However, rather than fight with swords, their weapon of choice is a species of insect collectively known as the Mushi, who they see as no more than tools; life which exists to further their goals. Said life reproduces by way of large batches of eggs, which need hosts to incubate in... namely human females, which their society expects all to be willing to bear at any given time.

To say it's a patriarchal and cruel group is putting it lightly. All are trained harshly only as warriors from birth, told to silence every single emotion they have for the sake of duty. Marriage exists only heterosexually, and only as a way for the all-powerful elders of the village to further bloodlines and create more powerful warriors.

Most important to them though is the incredibly strict code they abide by, which requires them to hide their existence from the outside world by any means necessary, and force those who become aware to either join if they're capable warriors or breeding vessels, or face death. And yet despite this, they claim all they *really* want is to live a peaceful life with the Mushi, but those filthy outsiders just can't stop interfering... despite themselves being unable to let bygones be bygones.



The whole thing is *brimming* with points of commentary, and one that becomes explicit by the end is the parallel to militaries and militarized nations as a whole. That idea of fighting for peace with violence, an undying respect to authorities, viewing other lives as tools to be used, and the belief one must silence their emotions to become a better soldier, are common to them all over the world, and rightly treated as inhumane here. But Ban'ya goes the necessary extra miles to not just commentate and ruminate on this through dialogue, but to center the perspective of Yumemi and the other women who suffer because of Mushitsukai's ways.

Putting a traumatized queer woman front and center asks the reader to seriously consider her view; one which is always quick to point out the injustices present within the Mushitsukai's patriarchal and degrading ways of life, while otherwise supporting fellow victims. It doesn't pretend one person can change everything, but it does remind players that support can make all the difference between a loss of will, and the motivation to join forces in resistance.

What really pulls all of this together though, is the focus on systemic issues and individual damage. I think in stories that deal with moral relativity like this often does, where a particular culture or group is framed as having cruel ways of life when compared to the modern world, it's very easy to stop talking about relativism and ultimately veer into outright colonialist territory, concluding with something that encourages conquest and dehumanization of cultures you deem unsightly.

I don't think there's any arguing that the Mushitsukai *aren't* awful, and their ways being at this point ancient do not excuse the harm they perpetuate. But rather than just telling you to hate them, the game wants you to come to your own conclusion by showing first-hand what their society does to someone they attempt to drag into it on the lowest social rung, and focusing on her - being Yumemi's - point of view and her suffering.

By doing so, the Mushitsukai never feel like a clear cut group of villains that do bad things which you need to hate, but a group of people who, though fully responsible for their actions, are still people acting according to a *very* fucked system they live under. So, the story focuses on examining those systems systems and reiterating the necessity of growing past them, affirming that their own hubris will be their own downfall should they not.

Given the fact that genocides of other countries and cultures have, historically and presently, been justified through calling entire groups uncivilized savages without considering the humanity of those within, I think encouraging people to think critically about groups is the right way to go about discussing these subjects. Because, at worst, you'll just come to a more well rounded understanding of their flaws and see the people within as people - and at best, you might understand enough about them to be able to find peaceful solutions, and show those within better ways of life without forcing it on them and doing a colonialism.

All those elements and more are wonderfully integrated into the world, primarily thanks to Ban'ya's great sense for delivering info naturally through character interactions and rarely through lore dumps. While I wouldn't exactly say there's a rich history to dig into and ponder on when all is said and done, there's exactly enough for what the game is trying to accomplish, and to flesh out its characters and themes.

A Complex Cast

The Heroine



Extravaganza is, first and foremost, a game about agency, free will, and the innate human right to control our own destinies; working with others to break the chains which prevent us from becoming who we are, and being with the people we love. It is also, of equal importance, a game about found family and how it can empower us to overcome loss and move forward together, no better represented than in Yumemi.

She is by all accounts the protagonist of the story, and one of my favorite women in fiction. She's a sweet, kind, lovable, and incredibly self-sufficient person who does her best to be good for those around her, while still very much capable of fending for herself and biting back when people bother her. But I think what puts her a cut above other fictional women that pass the low bar of "be literally anything other than a submissive cardboard wife," is the handling of her trauma and abuse.

Mushiai as a game deals *heavily* with those topics, given the entire first chapter is dedicated to showing the extent to which Yumemi had been abused by Rengo – everything from intoxicated sexual assault to forced insect impregnation, and later torturing her son when he deems it as a failure, just to laugh at Yumemi for having an attachment to a piddly little guy.

His character pays off in some fascinating ways as the story progresses, but it's important to note that events surrounding him do not center him and his narrative, but rather Yumemi and the whirlwind of emotions she experiences. She's portrayed as scared, frightened, and unable to figure out why any of this is happening to her; what she could have done wrong to deserve this. In equal parts however, the game highlights the power in her refusal to give up throughout it all, as well as her eventual brave and painful escape.

In the post-timeskip second chapter where the game begins proper, five years after it's all over; after she killed him and escaped with her son to live a peaceful life; she still continues to feel the echoes of his abuse in ways subtle and pronounced. To give a brief example amongst many, there's a couple lines in the narration when she's working at the cafe that briefly mention her being spooked by a man looking similar to Rengo, and another where it's mentioned she hates the scent of alcohol. It's not specified why, but given an early scene where she's assaulted with a full bottle... you can put two and two together.



Ban'ya in general shows restraint with her trauma like this; it's brought to attention, but gently so as not to paint her as someone overcome by fear at all times, but rather struggling to keep her mind wholly away from her past. And while I think there's a time and place for writing that shows the more extreme side of traumatic reactions, this *far better* captures what my day to day experiences with it are as a survivor of sexual assault and familial abuse.

I have breakdowns and I have panic attacks, yeah, but for the most part, trauma's a lurking presence that leads to me double taking when I see certain cars, being a tiny bit nervous around people who look like my abusers, and seeing certain objects and remembering certain events before trying to get on with my day again. And for Ban'ya to be able to capture this specifically, not even mentioning how well he gets those bigger panic attacks and freezes anyways, is something I feel is very commendable.

I also gotta mention just how much she kicks ass throughout the story. Not just in some fantastic action scenes where she fights alongside her son in battles that can rival shonen series at their peak, but in her incredible sense for humor and dominating conversations; making shitty powertripping people cower in fear with remarkable snideness. She's a legit fleshed out and emotionally diverse character, who can be loving in one scene and a smug bitch (positive) in the next without a single hint of whiplash.

Ultimately, if there is anything I want to hammer home about her, it's that she's a genuinely strong woman. Not in a placative way that feels like a writer putting a woman in the place of a very boring Strong Male Protagonist, but in a far more realistic sense; highlighting her strength for pushing through the worst humanity has to offer, while not shying away from the kind of damage that leaves.

Because of all this, I found her to not only be a deeply relatable character, but one that's helped keep a spark of determination in me burning. I felt continually *proud* of Yumemi for going through all that she did and coming out alive, and the way the writing had me connecting her as a person, led to me reflecting and feeling a little more proud of myself too.

Viewers who've watched previous videos of mine on Black Cyc and adjacent titles, particularly Ban'ya's 2016 horror masterpiece Shiniyuku Kimi, probably recognize some similarities between how I'm describing the leads of those titles and Yumemi. And... yeah, like I said in the intro, that's kind of their thing. Yet no matter how many times I see it, I can't say I'm at all tired of it. All of these characters feel unique and empowering in their own ways; a testament to the strength of the folks from that studio.



I also can't talk about Yumemi without talking about her relationship to the bestest little guy of them all: Mushi-kun, formally known as the Jyuumachuu.. The supposed harbinger of the death for the Mushitsukai, a creature who could freeze over the Earth, and an insect whose existence strikes fear into the minds of the village elders, ends up being Yumemi's son whom she protects dearly and treats as an equal because Rengo *stupidly* shoved the egg inside Yumemi without knowing what it was.

His existence is unique among all of the Mushi, as according to the Mushitsukai – most have no greater capacity for consciousness or emotion than a regular insect; and thus, it's acceptable to treat them as disposable tools rather than living creatures. Mushi-kun, however, is a very expressive little dude; he waves his feelers around when he's happy, he puts them down when he's sad and pouty, and he's incredibly responsive to not only Yumemi's emotions, but her speech as well. There's a reason he won the popularity poll.

While the reality of what the Mushi are and why this seemingly gentle and affectionate critter is prophesied to end the world isn't fully realized until Mushigurui, he's never the less a lovable puppy-like fella who has his share of precious lovely moments and outright badass fights that make him a star of the show, despite not even having a full sprite in Mushiai.

He's also one of the key driving forces of the major factional conflict within the plot. As mentioned prior, the Jinmu Corporation wants him for research due to his unique existence and legendary qualities, and the Mushitsukai want him to seal him away to prevent their apocalypse myths from coming true, leading Yumemi to be forced to make hard choices. Oh, and in one route, he grafts himself onto Yumemi after she loses an arm, and gives her super powers. **It's pretty fucking cool.**

And Those Who Influence



A story of action and drama is nothing without its actors to create and resolve conflict though, and Extravaganza provides such of all moral alignments on both sides in spades. Heroes and villains, sidekicks and helpers; those who fight for the Mushitsukai or Jinmu out of ignorance or willingness, and those who want only to see those they love find a happy ending.

A handful of these characters, and perhaps *the* most important ones, are all established within that initial first chapter and stay as important actors throughout the succeeding fifteen years. And at the very tippy top of that list, just under Yumemi, is the Mushitsukai named Ren. Son of the Satoru family and known as the strongest Mushitsukai to ever live, he's a warrior who strictly

abides by the laws of the society, being perhaps even more conservative than some of the elders who raised him.

His involvement in the story starts when Rengo gets involved in battle with his partner, Sayuri, early on in the game. Though he initially loses, kicking off the chain of events where he kills Yumemi's parents by accident and meets her, he later comes back with new experimental Mushi and defeats her, causing Ren to be called on and ultimately be the one to kick off Rengo's demise.

Because of Rengo stupidly bragging about having Mushi-kun over the phone though, Ren ends up assigned to try and confirm its existence, and - upon doing so - keep a close eye on Yumemi, leading the two to meet and start their very complicated relationship. And I don't mean that in a romantic sense; Ren is not even for a **second** ever portrayed as a love interest for Yumemi; but that the two have a very uneasy alliance, further fueled by Ren's complete emotional void.



He's a very, very cold-hearted person due to how the Mushitsukai live, showing absolutely no regard or care for Yumemi's life beyond what's necessary to accomplish his mission of retrieving the Demon Beast, and sealing it away before the myths can be realized. Even though, as I said earlier, he clearly sees that Mushi-kun is a kind creature who responds to Yumemi, and nothing like the demon the myths prophesize.

Though it would take until Mushigurui for the fruits of those doubts to bloom - which is also the arc where Ren gets a majority of his character development - he's still fascinating within Mushiai for more or less being a spokesperson for the will of the Mushitsukai. He sees himself as little more than a cog in a machine; an agent of a society who can do nothing more than obey it, and absolves himself of any guilt for his actions by stating it was simply his 'duty' to perform them.

Given that some of those actions are attacking innocent people and assaulting women to gather information he believes they hold... which real life soldiers *also* do under the excuse of 'duty...' it should go without saying that not only is Ren responsible for his abhorrent actions, but the system that asks him to perform them are utterly *fucked*.

In a game that is all about free will, having a character like this who so flagrantly denies himself it makes for some fascinating contrasts and conflicts; a man so stubbornly fixed in his ways that *nothing* can change his perspective of what is "correct" from what his elders had instilled into him. Whether or not I could call him a villain, though... I'm not entirely sure, as there's really only two that I feel get that title.



One of them I won't get into until spoilers, but the other is one I've already mentioned plenty: Rengo. Brash, cruel, and disgustingly arrogant, he's a pathetic little sad *baby bitch boy dumb dumb* who can do pretty much nothing right. Despite his constant touting about being amazing at everything, he *constantly* gets his shit kicked in by everyone around him, hilariously beaten in by a woman within ten minutes of the game starting.

Fascinatingly, it's the whole opening chapter which features the only first person narration in the game; foregoing Ban'ya's typical third person styling seen in other works and the rest of this

game, in favor of giving you a glimpse into Rengo's mindset. He values nothing in life except power and the high that comes with it, and seeks anything which can give him it.

After all, the Mushitsukai he was once part of teach that might is right, authority is key, women are baby machines, and the environment around you is a tool. But unlike some other works, Rengo's cruelty is never really sympathized with or explained. If the player wants to connect the dots and believe Rengo is damaged, they absolutely can, and Rengo at one point *does* violently refuse the idea of going back to the village, so he clearly doesn't feel well about things that went down there.

But what I find fascinating here is that the chapter takes the plot energy that would be exerted onto convincing the player to be sympathetic, and instead exerts it on showing how everything he does is just an attempt to feel in control. As a villain, Rengo's motivation to simply fuck shit up makes him simple, but as a *person*, I think he's an uncomfortably realistic depiction of some of the kinds of people that harm others. Reading his monologuing was hard for me at points, because a lot of how he talked and reasoned through things reminded me an uncomfortable amount of things that people who've sexually abused me have said.

As well as this, when you take into account the way he views his actions versus how Ren does, I think there's some fascinating commentary on how systems that require oppressing others inevitably hurt the class at the top of the food chain as well. Both of them, as men, undoubtedly benefitted the most being Mushitsukai – they received the least humiliating training, had the greatest potential to advance, and weren't expected to go through incredibly painful childbearing processes at any given time.

And yet despite this, they are still deeply damaged people from it. Ren is so emotionally deadened and submerged within the ways of the Mushitsukai that he doesn't even consider for a moment that what happens in there is cruel and unusual; it's just a way of life. And Rengo, without the same level of emotional silencing Ren is capable of, is well aware what happened to him and everyone else there was horrible, but still seeks to use those very same methods of abuse to gain some semblance of control in his life.

Rengo, within the first few hours of the game, ends up dead because of his own hubris, instilled into him by the society he grew up in. And as for Ren... well, he's a lot luckier, but it takes getting very late in the story for him to start realizing just how twisted the Mushitsukai's ways are, and to realize just how much he uncritically sacrificed for the sake of appeasing those in power.

Extravaganza, by having characters like this, and by centering the perspective of a smart and resilient woman who sees through all of the bullshit for what it is and calls it out, is able to make some legitimately compelling and smart commentary on how systemic abuse and power structures affect everybody negatively. Not just the benefactors, but the beneficiaries, too.



Someone else who gets... sorta close to the status of villain though, is Nishi; also known under the alias of Dr. West as a nod to the classic Lovecraft character of the same name. Nishi's dubiousness comes from the same vein as Ren's, being someone who has absolutely *no regard* for common human morals or emotions, and instead is entirely focused on conducting research into what the Mushi are capable of.

That is, namely, fusing them with humans to create fucked up hybrid creatures who exist entirely to fight and reproduce, as well as attempting to find new varieties of Mushi based on the specimen he was handed sometime before the start of the game. Anything he has to do in order to see the fruits of his labor is acceptable in his mind, even if it means sacrificing hundreds in the name of science.

While he initially appears as nothing more than a stereotypical mad doctor, that trope gets fleshed out once you start seeing the parallels between his actions and the Mushitsukai's. Because while you can look at the actions of the Mushitsukai as relics of ancient times, what's *actually* the difference between them using women as stock to birth more Mushi as weapons, and Nishi doing the same to discover new Mushi to fuel his obsession with science for a corporation; one that likely contributes to the broader exploitation present in the medical system?

As proven by the prevalence of eugenics and other dehumanizing pseudo-science, science can, very easily, become a veil for cruelty; a way to perform brutal actions with a veneer of progress, so you can look and say “see, the way WE'RE doing things is better than all those other UNCIVILIZED cultures!” Which the game, in fact, makes direct reference to at one point. Science or not, there are no ‘good factions’ in this conflict, because both are destructive in similar ways, and both benefit off of power structures that dehumanize those on the lower rungs of the food chain.



These five are the figures that I really think propel the plot forward the whole way through; with Rengo setting all of it in motion, Yumemi and Mushi-kun having an inseparable bond she fights to the death for, and Nishi and Ren being moral and emotional blanks who carelessly pull Yumemi their way for their own needs - whether she comes by force or by her own will.

If I had to pick a favorite besides Yumemi, it's probably Yulia Alexeevna . Introduced early on as the sidekick to the mad doctor Nishi, she's a seemingly cold and stoic, yet still deeply emotional cyborg who acts as everything from his maid to his research assistant, and gradually opens up as the game goes on. I absolutely *adore* her personality and where her character ends up going

- plus, you can't go wrong with anyone voided by Haruka Fukai, who gave life to my favorite vaguely lesbian cafe employee and the trans queen of the Yami no Koe series.

Besides her, you've also got the likes of Yuuto Minami, a sweet and caring boy who becomes Yumemi's love interest in some routes; Ageha Kujou, Yumemi's coworker at Anzu who has an utterly ***un-fucking-hinged*** yuri route; and Miyaka Jinmu, daughter of the Jinmu Corporation's CEO, best friend of the equally sweet and adorable Yui Sarahara, and the former heroine of Mushitsukai.

Compared to that game, her status here was downgraded quite a bit to make room for Yumemi; being turned into a side character and something of a secondary driving force within a few of the chapters. It wouldn't be until Mushigurui that she gets upgraded back to main character status, and thank *god* she does at all, as the final arc of Mushiai sorta shafts her.

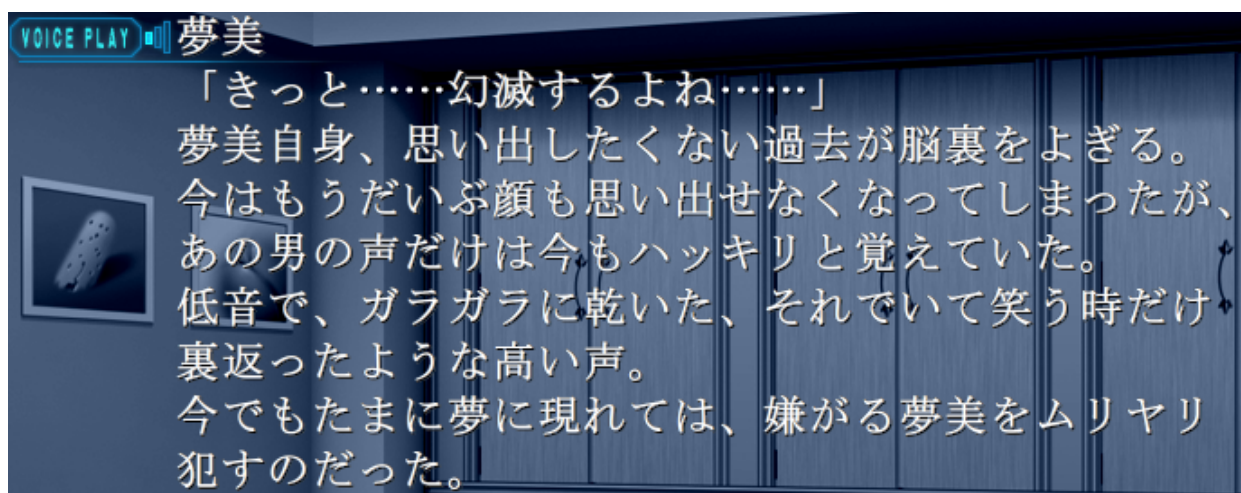
Even with that though, she – like all the other cast members - are very fleshed out and real people with believable flaws. I've talked enough about Yumemi and her own struggles, but I think the way her main love interest in the game - Yuuto - responds to her past, is very indicative of the way Ban'ya thinks of his characters and wants to earnestly show what being a messy human is like.

There's a sequence early on in the game, where he invites Yumemi out to go to the movies with him, and the date itself goes really well! But then, at the end of it, Yuuto asks Yumemi if they don't want to start dating... and Yumemi breaks, confessing with a hollow smile to Yuuto that she was abducted and implying she was assaulted, before suddenly asking him if he wants to have sex at a hotel.

Dazed the entire time and uncertain of what to even say, Yumemi parts only after the still air becomes unbearable, walking home in tears as she questions why she said anything that she did; questioning what she even wanted to accomplish by confessing to him what she says, in her own words, is her "disgusting past."

Though he disappears from the cafe for a few days after this, he does eventually come back with his thoughts somewhat sorted – and rather than tell Yumemi she was annoying and weird, or pretend like nothing was wrong, or hate her for being "dirty" like she believed Yuuto would, he actually apologizes to her for saying nothing when she was clearly distressed, and for wanting to jump straight into a relationship without trying to be friends first. So, he offers that, and Yumemi - though clearly very nervous and feeling guilty about what she did - accepts.

These two scenes are some of the best in the whole game. Everything from Yumemi's stark confession to Yuuto's sincere admission that he didn't do enough for her despite his bewilderment, just hits *so fucking close* for me, and speaks volumes about Ban'yas desires to write real people going through real shit.

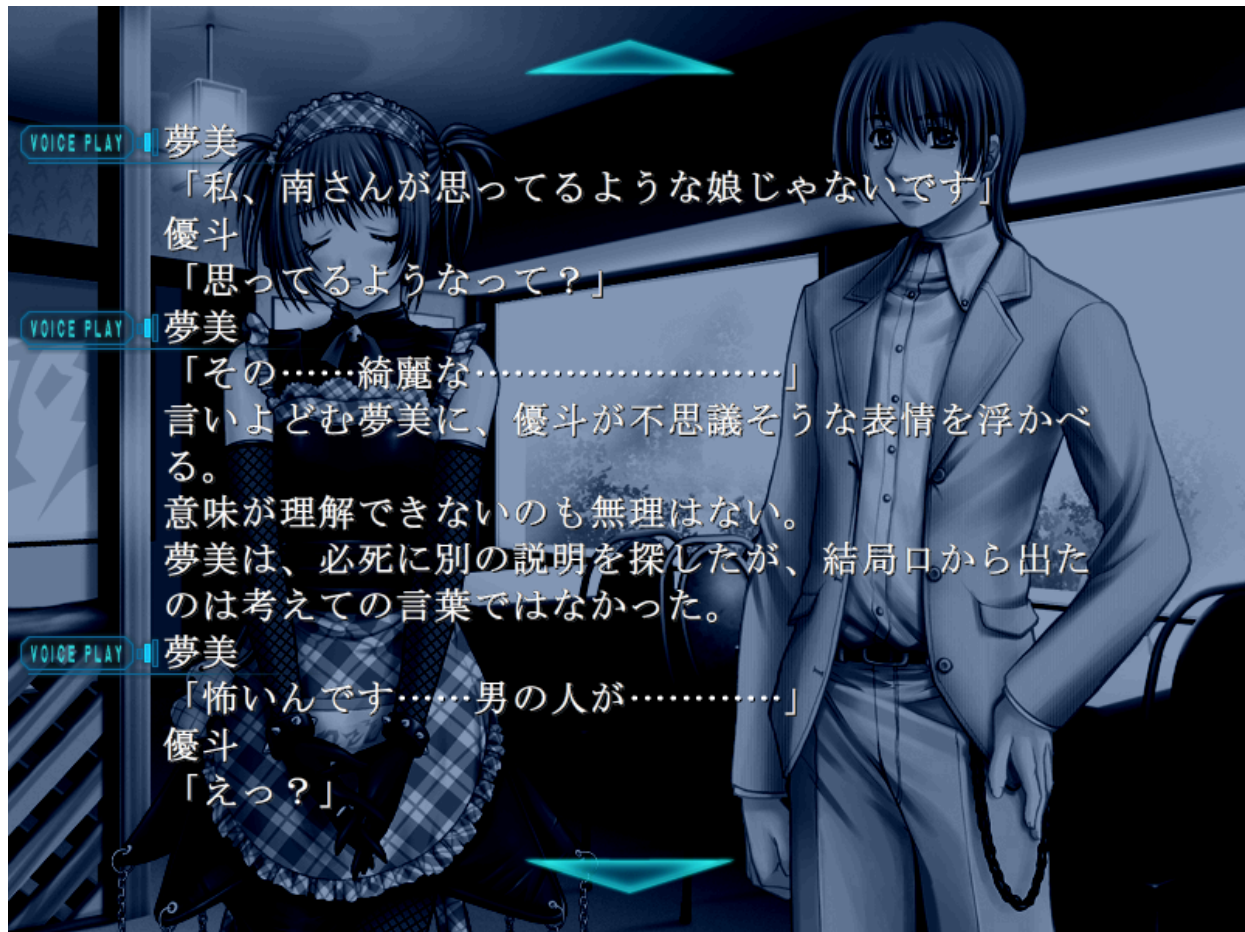


I can personally recall conversations I've had like this with people, where I admitted to the worst parts of my past in hope they would look at me like I'm disgusting. I wanted people to see me as the broken, dirty person I was, and leave me behind believing there was something better out there; and that awkward confession and attempt to make a bridge that Yuuto makes is something I've personally been a party to.

I think this sequence exemplifies something about Black Cyc: that as a brand, they've prided themselves from the beginning as being subversive. Whether that was being queer or being feminist, or being progressive or having off-beat fetish content, their catalog was founded on being willing to explore aspects of humanity that other brands simply weren't.

I'm not saying this to say that mainstream, prettied up KEY-esque titles can't have impactful narratives, but I am saying that the flawed people in titles like this; who act out from trauma like Yumemi, who never know quite what they're doing but do their fucking *best* to support those people like Yuuto; are FAR more relatable as people to me, and I cannot express just how much it means to me that Ban'ya did his best to make every character as fleshed out and flawed as possible, in subtle yet real ways.

Prosaic Wonder & Bloody Horror



This all brings me to the thing that ties the whole narrative together and makes it work as well as it does: the prose and dialogue. Though not a purple powerhouse like, say, Maruto Fumiaki of *White Album 2* fame, Ban'ya's a writer I adore equally as much for how he captures a clear and objective style with smooth, clean phrasing.

Very little in *Extravaganza* is ever obfuscated in a writing sense; almost all of it is told through the third person in a way that compliments the players own observations of what's happening, extrapolating on clear concepts in an enlightening way, while highlighting aspects that may not be as apparent. It's clean, concise, and always makes the story easy to follow while never treating the reader as unable to make sense of things on their own.

As well as that, something which I'll continue to highlight every time I talk about Ban'ya is the focus placed on the feelings of the victims rather than the victimizers. Despite being an author who *loves* writing about characters going through torturous events for games ostensibly sold on how wild their torture can get, the emotional weight in all of the scenes is placed on what those suffering are feeling; often followed up by well-earned reprieve later in the story, and usage of those elements to commentate on some social matter.

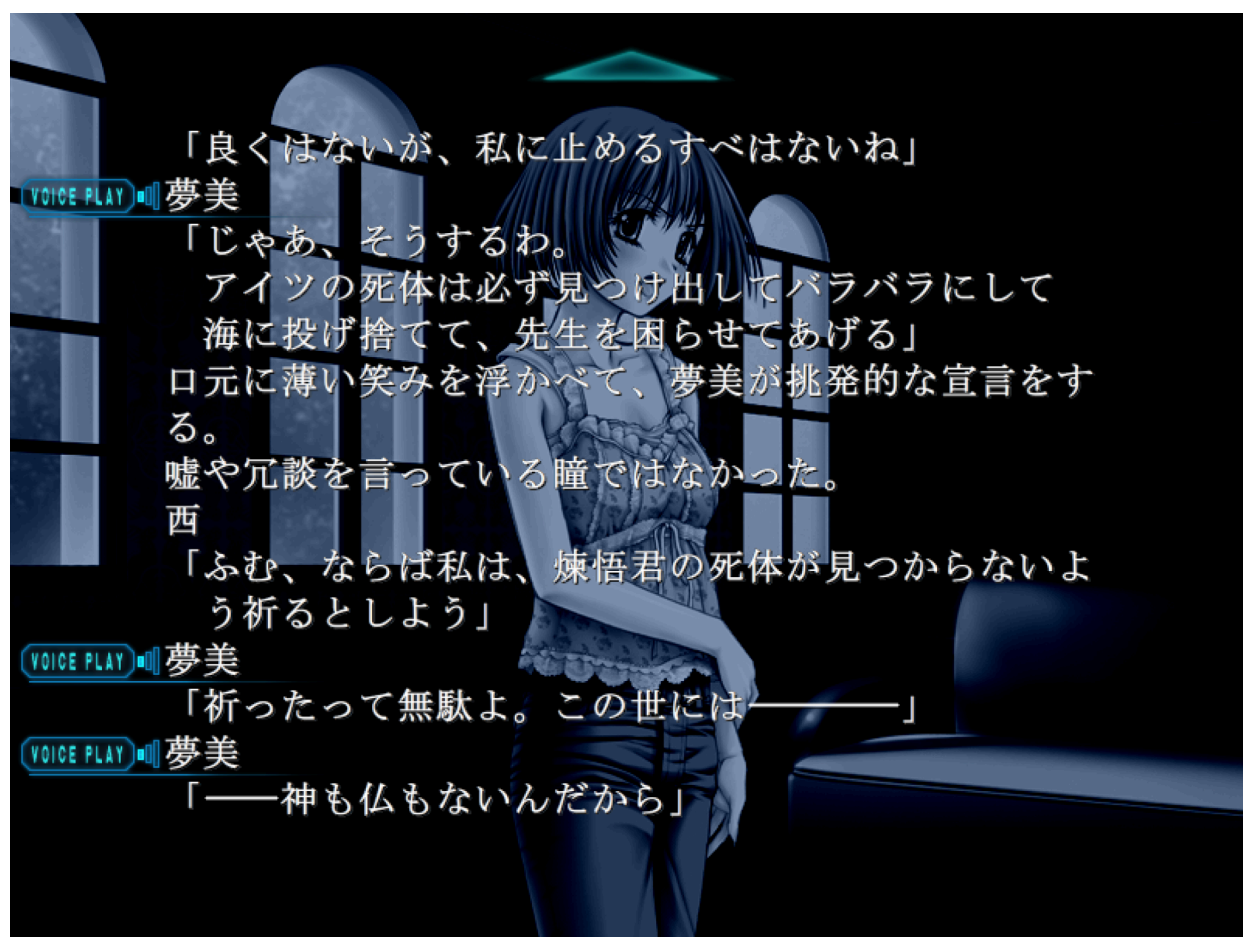
While there certainly are a number of scenes whose inclusion feel... very unnecessary, I don't think I could ever describe the writing itself as gratuitous. It's an emotionally tender and vulnerable game that wants you to sympathize with these characters and see them succeed; pacing itself beautifully on a micro, prosaic level, and *generally well* on a macro, structural level, to make those successes as meaningful as they can be.

What is perhaps Ban'ya's greatest power to accomplish this, is his ability to bounce wildly between moods without giving whiplash. This game regularly makes shifts like going from some of the most gruesome shit you'll ever read, to girls having a quiet chat, and finally to an action-packed battle scene, and it all feels concise thanks to clever usage of time skipping and subtle writing to bridge the gaps.

While Extravaganza isn't exactly loaded with memorable quotes like Cross Channel or something, it *is* a game that just flows; a buttery smooth read which places emphasis on the implications and feelings behind what's being said, rather than the profundity of individual quotes themselves. I might not be able to recite many lines from this game, but I *can* tell you what many scenes made me feel as a whole.

To be clear, I don't think either of those styles are better than the other. I adore games that have sayings which make me think for hours on end, but there's something equally cool about a read I can breeze through while letting a whole bunch of emotions go through me. And plus, I think the smoothness helps to bring forward just how good the chemistry between characters is. No matter how big or small the conversation, they all bounce off each other in ways that serve to develop the story as much as your appreciation for the individual cast members.

It'd be unfair of me to make it seem like the game *doesn't* have any memorable quotes or phrases, too. The cornerstone of the Mushitsukai's society - 蟲と共に生き , 蟲と共に死ぬ, which roughly translates to "We live with the Mushi, we die with the Mushi" - is both cool as fuck, and gets spun around in some interesting ways by the end. Plus, Mushiai has a line that goes something like 'praying is futile, because in this world, there *is* no God nor Buddha,' and that goes hard.



Just as much as Extravaganza flows beautifully, it's also equally as frightening. Ban'ya's a writer I know to have a fantastic sense for creating tension because of his work on Shiniyuku Kimi, and even ten years earlier on Mushiai, you can feel those writing chops thanks a great sense for how to play the tug of war of comfort and dread; pulling the player between both sides to create tension, before resolving it all with dependable peace, or with utterly horrifying bad ends.

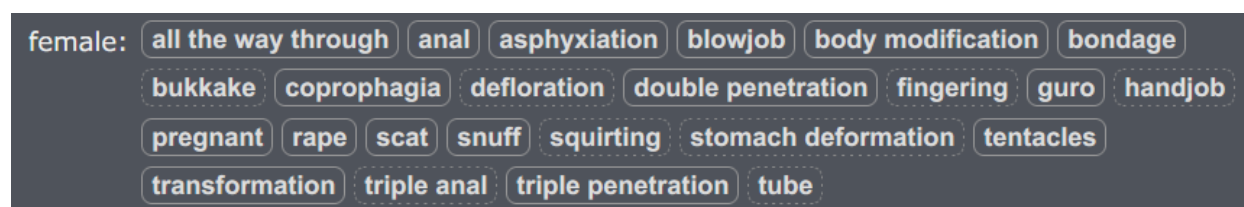
One of the most clever tricks it pulls to create this tension is by making the introductory chapter by far the most brutal part of it. Those first few hours following Rengo around pull no punches in presenting you with the worst results of the Mushitsukai's ways; but without him being as emotionally detached and duty focused as Ren, a lot of the actions he takes are unnecessarily cruel and only done for his pleasure.

Seeing him take delight in trying to reduce Yumemi down to nothing more than the tool he sees her as, seeing her get beat and broken again and again despite her best efforts to abide by what he wants, is sickening, and gives the player the same level of fear that anything could go wrong at any moment which Yumemi is forced to live with.

Besides this being a fantastic way to put readers in the mindspace of a traumatized and uneasy character, it's also just a good foundation to build strong horror writing off of, and sets the stage

for the kind of things you can expect to see further on. I'm someone who's pretty desensitized to fictional gore and torture, but this game *still* somehow got to me just through the framing of numerous scenes.

Ban'ya knows how to fuck with your expectations of the characters as much as he does your emotions, putting the cast into stomach churning nightmares which can showcase the absolute worst they're capable of, motivating you to find a happy ending. It is, without a doubt, *the* most unrelentingly brutal title I've covered on this channel, with a set of E-Hentai tags that would make most anyone shrivel into a ball.



Lemme be totally clear: I am an eroguro *fiend*. I love seeing what people can cook up, and what wild ways they can come up with to break the limits of the human body in a way that does something to click with my traumatized brain. The sheer exaggeration of it, combined with the often creative ways authors use it to represent the trauma, abuse, and societal injustices, rocks. As long as it's interesting, I'm in – and I think Mushiai sometimes manage this.

Thanks to Ban'ya's empathetic perspective, many of the adult scenes in this game; no matter how brutal; feel like they're saying something interesting, whether that's expanding on characters in ways you couldn't have predicted or demonstrating to what extent the powers that be can damage people, and lead to cycles of abuse recurring.

To give at least some reprieve, there are still a handful of scenes that are more tender and caring – including yuri! Actually... *all* of the more tender and caring adult scenes are between Yumemi and Ageha in her chapter, as all of the straight scenes that would have been tender simply cut to black. On this note, I need to mention the interactive bath scene here, because waving your mouse around to clear steam off the frame is just... so cute and clever.

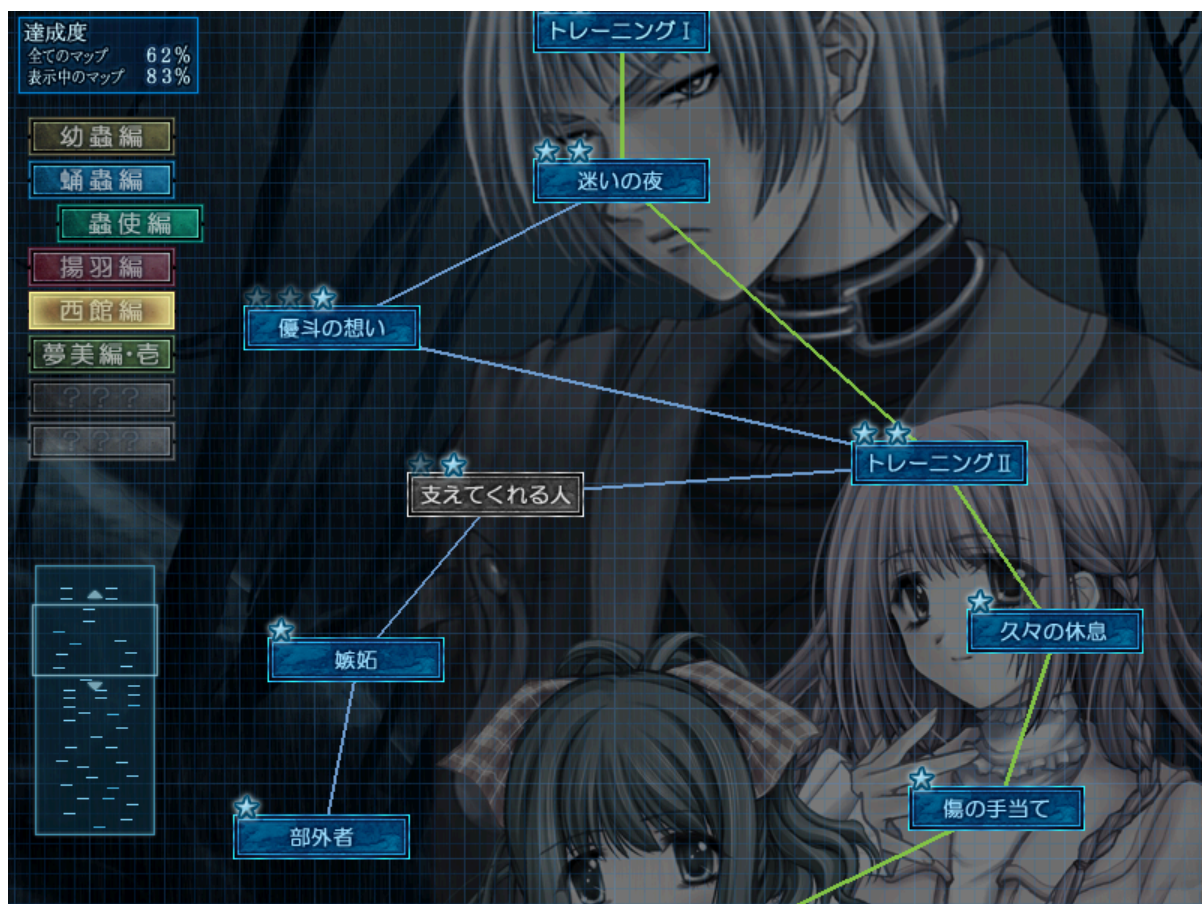
Unfortunately, the adult content is where you can start to see the scope of Mushai bogging it down. Of the game's 40 hour length, an entire **TEN** of those are dedicated to adult scenes - only maybe a third of which are actually interesting, only maybe a quarter of which I'd say actually add to the story, and an overwhelming majority of which are unrelentingly brutal.

By the time you've finished the first quarter of Mushiai, you've seen pretty much everything it has to offer in terms of variety, with only sparse exceptions here and there. For the most part, you're gonna see the same kind of tentacle torture, the same kind of gore, the same kind of nasty liquids going in and out, and the same kind of mindbreak happening over and over and over again, to the some point I just started skimming scenes for plot information. Which *is* tucked into a lot of these, so it's not like you can just ignore them!

If you haven't played many eroguro games like this, I can see how these *might* be effective the whole way through at instilling fear. But I honestly would have preferred more scenes take an elliptical approach, with entire sequences left out and filled in through the implications of a before and after. It not only would have improved the pacing, but made the scenes which were told in full far more impactful.

Oddly enough, I think Mushigurui gets around this problem entirely despite having quite possibly the most fucked up content in both presentation and viscerality. The singular bad ending it contains is both wildly creative and interesting for gore horror junkies to peep, on top of being relevant to the story, expanding on some themes, and leaving on a neat little hook. It also doesn't have the same gameplay issues that Mushai does, being a linear title, because uh... oh dear.

Biting Off More than the Mushi Can Chew



Mushiai describes itself as a Chart Search Type ADV. Each chapter of the game is contained within a flowchart, and within that flowchart are a number of scenes accessed via nodes, which determine how the story will progress through character actions. Click a node, see a scene, and

get bumped back to the chart to do it again, with upwards of four nodes or choices available at any given time. Some nodes also have multiple forms available, indicated by the number of stars on top of them.

The order in which you go through nodes, and which you even choose to view, determine what flags are set and subsequently what ending you'll reach – *if* you even reach one, as you can easily domino-effect the state of the world into an inevitable character death. Causality is the name of the game here, as decisions you make all the way in the beginning of an arc - or even in the previous arc - can determine the future.

To give credit, I think this system is incredibly fascinating in a number of ways. The most obvious of them is how it allows one of the main themes of the game to manifest: the idea that people are not fixed beings, but rather products of the environment that surrounds them. Like, Yumemi as a character is *generally* a good girl, and she *canonically* is, but there's a number of alternate routes in this game that show; under the right horrible circumstances; how her trauma can lead her to become a power hungry monster just like Rengo.

Alternately, while she's typically a very brave person who fights things head on, there's some routes which show that she *can* reach limits and become the same timid, scared person she was under Rengo's lack of care, leading to some of the most gruesome and horrifying scenes in the game as others take advantage of her fears.

Everybody, and I mean **everybody** who is not a fixed villain in this game, is vulnerable to some level of flexibility in some way; whether that be moral, emotional, or factional. Like, even Ren, who's stubbornly fixed in his ideals and at multiple points refuses to let Yumemi lead a normal life, *does* have endings that show him changing and fighting the laws of the Mushitsukai for her. Hell, even Nishi, who's often cold-hearted and emotionless, can be found to show sympathy for Yumemi's suffering, such as after he almost gets her killed in a forced combat trial.

It's by no means a hot take to say that people's actions are a product of their environment and circumstances, but it's one that I feel works about abuse don't always realize, and it's definitely not one that people broadly want to accept. People want to have clear villains to blame and obvious targets to go after, thinking that'll make things 'normal' again once they're gone, but Extravaganza actively denies its readers that pleasure by showing just how much even a minor decision can change somebody.

And that's to say nothing of how this flowchart structure makes for an amazing vessel to reveal different aspects of characters and plotlines slowly. The game makes regular use of locked nodes that become available hours later, inevitably going to be discovered by the player as they attempt to figure out what the requirements for the next ending is. Some of them are as simple as flashbacks to fill in blanks, others are reports that flesh out other perspectives, and yet others are goddamn Resident Evil-style note reading sections that feel like they came out of a creepypasta.

I also think it's interesting how the game uses its non-linear structure to reveal various plot points to you *long* before they may otherwise get revealed. It never shows you everything in full detail, nor even how it'll turn out in the future as Yumemi often has to be present for it to be visible to you, but it adds a lot of extra value to playing through non-canon paths to get a hint of what's to come.



Unfortunately, it's not all sunshine and rainbows in Ban'ya land, as Mushiai commits the great cardinal sin of adventure gaming: moon logic. I mentioned causality being a key aspect of how paths lock and unlock – and when I said that, I meant that the place you choose to have Yumemi put up a cafe recruitment poster or go on a calm walk can potentially determine whether or not she lives to get married in 10 years.

I can't even say the game generally makes sense as a platitude; even in the first chapter, you can get struck down by complete nonsense that locks you from progressing onto the rest of the game, before you look at a guide and realize you read one seemingly inconsequential node you shouldn't have, or passed over one seemingly optional node that actually altered the fate of everyone involved 27 nodes later.

It's infuriating at times, especially when it feels like you've pieced together what to do, you maybe unlock a new node or two, and then get cockblocked in the same spot *again*, or in a *different* spot, and are left even more clueless than you were before. Mushiai is a game that absolutely requires a guide to play without getting mentally exhausted; and if you don't have godly temporal memory, to keep the story straight too.

It's sad, because I think this could have all been fixed with the addition of some color coding and hints. Make nodes that are dependent on clearing the content of future chapters the colors of those chapters; add a hint system that gives you an idea of what plot events could enable it; or even just add an outright easy mode that tells you what nodes unlock what so long as they aren't spoilers.

Playing the game now, it *feels* like an obvious solution, but I don't fault the developers for not adding it; not especially given this game was developed in five months [4] by a team of **seventeen** whole people, and that includes all of the playtesters, website designers, and other smaller yet vital roles. If you include the voice actors, it's still only 24. The fact this game even exists is a miracle, but it doesn't change the fact that playing without a guide is a nightmare.

This also brings me to my last, and perhaps most critical issue with the structure: the pacing. Mushiai is a game that, if you played it absolutely perfectly and focused on the main plot, would have fantastic pacing. But ya' can't really do that; it's a 40 hour long game which is bogged down by unnecessary bad endings and adult content you kinda *need* to see due to the aforementioned flagging nightmare.

There's extremely important and fascinating scenes that, without tons of playtesting or script hacking, I could not confidently tell you the unlock conditions for. And even if I gave a list of endings to skip through, you still have to expend the effort to map them in the chart and CTRL through them, and just... **MAN**. Which uh, on that note, future Noelle here – I found out while writing this script that you can press F5 to forcibly end a scene. That... sure would have been handy to know before...

I want to love the gameplay here. It's wildly creative, thematically relevant, and leads to some truly incredible non-linear character development that few stories can rival. But it's got holes in it bigger than a piece of premium swiss cheese, so I can only express my gratitude towards Ban'ya for sticking with a more typical VN structure in Mushigurui, and my sneering negativity at Black Cyc for making these same mistakes in Gun-Katana.

Metawo & Co Strike Again



What I can easily praise however, is the art and aesthetics of this game. Once again illustrated by Black Cyc legend Ueda Metawo, it's an undeniably beautiful game from a fantastic era of his career; oozing 2000s anime charm in the best ways possible. From the gothic maid outfits of the cafe Yumemi is employed at to the classic CG of Yulia donning a minigun in a maid uniform; from the cold metallic blue UI giving Shadow the Hedgehog vibes to Rengo's goofy ass shirt; it's like going to an industrial metal concert, simultaneously so dated yet so modern.

I feel like there's been a renewed appreciation for this type of aesthetic as of late; not in an ironic sense like there was a few years ago, but people actually seeing the value in these kinds of over the top, absurd and sincere vibes. In the particular context of Mushiai, I think it does a lot to ground the game in a sense of comfortable familiarity in the face of all that happens within it.

Like I've said numerous times, this is *not* a game that's light on the content it offers, and I can imagine most readers are going to struggle to handle the game's most brutal scenes – the intro *alone* is infamously a filter. But as a kid of the 2000s, seeing Yumemi in her pretty little top that belongs on an issue of CosmoGirl, or Yulia in her poofy maid outfit, gave me a sense of nostalgic comfort, and I can imagine readers then feeling like they're glancing back at a safe reality after a moment of horrifying surreality.

It's a very vibrant game in a lot of ways; from all of that to the expressive and fun standing sprites to even the coloring of the illustrations. In a total contrast with the game's dark theming, and befitting of its general optimism, Mushiai is a title rich with color in everything from individual character designs to intense action CGs; perfectly utilized to make each element of a scene stand out while still feeling cohesive.



And on the note of CGs, dear *god* does this game have a lot of them. There's a whopping total of 74 unique sets in Mushiai... only 19 of which aren't erotic in some way, which does create a problem. Like I mentioned prior, this game has roughly 10 hours of adult content, and 30 of... not, adult content. There's some climatic scenes that go on for a *long* while, and very few have anything more going on visually than some sparse effects ripped straight out of MinDeaD Blood here and there.

As well as that, there's a lot of problems with backgrounds being reused in places that don't really make sense. Probably the best example is that whenever characters talk about going to a movie theater or the grocery store, you don't see either of those places – it's just a typical street corner background. And you see that exact sort of issue crop up at many places throughout this game, which does lead to some moments of very pronounced mismatches between the writing and graphics.

Taken as a whole, the novel part of the visual novel ends up doing far more lifting than the visual part does, and it all comes back to the games budgetary struggles. I have no doubt that, if this game had more funds and time in the oven, we would have seen something closer to Gun-Katana's 50/50 erotic/non-erotic resource split and fantastic liberal usage of CGs.

That isn't to diminish the work put into the adult illustrations though, because they are genuinely incredible works of horror artwork, nor do I say this to downplay the quality of everything here broadly. I can't show many scenes off right now due to the potential for spoilers, but some of the illustrations in Mushiai are up there in my personal 'top 10 CGs' thanks to some incredible composition and usage, as well as the art direction as a whole being My Shit.



Up to this point, I've been specifying Mushiai when talking about the aesthetics of this game, and that's because Mushigurui looks very... different. After Black Cyc fell apart under their original owners in 2011, Metawo took a four year hiatus from doing artwork for visual novels; coming back into the scene in general with 2015's otome game Sengoku Himeuta, and back into eroge with Mushigurui Hen in 2016.

And, my god; not only does 10 years between releases make a huge difference, but even compared to his last work under Black Cyc's original ownership five years prior, Mushigurui has to be one of the biggest glow-ups of all time. Everything from the shading to the coloring to the anatomy to the expressions has been monumentally improved, while still feeling like *his* style.

There's this sense of nostalgia, growth, and closure all at once with seeing these characters rendered like they are here, I think most prominent in the almost film-like quality of much of the

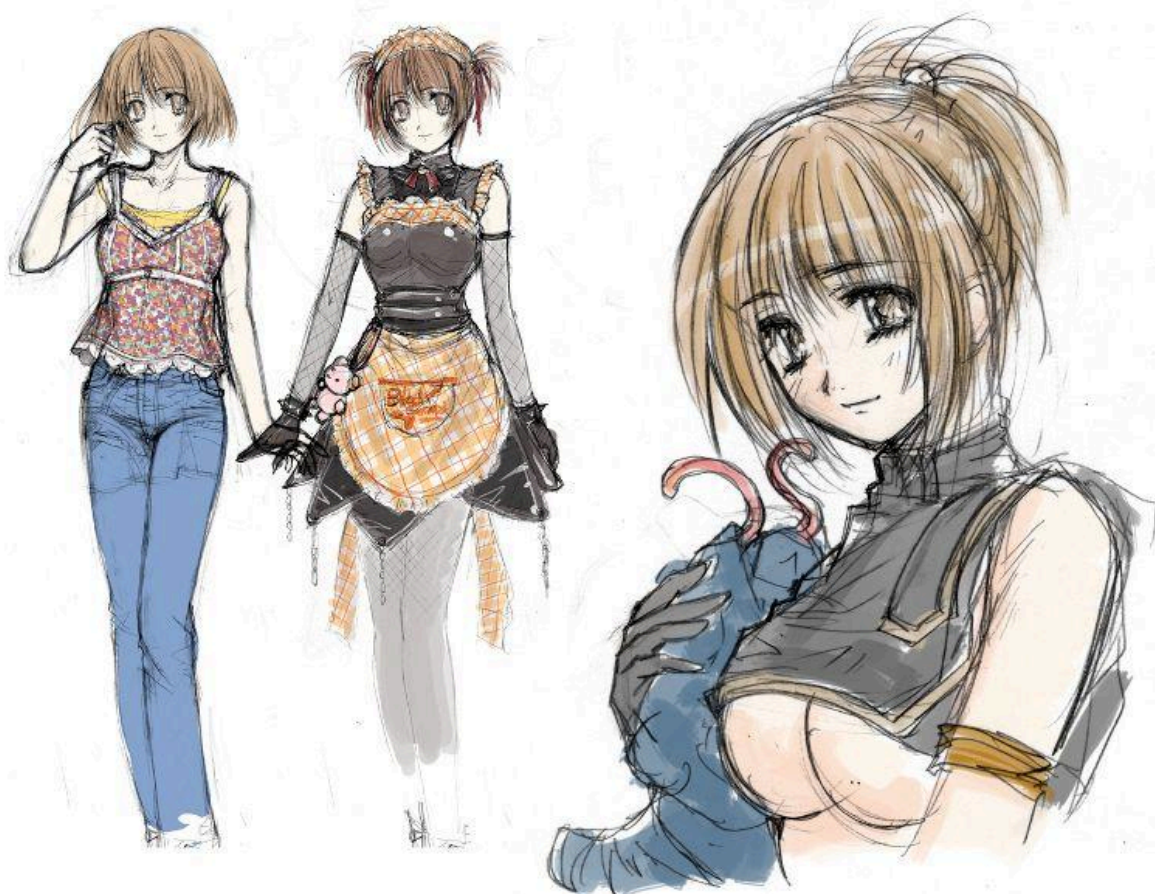
artwork. And I don't mean in terms of staging, I mean something about this looks like it was shot on grainy film. I'm not an artist so I can't say for sure what it is, but I feel it's most obvious in the shading of the clothes; there's this realistic roughness to the fabrics that contrasts wonderfully with the colorful anime aesthetic.

Mushigurui also fixes the problem I have with Mushiai's lack of CGs and backgrounds by having a *lot* of them relative to its short length, with a couple of wallpaper worthy bangers in its climatic hours. Plus, the revisions of the character designs here? Absolute **peak**; I love seeing Yumemi looking mature and confident in her early to mid 20s, and for as much as I love Miyaka's old frilly design, both her office lady and casual sprites here are top notch.

Perhaps the most clear improvement that Mushigurui makes over Mushiai though, is the game resolution. The latter runs at the then-standard 800x600, which is perfectly fine for when it came out, but a bit... erm, questionable these days. The former however runs at 1280x720, which is still beginning to show its age, but is certainly far better in terms of detail. Nevertheless, as always, Magpie makes it look great on modern displays. Download a copy for free, install it, set it to Anime4k for smooth upscaling or a Linear scale for crunchy pixels, and you're on your merry way to good looking low resolution content.

The only thing I can really criticize in Mushigurui's aesthetics is the downgrade in UI. Being made in a very tiny budget and after the Ranba Amuse buyout, the game uses their generic visual and aural design for the System-NNN engine. As someone who first saw this while reading Dasaku, I have... very particular associations with some of these sounds and menus.

An Auditory Extravaganza(?)



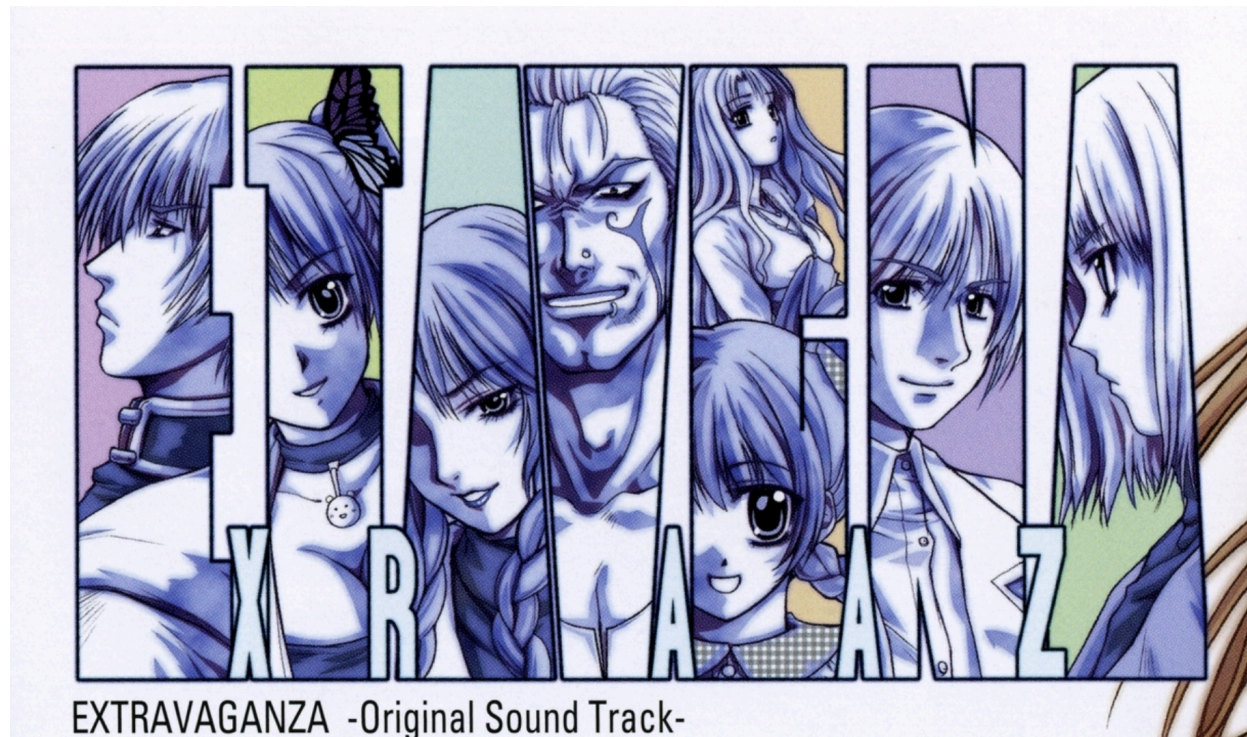
One thing does not change between these two games however, is the quality of the voice acting, or even really the voice actors themselves. By some stroke of luck, Black Cyc managed to keep the *same* seiyuu from Mushitsukai in 2003, all the way through Mushigurui Hen in 2006, and some of them are pretty notable relative to the eroge space.

I already mentioned Haruka Fukai as Yulia earlier, who I absolutely *adore*, but you've also got the likes of Itou Touko playing Yumemi, notable for playing Fuyutsuki Kaname in SMEE's Sugar Style, and channel favorite Sakurai Harumi playing Sasahari Yui, who played Mako in the Doukyuusei Remake and Kiika in Gore Screaming Show.

It's a solid cast I could talk for ages about my appreciation for, but the important thing is that they're all incredible at their roles. Special recognition has to be given to Itou Touko for nailing all three eras of Yumemi's character perfectly. I think the decision to cast only one seiyuu contributes a lot to a feeling of 'consistency' across the whole saga, and the fact she does all three perfectly speaks immensely to her capabilities as a voice actress.

The whole cast has some amazing vocal performances that make the quiet moments feel more resonant, and the powerful moments all the more boisterous; synergizing wonderfully with their characters and the writing. The staff room you unlock after clearing the game not only has some

wonderful commentary from all the other Black Cyc then-employees, but the voice actors as well, who talk about their characters with an infectious glee that shows how passionate they were about this world and setting.



There's another important side to the sound though, and that's the score. Unlike Gore Screaming Show and Gun-Katana though, this wasn't composed by Doctor Hauzer spiritual successor alumni Otonokaze, but rather a two person unit called drops-tone. You may know its first member, alulu-can, for making the opening themes to Ayakashibito and Tokyo Babel, and you may know its second member, John-Nahm, for making the BGM to... Starless... I guess?

Extravaganza's soundtrack is an aural treat that stands out from other visual novel BGM of the time with catchy melodies, endearingly 2000s instrumentation, and a handful of *incredibly* hype tracks. My personal favorite, with exception to one spoiler track, has to be "A Mad Dance of Claw and Fang." It's not only a banger of a battle theme, but a fun dance track on its own that goes hard as hell.

The only problem with the score is the same that the CGs have: there's not enough. While I think it just barely escapes being gratingly repetitive there is *certainly* an overuse of some tracks. Like, the tune that plays for most of Rengo's chapter is used constantly throughout the rest of the game, and there are only *three* different H-scene tracks. For ten hours of H-scenes. And one of them only gets used three or four times!

This lack of tracks does also result in more than a few moments where it seems like they tried to pick whatever fit from what they had, and it... does not always work out. Much as I'd never say

Ban'ya's writing has abrupt tonal shifts, the bounce from a grungy slow metal track to a bouncy happy strolling tune can be so startling that it's almost funny.

What I think everyone remembers about Extravaganza musically isn't the BGM though, with one particular exception anyways, but the vocal themes. I could talk *forever* about them, but I don't want this video to be ten hours long so I digress. What I instead want to iterate is that all of the vocal themes in this series are bangers, even from the very beginning.

Sudden Death R99, Broken Promises, My Precious, Aoki Kodoku; each and every one of those tracks is an awesome banger of varying forms, and each manages to embody different themes and vibes of the series in unique ways – and as a series with complex characters and themes of breaking out of your binds and treading your own path, I'd say those are pretty rad themes to hone in on.

And to discuss those in more detail, I'm *finally* going to be getting into spoiler territory, so if you want to experience this saga for yourself, then skip ahead to the ending segment where I give my concluding thoughts. But before that! I'd like to take a moment to thank all the Patrons, donors, and other cool people that make this possible, and shout out some folks that *you* should check out!

OMAKE: Patreon

Hello heroes, heroines, and hero-nbinaries, and welcome to the part of the video where I write puns so bad my stomach gets upset seconds later! Jokes aside, welcome all to the segment to that time of the video to give life updates, channel updates, shout outs, and appreciate all the donors and sponsors who make content like this possible.

For starters... well, I apologize this one is a bit late again. I bit off **way** more than I could chew here, given that I'm in the final stages of getting all of my belongings boxed up to store for the next while and packing up what I need for travel. Because, for those who haven't seen the updates: *I am GOING BACK to Brazil on 4/20!* ...nice. But seriously, my apartment lease is up and I have a long while left on my tourist visa, so I'll be able to chill out in the state of São Paulo until around September.

Because of that though, I want to try and focus on shorter games for a while. I overworked myself with this, and I want my time there to *not* be filled with 9 to 13 hour work days, *and* I'd like to have weekends back consistently. So expect coverage of some sub-20 hour games for a while, and eventually I'll wean myself back into bigger projects here and there as the year proceeds.

Anywho, as per usual, I wanna take some time to shout out some cool stuff and folks from the community that makes these videos possible, and just things I find neat! And if you'd like to potentially be shouted out, then feel free to drop me a line on Tumblr or Twitter – preferably the latter, since I'm really bad at checking my Tumblr, but I try to be attentive either way.

The first thing I'd like to call attention to is Prof Lily, a games collective run by a couple friends and acquaintances of mine who just released their second visual novel: 31st March, Midnight. It takes less than half an hour to read, so I won't say too much to avoid spoiling it, but as someone who's worked in game development for over 7 years... it is certainly one of the most 'real' and painful things I've played. If you feel disillusioned with creative industries and want catharsis... well, there ya go.

The second person I'd like to shout out is DoujinShinji, a guy who's been making video essays for a long while now - some of which have gotten popular, many of which have stayed obscure. The first one that I saw was his latest work on Kid Chameleon, a *very* silly Mega Drive game I've known for a long time but never took more than a cursory glance at.

Somehow, he manages to make nearly a whole hours worth of analysis on it that stays captivating the entire way through; looking at its' weirdly sadistic design, the odd reception it's gotten over the years, the culture surrounding it, and a whole ton else, all with snappy editing and scripting that makes it a blast to watch. If you want something chill and amusing to check out, I can't recommend it nor his other videos I've seen enough; so go check him out and maybe toss a few bucks his way while you're at it.

And with those two things hopefully popped up in other tabs to check out later, it's time for the good ol' Patreon Q&A! There's not a ton this time, but there is a very big one, so... let's get right into that.

Cuba200611 asked, "Oh, and I forgot to ask, do you have a Discord server by any chance?" Okay, so this is the *big* question of this Q&A. I've had a lot of people ask this, and my answer is... no. Never. Running a community is way too much for me to handle, I don't want to delegate the task to anybody else, and I don't want to deal with the possibility of people having parasocial relationships. I've seen it... wayyyy too much with other community Discords I've been in.

I realize that might be a disappointing answer for some people, especially as it's challenging to find good VN communities that aren't *phobic, but I just can't see myself managing something like that without crumbling under the pressure.

Amlife asks, “Have you ever read or heard about the visual novel Saiaku Naru Saiyaku Ningen ni Sasagu?”

I think I’ve seen it around and thought it looked neat, and… yup, that sure does still look neat! Maybe at some point I’ll check it out, could be cool.

Maddie Hunter asks, “i saw a comment on one of your videos suggesting a video about women in the vn industry, would you consider ever doing a video like that?”

Definitely! That comment has stuck in my mind since I saw it, and I’ve been trying to think of ways I can make it work. It’s unfortunately hard to find history on the industry in general, let alone womens contributions, but… I dunno, maybe a video roughly tracing through some careers and a timeline of games where they got lead roles? There’s potential there.

Now, before we wrap things up, I have one more shoutout to give: and that’s to the sponsor of this video, Very Ok Vinyl! If you haven’t heard of them before, they’re a little company based out of Ontario Canada who sells vinyl records of neato game soundtracks, from indie darlings like A Bag of Milk and Signalis to Japanese hits like Saya no Uta and Rusty.

If you’re a fan of crispy, beautiful analog audio, printed on gorgeous limited edition discs with wonderful sound quality, and creative music from creative games, then they’ve got a whole ton of treats in store for you. Doubly so right now, as all those soundtracks I just mentioned? They’re *all* in stock or on pre-order again, with the previously unavailable ones getting re-presses! So if you missed your chance to pop the chilling ambient tunes of Signalis onto your turntable, or cry to Saya no Uta’s ending songs as they’re blasted on your stereo, then you’ve got another chance to right those wrongs.

And hey, while you’re there, why not check out all the records they’re distributing from other cool brands, too? They’ve got a little bit of everything, from anime like Evangelion to city pop like Piper’s Gentle Breeze, giving even more opportunities to expand your collection with slick tunes. So, thanks again to Very Ok Vinyl for sponsoring this video, and for always being a blast to work with – check em out if you get a chance.

Alrighty! With all that said, I think it’s once again time to wrap up this segment. Again, thank you all *so much* for making these videos possible, and a special thanks to the donors who keep me funded. And if you’d *also* like to have your name on the side with all these other cool people, see videos early sometimes, watch them without cuts, suggest games, get monthly updates, and other neato things, then consider supporting me monthly on Patreon or Ko-Fi, or one time via the latter!

The minimum donation is \$1 USD a month, and you get the same benefits no matter how much you pledge. Making these videos is my full time job, so every little bit counts – and if you can’t or

don't want to donate, then rest assured there'll never be anything but cuts and censors hidden behind a paywall. It's purely for a few small benefits and to feel something warm and fuzzy in your tummy!

Whether or not you give a few bucks, or simply watch, share, comment, subscribe, like, and all those other neat things, your contributions mean just as much to me and are all important to keeping the dream alive. I just wanna see people happy and enjoying what I make, because as stressful as this work can be due to deadlines and the general busy-ness of life leading to pulling extra hours.

So, thank you all so *much*... and let's get back to the show.

(SPOILERS) To Live and Die with the Mushi



Before I start examining the game proper, I wanna be clear that this isn't going to be a comprehensive dive into Extravaganza's whole world. As per usual for my channel, I wanna focus on what interests me - and with forty whole endings, a number of which add little to the story, there's going to be plenty which I glance over. Not just in favor of focusing on what I find to be the most interesting plot beats, but in favor of crafting a coherent narrative as well.

There's two main issues that make any analysis of Extravaganza difficult though. The first is how the main portion of the story is structured in a ladder format; which is to say, there's a canonical path through the main arcs - Youchuu to Mushitsukai to Yumemi - and each of those three have their own non-canon arc splitting off. Youchuu goes to Ageha's arc, Mushitsukai goes

to Nishi's arc, and Yumemi goes to the Jinmu arc... at least, it would, if the Jinmu arc existed in Mushiai.

Instead, Mushigurui takes its place, and more or less usurps Mushiai's epilogue - Seichuu - as the ending to the entire series. Ban'ya claims it so in the staff talk section of the game, and I'm *a/so* gonna say so because I think it does a far better job at capping off the series than any of Seichuu's two endings, and most certainly the secret ending contained within that.

The second problem is the fact that, as I mentioned prior, Mushiai's story is told through a somewhat non-linear format. It's pretty normal for visual novels to have divergent paths, but Mushiai having 40 some-odd endings with sometimes long spanning causality requirements and tons of semi-hidden plot relevant scenes that require retracing your steps, makes an "as it's seen" timeline look like a Pepe Silvia-esque dartboard.

For these two reasons though, I'm going to be examining the game chapter by chapter in the order which makes the most sense for the video, and splicing information in as-needed rather than as-appears. I really just want to do whatever makes the most sense for analyzing the themes I want to analyze, rather than doing what makes a perfect beat by beat summary – because at that point, you might as well just read the game if you know Japanese, or poke JAST USA for a translation since they're the ones with the Black Cyc hookups. Not the sex kind of hookups, I mean. At least I think so?

Rengo is an Idiot (Larval Arc)



As I've described before, Extravaganza's earlier arc is a *tsunami* of an introduction, only somewhat cushioned by the appearance of its concluding moment; Yumemi walking out into the sunset, as the narration promises she will survive; being the very first scene you see. But between following the POV of one of only two definite villains in the game, offering up a gauntlet of grotesque adult scenes, showing some of the most brutal examples of abuse to a person and bug friend possible, and setting up a whole heap of plot beats and characters which come back later in the story, there is a LOT to take in here.

There is, of course, Rengo, who fucks basically everything up for everyone by defecting from the Mushitsukai, failing to defeat one of their agents looking to eliminate him named Sayuri, destroying Yumemi's parents car, then kidnapping Yumemi, torturing her for a month, forcing her to give birth to the Jyuumachuu, defeating Sayuri in another battle, getting her partner Ren on his ass, and finally failing in combat with him before being fatally stabbed by the young lady he kidnapped.

During all of this happening, he regularly collaborates with the mad scientist Dr. Nishi, who's long been fixated on human hybridization. After saving a Russian woman named Yulia by outfitting her with cybernetic parts, following being gravely injured in a war, he soon had his attention turned to the Mushi presented to him by Rengo and other defectors of the Mushitsukai.

With the power they present shown to him, along with their abnormal compatibility with human physiology, he became obsessed with experimentation even at the cost of thousands of human lives, attempting to fuse human flesh with Mushi flesh and creating creatures broadly known as the Gochuuningens; literally meaning... 'a joining of human and insect.' Though some of these are successful as we'll see later, most became grotesque ultraviolent abominations with no mental capacity except for obeying orders and desiring procreation.

Unfortunately, we're shown the wall he's hit with these the second players see them. Perhaps due to the Mushi given to him by Rengo and others being subpar stock, he's run into flaw after flaw: and in the first chapter, it's parts of their bodies violently exploding when they become too excited, demonstrated when Rengo hands Yumemi over to Nishi as a guinea pig, and she becomes covered in their viscera as the creatures ruthlessly assault her.

The only thing which Nishi seems to have *some* level of true success with are developing new varieties of Mushi, but even then, he finds himself unable to make progress past a certain point. These failures, along with his corrupted sense of curiosity, are what lead Nishi to be utterly obsessed with the weird little blue bug guy that Yumemi gave birth to - especially in the arcs where it manages to successfully fuse with her body, and perhaps give a blueprint of the second gen of Gochuuningens.

Of course, the real star of the show here - even if it doesn't quite seem as such at first - is Yumemi. The amount of shit she puts up with here is *staggering*; being locked in a cell for a month, assaulted multiple times, forcibly impregnated, passed around people who only see her as an object, and having her son beat right in front of her.

His persistence in coming back, realized thanks to his abnormally incredible abilities to regenerate his own flesh, is one of the only things that keeps Yumemi going throughout all of this, as the bond they form becomes dear to her - dear enough for her to kill Rengo when the opportunity appears, leading to one of the most memorable CGs in the game.



This shot here, of Yumemi naked, covered in Rengo's blood, looking on with crying empty eyes, is the moment that I knew this game was going to be something incredible. The unsettling angle, the lack of background music, the way the narration emphasizes the sheer adrenaline of the act and the subsequent fall; it's some utterly incredible horror that makes way for a heartwarming CG teased in the very first scene of the game.

It rounds out a startling introduction that, up until then, left me... a little bit concerned as to where this game was going to go. Even though I knew going in it would start to focus on Yumemi at some point or another, I can't deny I was a little baffled about the fact I was following the perspective of some pathetic jackass who fails at everything and takes pride in beating women - but with the context of the full game in store, I honestly think it was a brilliant move.

Something that particularly stands out to me is how effectively his existence is used to lie to the player about what the Mushitsukai are. By positioning Rengo as a fugitive, and by showing us how much cathartic *g/lee* in abusing others, all of his actions initially feel framed as a result of him being a particularly bad person rather than being - at least in part - borne out of values instilled in him by an abusive system.

This is further reinforced by the first practicing Mushitsukai you meet being Sayuri, who stands out from the rest as showing emotions - a subtle quirk which becomes **extremely** important in Mushigurui. Without knowing any of this until later on, Sayuri appears like almost something of a hero to root for, and Ren later coming in to avenge her not only feels satisfying, but falsely sets up the expectation that there's going to be some sort of hero of this story on the Mushitsukai's side.

In reality, there are no true heroes on either side of the conflict; it's only those without allegiance that could be said to be such. The three following canon chapters, along with Mushigurui, work to slowly dismantle the Mushitsukai side of this by unraveling the secrets of their society. And the two deviating chapters of the main story arc work to explore the other, equally guilty side of the conflict: Jinmu.

Both Ageha and Nishi's chapters take a deep dive into the dark and twisted ways that the corporation and its lead shadow scientist attempt to make their discoveries and acquire the people and information they want; teaching a bit about the Mushitsukai by contrast, as well as the way in which they're viewed by people who are wholly foreign to their culture and ways.

Brief Normalcy (Pupae Arc)



But before we get to that, we first have to contend with what happened to Yumemi after escaping Rengo's grasp in the Youchuu Arc. After killing him and fleeing with her son, Yumemi lived life for a short time as a homeless person; stealing from stores and taking refuge in various parts of the nearby forest to make it from night to night.

It was during one of these escapades, however, that two lucky events happened: the first was running into a young man who recognized the Mushi she was carrying around in her backpack and sought to give her an apartment to live in with her fees covered. The second was walking by the cafe Anzu, run by the friendly Anzu Kagurazaka.

Recognizing Yumemi as a girl on the run with no-one around to care for her, she sought to give her two things: first, was somewhere to be and help out so she wouldn't be alone in her apartment all day, if she wanted to be out. And the second, was someone to watch over and care for her; to ensure she had someone she could feel safe and warm around.

In a game all about found family, the relationship that Yumemi and Anzu have has to be one of the most endearing. Despite her not having a whole lot of content in the game by volume, almost every single scene with her is heartwarming; bantering back and forth with each other in a way that you can tell is borne out of a deep trust and bond.

She gives a light to look to in the games darkest moments; a safe place you know Yumemi will always be welcomed in, even when things take a turn for the worse. And that ability to give light is, broadly, one of Extravaganza's greatest strengths in storytelling. Not only does it manage to space out the darkest moments with bits of happiness here and there, but it gives you little bits of foundation like this here and there to hold onto.

Thanks to the help of Anzu though, Yumemi finds herself able to lead something close to a normal life. She works a job she loves at the cafe, she has a comfortable apartment, and she has a precious little son that waits for her to come back from work every day, so they can snuggle up and watch TV together.

Where things start to take a turn is the sudden appearance of a few *very* notable people at the cafe. I've already mentioned Yuuto; the sweetest boy, the bestest of non-Mushi boys; but there's Miyaka Jinmu and her best friend Yui as well, whose existence seems to startle Anzu... and appears a bit odd to Yumemi, being a rather rich girl for dining at a middle-of-nowhere cafe like Anzu's. Nevertheless, the three all make decent acquaintances.

However, it's the appearance of Ageha Kujou as a part-timer that starts to change everything. Bright, chipper, and cheery, she seems like a lovely girl... who's *actually* secretly an agent of Jinmu, with a past of being severely bullied that all took a turn one day, when a *certain* young girl handed her Mushi to help get revenge, and had her entire life upturned once Nishi took notice of the sudden insect related ruckus at her school.

She's one of the most fascinating examples of how this game uses its non-linear narrative to develop characters in diverse ways, as... really, her entire backstory isn't told to us until presumably *after* you've finished her route. And that route, without that context, is one of the most ridiculous rides I've ever seen - but with it... well it's still ridiculous, but it hits hard.

Unfortunately for Yumemi, she and another agent of Jinmu begin working in secret to resurrect her past and drag her back into the world of the Mushitsukai, first becoming clear when, late one night, Yumemi is stalked to her apartment - and finds an envelope slipped under her door, containing doctored photographs of her being violated by Mushi just as she was all those years ago.

Yet another night soon after, she's suddenly attacked by a grotesque figure only seen for a flash; fended off by the sudden appearance of a Mushitsukai... Ren Satoru, her assigned guardian. Over the next few days, he explains the situation: with Jinmu going after her for possessing the Jyuumachuu, and the village being invested in the outcome of its existence, there's now a necessity for keeping her guarded until they know what to do with her.

With his watchful eye, things seem to go well for a few days. She gets closer to Ageha, Miyaka, and especially Yuuto through dates with him, learning of his passion for archaeology if the whip didn't give it away. But then, this peace is suddenly interrupted at night when Yumemi and Ren

are attacked in her apartment by the Gochuuningen... which is where *the* most major divergence of story happens in the game.

If Yumemi, with her son in hand, clings by Ren's side even as he battles the Gochuuningen, then Yulia shows up out of nowhere to confirm the existence of the Jyuumachuu; and upon doing so, enters combat with Ren over its ownership, eventually retreating when she finds herself overpowered by the master Mushitsukai. Alternately, if Yumemi attempts to try and escape, she runs into one of the beasts alone and is gravely wounded from a single attack, losing her right arm in the process and passing out.

Waking up to Ren's watchful eye in a hotel some time later with no memory of that night, she's mortified by the sight of her arm not only missing... but regenerating; forming grotesque strands of intertwining flesh, which Ren explains is the Jyuumachuu fusing to save her. Though its consciousness is subservient to Yumemi's, it still maintains some sort of independent mind; and when fully fused, will not only become indistinguishable from her own flesh, but a powerful weapon should she choose to learn how to wield it.

Regardless of which form Mushi-kun takes, the two inevitably end up in the hotel, where Ren begins to explain the myths of the Jyuumachuu. Known under many names, its existence is that of a legend in the village; believed by elders to bring destruction when under the rule of the Mushihiime (or Insect Princess); a woman foretold to bond with one Mushi above all others.

Because of the startling similarities to this myth, Ren can't find it in himself to let Yumemi and her son walk freely in this world, and gives her two choices. First, she could join the Mushitsukai, potentially growing into one of their most powerful assassins. Or, second, she can hand him over to be sealed or killed, ending her ties to the clan and allowing her to live a normal life in the only way they see acceptable.

Determined not to part with her son, Yumemi chooses to join forces with Ren, and forms an uneasy alliance with him to undergo training and aide in his mission to kidnap the daughter of the Jinmu Corporation's CEO, as she may prove to be a vital lead as to the location of one Dr. West and what all Jinmu is doing. And thus, begins the Mushitsukai Arc.

Shonen Time (Mushitsukai Arc)



Alongside the Epilogue, this chapter is by far the shortest of the game, and sees Yumemi learning how to control the power of the Jyuumachuu with the help of Ren, as well as being exposed to more and more of the customs of their cultures. One of these is how women undergo special training that involves them being violated by Mushi to prepare them for when they will inevitably want to bare them; brought up by Ren for... absolutely no reason honestly, he just mentions to Yumemi that she got abused and says “y’know, where I’M from, that’s just what everyone has to deal with!”

Yumemi, being rightfully baffled and pissed at not only Ren’s complete lack of respect for her trauma, but at the way this “training” exists, at how men are exempt from this training, **AND** at how it’s assumed all women want to bare bug children, walks out on him; her mind clouded with confusion and frustration at the cruelty of the Mushitsukai and Ren’s insensitivity.

To say he’s a complete and utter dipshit when it comes to abuse is an understatement. Because of his emotional detachment, he has zero concept of how to handle the subject gracefully; probably best exemplified in a scene somehow worse than this, where he shows up to Yumemi’s workplace while she’s busy. His reason? To interrogate her on her past for his investigation, giving absolutely no care to the fact she’s busy and probably does not want to have details of her assault dug up.

It's a very uncanny mirror of the lack of care that's often shown to real life SA victims by authorities; whether that be police officers, medical authorities, or even community leaders as happened to me. And I think the fact the game not only portrays this very real aspect of a lot of victims stories, but does so while portraying it as undignified and violating on part of the authorities, is another great example of how Ban'ya understands the subject.

Where walking out on Ren due to this leads her though, is either back to the storehouse the next day, or wandering aimlessly into downtown... and into a sudden reunion with Yuuto. After inviting her to his apartment, she begins to explain everything: the details of her kidnapping, her involvement with the Mushitsukai, the existence of her son, and her supposed inability to ever go back to the normal world no matter his insistence; swearing she can't return anymore.

And as she attempts to leave, saying what she believes his her last goodbye to him, Yuuto stops her with a kiss, holds her tight, and asks her: does she really want this? Regardless of whether or not it's possible, does she *really* not want to return? And Yumemi, through her tears, answers honestly... that she wants to live like a normal girl... and Yuuto says that even if she can't do it now, she *can* come back, and he'll be by her side until that day.

It's one of the most heartfelt and painful scenes in the game; one which reinforces Yuuto's willingness to stick with the person he loves, even as he doesn't fully understand what's going on with them. All he knows is that he wants to stay by her side, and does; willingly coming back to Ren's hideout where he and Yumemi are being housed.

Throughout the remainder of this route in the arc, and for the entirety of the following canonical chapter, Yuuto acts as somewhat of a grounding force that provides Yumemi a warm reprieve from Ren's coldness. But this desire to stay by her *a/so* leads to him being unable to leave the sight of the Mushitsukai, with Ren believing that he knows too much to be able to go back to normal society - thus, leading into the next chapter, where they venture into the forest of the Mushitsukai together: Yumemi Hen.

Before we can get to that though, we need to talk about the two breaks on the ladder, starting with what happens when Yumemi *doesn't* have her drive to live normally realized by Yuuto. Without that, she instead becomes Ren's new sidekick in training and helps with his objectives of capturing Miyaka, and finding the man who's been experimenting on their Mushi: Dr. West.

Regardless of whether or not Yumemi is a party to any of this, Ren *will* go ahead with capturing her and infiltrating Nishi's manor in almost every route, but the only paths through this arc which lead into other arcs have her breaking off before she can help. In the case of what leads to Nishi's chapter, a conversation Yumemi has with Ren about a Jinmu scientist experimenting on Mushi reminds her of her past meetings with one Nishi - a name Ren *a/so* knows West by, leading the two to infiltrate his manor building... and being forced to fight the Gochuuningan when they're caught.

Deciding there's no way he can save the both of them, Ren *immediately* bolts with Yumemi struggling to catch up, eventually being left alone. Overwhelmed and quickly defeated, she wakes up the next day in a mysterious yet familiar dining hall to the company of a familiar face who has no interest in letting the owner of the Jyuumachuu go...

The Maniac Mansion (Nishi Arc)



And so, we enter the first arc of the game that *really* starts laying the themes on heavy and recontextualizing past events. Not only do we learn about the second main villain of the game here, but we finally get parts of Ageha's past, more on Nishi's motivations and the depths of his experiments, and how powerful Yumemi's little baby boy can be when fused into her body – *especially* after she loses her legs in a fight early on and they *also* become part-Mushi!

Above all though, this arc is really the one that fleshes Yulia out as a character. Mirroring Ren's commitment to his superiors, Yulia - up to this point - has only ever really been seen as an agent of Nishi's will. Where he needs a combatant, she's sent out; where he needs a maid, she works to clean; and where he may need an extra hand for research, she can be called upon. No matter what, Yulia offers Nishi her aid, even if she doesn't always agree with him... and even if she isn't treated favorably by his compatriots.

I've already mentioned Ageha as someone who works under him, and honestly, her worst offense is just being understandably bratty and not so great at following orders to a T. But there's another person: Shirou Kitabatake. A respected university student, friend of Yuuto, and an absolute scumbag of a man, Shirou is someone who gleefully indulges in all of the misogynistic and brutal excesses his position of power grants him, all while hiding it from his superior and maintaining a good image.

He's also one of the only instances of Nishi successfully managing to fuse Mushi into somebody, with his body containing numerous unique creatures that he can command at will; first demonstrated to the player in a scene where he performs mandatory maintenance on Yulia to keep her cyborg body functioning... and takes advantage of the opportunity to assault her.

Yumemi, glancing upon this, walks into the room as soon as the act is finished, and scares the shit out of the little piss baby by bearing her claw at her. Unwilling to see another woman be abused like she was, even as Yulia claims she's okay with it because it's part of 'her job,' she manages to talk Nishi into letting her take over maintenance duties just to keep Yulia from facing more disgrace.

It's over the next few sessions that Yumemi begins to understand Yulia and Nishi's ties more. She clings to him not necessarily because she agrees with everything he does, but because she feels a sense of obligation to him for being the one that saved her life. After all, it's his research into cybernetic augmentation that's allowed her to stay alive, so she couldn't dare question it; even if she *is* uncomfortable with the way his career has gone since.

Yumemi sees right through this, and repeatedly points out the flaws in her logic. It's one thing to be appreciative of someone for saving you, but it's another to go so far that you turn yourself into what Yumemi sees as a slave; giving away your freedom, your morals, your boundaries, and your will, accepting horrible torture because of a sense of duty. Is that really how she wants to live? Can she really accept that the person she's helping is someone who maims and tortures people for his own scientific curiosity?

Though she struggles to move past this long-instilled sense of responsibility, what finally leads to it being broken is a chain of events kicked off by Nishi informing Yumemi that Rengo may very well still be alive; kept in stasis within a hidden room. His reasoning for maintaining him isn't at all complicated; as a man of science seeking answers, he merely wants to hear from the source... *'who killed you?'*

After hearing of this, Yumemi asks Yulia about it during one of their maintenance sessions, and is given confirmation that he is indeed alive – and with Yumemi's insistence, Yulia aids her in locating the dilapidated basement. Mortified by the sight she sees; of a room lined with the decaying bodies of women forced to bear Mushi until their bodies gave out; Yulia sets not even a foot in, leaving Yumemi to push through the room on her own.

And within that room, filled with the stench of decay and scattered papers containing the theories behind the mad doctor's horrifying projects, lays another room hiding a single pod: the body of Rengo held in stasis, grotesquely morphed through unknown experiments. And in a brutal, unrelenting flash, that body is no more – the life of the man who took Yumemi's life, taken by her for good.

As Yumemi handles her task, Yulia acts on the only thing she knows to be right at that time, and confronts Nishi directly. Now knowing depths of his research she previously couldn't have imagined, she decides she cannot stand by nor let live someone who has lost all sight of his once admirable goals. And in his last moments, all he can do is deliver a soliloquy about who he was; a simple scientist who dedicated himself to answering the questions of this world he wanted to know at any cost. Even the most benign... the most pointless... such as learning straight from the source, *who killed Rengo*.

With the corpse of her abuser in pieces, Nishi's life force severed, Shirou killed moments after them, and Ageha missing in action, Yulia and Yumemi depart the mansion together to live a peaceful life. No plans, no goals; simply wandering and seeing what the life they'd both been denied has to offer together, as a pair of transhuman bisexuals.



As the single truly 'good' ending this arc has to offer, 'Living without a Plan' is such a damn solid one that I couldn't really ask for more. Not only does it offer some fantastic yuri, with Yulia and Yumemi making an adorable couple of dorks, but it expands greatly on the key themes of free will and solidarity amongst all those who are oppressed through Yulia's arc.

Having been in her situation for so long, and being someone who wouldn't be here were it not for Nishi, Yulia can't see any way for her life to go forward that does not involve Nishi being present. After all, he's saved her; and he himself is not a directly abusive person to her, being shown to show concern for her and never putting her in situations she isn't theoretically equipped for. There's even hints that, despite Nishi being primarily aro/ace, Yulia might be the only person he's felt something for.

The problem is in what Nishi *doesn't* do. Ever since saving her, he's made no attempt to help her form an independent life in the outside world – no friends, no schooling, no activities, nothing. Her entire life is situated within the manor and conducting errands for it, focused on her work with a feverish dedication that he does nothing to calm – and that manor does *not* treat her well.

Both Ageha and Shirou seem to view her as lifeless due to being a cyborg, and Shirou regularly takes advantage of her, knowing she'll never tell because of how she internalizes that abuse as just a part of her job. A job, for the record, she doesn't even fully understand, as Nishi hides an immense amount of his work from her, reaffirmed in each ending where she discovers the Morgue.

What allows her to finally break free from all of this is the support from another person has *also* escaped something horrible. As a fellow victim of abuse who wants others not to suffer, Yumemi is perfectly positioned in the story to push Yulia to really start thinking about what's happening to her, and whether or not she's *really* okay with everything happening.

There's one particular dialogue with regards to this that sticks with me. After one of their maintenance sessions, Yumemi questions Yulia's logic as always and says she seems like nothing more than a slave – Yulia says Yumemi only thinks this because she doesn't understand the kind of connection Yulia has to Nishi. And to that, Yumemi says, 'it's *because* I don't know it that I can see what's happening.'

I think there's something to be said for how closely a lot of this maps to the ways people growing up in abusive households rationalize their experiences, and eventually - hopefully - break out. Like Yulia, I felt I had an obligation to those in authority where I was; not as life savers in my case, but as the people responsible for giving birth to me to begin with.

Regardless of whatever happened and would happen, I could not change the fact that my parents were the people who brought me into this world; kept me sheltered and fed; and I was reminded of this any time I had even an inkling something might not be right. For a long time, I excused everything with that reasoning; strengthened by a hopelessness in the back of my

mind, as I had no friends near me, no school, nothing to fall back onto. My life was my household, and escaping was unthinkable.

What broke me out of it was people I knew online who would listen to me describe some part of my life, and point out that something wasn't *right* about it. It was people listening to me excuse horrible things as 'just how it is,' and asking me: are you really happy with this? And even if I didn't want to believe anything was wrong at first, even if I thought these people just didn't understand what connection I had to my family... it got through to me, and I started thinking.

Admittedly, things haven't gone perfectly since then. But even in the worst of times, I've at least been able to take pride that I made it out with the help of others who simply wanted to see someone suffer no longer. And I've been able to hold onto a hope, that no matter what, escape is never impossible when you have people by your side to help you see a light.

Also, and I couldn't figure out a good way to segue into this, but I just want to talk for a moment about how relatable Yulia is as an autistic person. Her struggles to understand jokes, her very literal and forward manner of speaking, and difficulty with social cues, reminded me a lot of myself - as well as the bullying others give her for those things feeling sadly familiar.

I think it makes Yumemi's care even more heartwarming, as she's someone who sees all of her little quirks and knows from those that Yulia is far more than a cold inhuman robot. The wonderful passion-filled taste of her cooking, her subtle expressions, her tiny gestures, her often kind speech; Yumemi picks up on it all and understands that, just because she isn't super loud or talkative, doesn't mean she's without feeling.

It says a lot that at no point are any of her quirks played for laughs to have the audience ostracize her; at worst they're jested about to call her cute, and most often, they're highlighted as examples of her very human warmth. And plus, when Yulia *does* tell a joke or do something for comedic or ironic effect, it's some of the funniest shit in the game.

It's surprising just how heartwarming this route is by the end, because this chapter has some pretty brutal spots – not surprising given it was originally called Zetsubou Hen; aka, the Despair Arc. It's name was only changed when it wasn't fucked up *enough* to Ban'ya to earn that name, which like – really Ban'ya, are womens heads being pulverized not **despair** enough for you?

Oh yeah, speaking of head pulverization, 死を越えた少女 or The Girl Who Surpassed Death, is by far one of the coolest bad endings in the game. It sees Yumemi opting *not* to crash in on Shirou's party, but instead joining forces with him to torture Yulia - which, I guess isn't unfair, because she's shot at Yumemi multiple times by this point - before they both decide to go after Ageha, each having their own bone to pick.

This ends... disastrously, as Yumemi gets fatally injured in their ganking gone wrong, and her body quickly starts to regenerate the wound - leading Shirou to report it to Nishi, and soon after becoming subjects to a body of tests. Tied up next to Ageha and stripped bare, the two are

tortured for weeks to see how a similarly aged and sized human body responds to injuries versus Yumemi's half-human body, only ending when both of them have their heads blown off by a high speed sphere.

Some unknown time later, Yumemi - to her own surprise - wakes up with her head and brain fully regenerated. Realizing what happened and the implications of it for her own mortality, she begins to walk again... but not as a human, instead a God amongst men. She is, as the title says, The Girl Who Surpassed Death.

It's an interesting ending just in how it subverts eroguro as a concept. Rather than showing that kind of brutal, inhuman torture as a terrifying end to life, it instead comes back against the people who inflict it; creating a God who will, presumably, wreak havoc upon those that tried to destroy her. *Presumably*, as what happened after this ending was cut from the game.

Still, though, I think Nishi's arc on the whole is one of the most interesting in the game. Even many of the bad endings here are interesting for how they trend towards showing Yumemi acting as a villain due to desiring control in her life which she lost long ago. And the good ending is one of the best in the game, certainly much happier than what Ageha gets.

Two Normal Girls (Ageha Arc)



Yes, it is *finally* time to get into what is by far the weirdest arc of the game: featuring two very messed up girls entering a lie of a relationship, detachable penises, gay bug baby moms, and a serial murder case explained to the player by a series of notes straight out of a Resident Evil game. When I said this game had it all, I really meant it had it all.

What kicks this whole chain of events off is a decision made during the Youchuu Arc; wherein, if Yumemi opts *not* to run away to an alley or tag along with Ren when first encountering the Gochuuningen, she bolts for the one safe place she knows: AnzU. And en route to it, she meets with a rather surprised Ageha, who takes Yumemi in without hesitation. The two begin to talk casually to help take her mind off of whatever unexplained thing had happened, which quickly becomes sexual when the two enter a bath together; ending the night with a loving kiss.

After a day of calm following the storm, Yumemi reveals to Ageha her ties to the Mushi and her son; who, in turn, reveals to Yumemi that she's being paid by a researcher at the Jinmu Corporation to try out new varieties of them. By whom she doesn't specify (it's Nishi), but it's not particularly important to Yumemi, who's just happy that the person she's beginning to fall in love with can be trusted with her biggest secret.

And so, for the next few days, Ageha and Yumemi have kinky sex fueled by the power of detachable penis granting Mushi; lent for longer than Nishi initially intended after Ageha makes a deal with him behind Yumemi's back to give away the Jyuumachuu for a week of research that will totally not hurt it in exchange for extra time. Yumemi is initially *very* hesitant to accept this, but she eventually does... which proves to be her worst mistake.

One day, after a night of passionate loving sex, Yumemi wakes up feeling ill... and fails penis inspection day, as her cock just *won't come off!* Ageha seems stunned and confused at this revelation and promises Yumemi that the mysterious researcher will have a cure for her – but knowing Ageha's true allegiances, and that researcher's goals... you can see where this is going.

Yumemi has in fact, not fallen ill with a cold or anything, nor has her detachable penis become parasitic, but she's instead being injected with Mushi poison by Ageha, who's finally enacted the last steps of her plans to capture Yumemi for Nishi, and to ruin her life along the way.

She uses Mushi to brainwash Yuuto, burns down Yumemi's apartment, and attempts to get her sacked from her work, before finally handing her deathly ill body off to Nishi for experimentation. Everything that Yumemi had known about Ageha was a lie; a ploy just to be able to accomplish her job for Nishi... but why go this spiteful extra mile? Just what was her motive?



家に居れば、いずれは帰ってくるのだから、少女が
悲しげな表情を浮かべる理由がよく分からなかった。

Well. To expand on what I mentioned briefly earlier, Ageha did not have a happy childhood. Her parents were often absent, and at school, she was a regular victim of harassment, being subject to everything from teasing over the size of her chest to downright sexual assault, leading her to be a scared and resentful child. This all changed one day, when on a walk, she met a *certain* runaway wielder of Mushi in the forest.

After hearing Ageha's story, she hands her a cylinder of Mushi she had stolen from Rengo after his death and tells her to open it when she gets bullied to fight back. And upon doing so at school, a *massive* commotion ensued; one which subsequently barred her from ever living a normal life, and which also garnered the attention of Nishi. Left with no other choice, she accepts his offering of becoming a paid guinea pig to try out new varieties of the very same creatures which stole her normal life from her.

From then on, she developed a hatred for the Mushi and the Mushitsukai; which Nishi's other cohort, Shirou, capitalizes on after they're given a job to capture Yumemi and her mysterious Mushi, riling her up for his own delight by feeding her a false story of Yumemi's past, which paints her as a perfect happy rich girl that co-exists peacefully with her Mushi friend, working at a cafe because she just loves life *that much*.

Filled with jealousy, envy, and rage at this woman for living the life she wishes she could have, Ageha makes it her personal duty to make Yumemi suffer and feel what she's felt. And though she learns the truth before it's too late in every other chapter; realizing how much of a fool she'd been for not even thinking to talk to Yumemi about herself; she isn't granted that mercy here...

まあ、それならそれでいい。
私自身、未だに信じられないことを含めてこれを書いているのだから。
とにかく、今の私にできる事は祈ることだけだ。
彼女が無事であるように。
アゲハ 君を愛している

南優斗 

After almost a year of living peacefully, everything changes. As described in a journal written by her then-boyfriend, found by investigators years after the incident, bodies began piling up one day around the estate of Nishi. All people Ageha knows, killed in varying ways. No one understands why, and no one can find the killer. The town becomes engulfed in fear, and Ageha begins to socially withdraw.

Eventually, it's decided the only place safe for them to be is in Nishi's estate, protected by Yulia. Even this proves worthless, as her corpse is soon discovered in the basement. Nishi leaves his room for nothing but food, yet even that ends up too much. With only two left alive and their fate certain, the final page of the journal ends on a solemn note:

"Regardless, all I can do now is wish. Wish, for the safety of my girlfriend. I love you, Ageha. - Yuuto"

Before they even know it, the two find themselves in a dark, cold room; awoken by a voice they never thought they would hear again... and Ageha's senses sharpened by the sounds of her boyfriend's body being pulverized, screaming for mercy... only able to see a faint glimmer of the figure responsible. *A disfigured Yumemi.*

For weeks, she tortures Ageha for everything; lying, selling her out, and leading her to become a guinea pig with a now inhuman body. And during all of this, Ageha begins to realize just how much of a mistake she had made, as one of her last conversations with Nishi was about Yumemi's past – forcing her to realize that she not only created her own worst enemy, but terrorized a woman who suffered *just as much as she did.*

The only bright spot in this, is Ageha eventually realizing she really *did* love Yumemi. A truth which Yumemi wants to be real, but believes can never be acted on. No matter how much she wants to go back, no matter how much she wants to be normal again – as a murderer, as an inhuman creature – she can no longer go back to being a part of society. And yet, somehow... the two manage to find a way to live. Even if they can no longer be accepted by the world, they can at least create their own; with their own peace, raising dozens of Mushi children together.

The most interesting thing about this route is how it shows the ways traumatized and disadvantaged people can be manipulated to do *horrible* shit. If you've lived a life stripped of all power, then it's not at all abnormal to desire that power back – and other people, whether for their own gains or not, can influence someone towards believing revenge and further damage is the path to growth.

Basically, it's cycles of abuse; but what makes it unique here is how the gameplay converges with this theme. If you play this route right after Youchuu and Mushitsukai, like it appears on the chapter selection menu, then you'll be stripped of basically all the relevant context that explains why Ageha does everything she does. Things seem normal at first, then bam: penis inspection failure, secret Jinmu agent, apparently someone lied to Ageha, then bug baby moms.

But as you move through the story in order, you start to get inklings that something *isn't right*, with that absolute bombshell involving Shirou dropped on you by him towards the mid-way point of Yumemi Hen. Alternately though, and far more impactfully, there's another path through Yumemi Hen in which she tries to open a dialog with Ageha to get to know her, responding that it might be 'worth knowing what it's like for other side;' i.e., a Mushitsukai. Which Yumemi responds to like... "wait, what did you mean by this?"

It's a fantastic scene that shows how talking to people you hate based on some perception of them can lead you to realize just how unfounded that hate *is*, and how much you may have in common with those you least expect. Like, if you're familiar with stories of people being deradicalized from extremist right-wing ideology, a very common thread in those stories is them talking with someone they don't realize is trans or biracial or something, or being helped by them in a time of need, and suddenly starting to question why they disliked them.

This is, oddly enough, something I've actually seen with my own channel. I've had multiple people who said they used to be uncertain of or downright hostile towards trans people reconsider their beliefs after watching my videos. Because they were curious to learn about some game or another, and my videos happen to be stuffed with personal diatribes where I mention I'm trans some 40 minutes in, they stuck through it all and realized... "hey wait, these people are actually *okay*."

Being an open, empathetic person, and doing random acts of kindness to people when it's safe to do so, can have profound impacts on people's lives. It's part of why I don't really try to hide that I'm trans when talking to strangers – if I'm having a good conversation with them, it becomes relevant to bring up, and I'm in a safe environment, I do just openly discuss it. And I've been thanked *multiple* times for it, because many times, those people had some confusions that could have easily led them down a very bad rabbit hole.

It's themes and ideas like this that really make playing through all of Extravaganza worthwhile, even the noncanon parts. While I think the main story is the best part of the game overall, you'd be missing out on a lot if you *only* followed that. Speaking of which!

The Forest Arc™ (Yumemi Arc)



Well friends, we are *officially* back on track with the canon path. After Yuuto gets dragged into the world of the Mushitsukai by Ren with fresh trainee Yumemi, they *immediately* get lost in the woods. And by that, I mean just Yumemi and Yuuto, as Ren recklessly abandons the two of them to fend for themselves as a trial of attrition. No reason why, no explanation, just fucks off to his own place and asks them to survive in woods lined with illusionary magic – but with context from other routes, we know he's off kidnapping Miyaka and stealing documents from Nishi.

As expected from the final main arc in the game, it's by far the most significant; attempting to tie together every loose end and setup the epilogues. It's also where Yumemi and Yuuto's relationship develops the most, as the two, stranded alone, are forced to learn more about each other than they ever could have imagined, and share beautiful moments together – gazing at a gorgeous hidden pond, sharing warmth on cold nights, and so on.

It *also* provides us with a lot of context on the way the Mushitsukai live and how difficult their life is; from finding children crammed into a storehouse eating Mushi, to seeing a number of their corpses piled up next to a river, with only a single survivor. That one survivor, who Yumemi and Yuuto work together to keep from dying, becomes a *very* important character later on. But for the most part, this first half of the arc is them becoming closer partners and linking up with the other cast members who got caught up in this fiasco.

This notably includes Ageha, who gets kidnapped by Ren while on a mission for Nishi, and quickly becomes an uneasy ally; connected to the soon-to-be-couple by a drive to find a way out of the forest. Which they do thanks to Yumemi's intuition, and it's from here is where the story begins to seriously deviate depending on whether or not Mushi-kun melded with Yumemi or is still alive as a little bug fella.

If he is, then Ren immediately greets the group, surprised they manage to escape – and states that eliminating Yumemi is necessary, as the Mushitsukai have decided her existence, one which bears strong resemblance to the myth of the Mushi-hime, is too dangerous to allow. Jumping into action, Mushi-kun distracts Ren as Yulia steps in with a group of Gochuuningen to kill the other Mushitsukai waiting to assassinate the group, then escorting the group to a hotel where Nishi awaits.

It's here that Ageha and Yumemi manage to reconcile, and Nishi gives Yumemi a briefing on what's going on. While they were trapped in the forest, Ren completed his objective of capturing Miyaka Jinmu, and thus, Jinmu began a rescue operation to retrieve her. Unfortunately, making it into the forest isn't an easy matter, as that illusionary magic it's enchanted with exists *explicitly* so no one but those who know the way can go in or out.

It's both a way to self-isolate and act as a jail for kidnapped peoples, and Jinmu's goal is to use whatever means necessary to bust it open; and Yumemi as well has resolved to join in; not just to save Miyaka, but to save her son, too. And so, Yumemi - with Yuuto being pushed to stay

behind for his own safety and Yui Sasahara tagging along - ventures off into the forest, before eventually catching up with Ageha and making her way towards Miyaka's cell.

The alternative to this path, if Mushi-kun has melded, cuts this whole sequence of events short, with the group walking out to the sounds of Ren fighting Yulia in the distance... with Yui by her side, and some Gochuuningen taking blows from Ren. Immediately, the group puts together that this not only means that Ren has succeeded in his mission of kidnapping Miyaka, but that the illusionary magic of the forest may exist to jail people – and thus, Miyaka has to be contained within.

Either way, Yumemi and Ageha find not Miyaka in any cells where Ageha had remembered there being jailhouses, but a giant slain spider; the same which watched over Ageha, and left when Ren went to monitor Miyaka. And who's there to greet them after this but Shirou, acting bizarrely friendly and mysteriously aware of not only Miyaka's absence, but *exactly* where she went!

Yumemi *immediately* figures out that Shirou is not only the one that killed the spider, but transported Miyaka as well – which he confirms, and explains was part of his job given to him by Nishi. It's also by his hand that Ageha got kidnapped, as he leaked her location to the Mushitsukai to learn where their jailhouses are, *and* as previously mentioned, that he lied about Yumemi's backstory to her. Oh, and he's also the one who doctored those photos of Yumemi, as if he wasn't already hateable enough.

As he gets ready to fight, Ageha offers to take the wheel so Yumemi can go and find Miyaka - and after doing so and leaving, she sees Yulia and Ren engaged in combat, only broken off once Miyaka yells at them how pointless it is. Ren, of course, responds by attacking Miyaka, which Yumemi scolds him for; yelling at him to think for himself for even a *second*, because if he did that rather than obey orders, he'd realize how pointless continuing this battle is now.

But of course, Ren is dedicated to his cause, refusing to let someone who knows about their world go - even as Jinmu's operation begins in earnest, with Gochuuningen wreaking havoc on the Mushitsukai as these two speak. With him turning his sights towards Yumemi, unwilling to back down from the orders of his superiors, she steals her resolve to protect her son, as Yulia goes off to the forest to aid Ageha.

Though her battle ends in a decisive victory when blasts Shirou to smithereens with a **FUCKING MINIGUN** while wearing a maid outfit, only because he fetishized her in it as subservient and she wanted the last laugh like a queen, Yumemi's battle ends up drawn out regardless of whether she's commanding or wielding Mushi-kun. What finally decides the victor is not either of their strengths, but the sudden appearance in the most critical moment of the battle... of that small child Yumemi and Yuuto saved.

Ren seems utterly bewildered at their appearance and intent to stop the fighting, despite being someone who should have been taught the ways of the Mushitsukai by now and known not to

interfere. But Yumemi knows why; it's because they know this fight is meaningless. The forest has gone quiet, Jinmu has won. But Ren, being dedicated to his duties to the bitter end, even as Yumemi pleads with him to cease, furnishes a Mushi cylinder one last time – and is slain for it by the Jyuumachuu.

When Ren comes to, he's faced with the sight of most all who remain looking onward, as Miyaka orders Jinmu's soldiers to stand down... so the few standing beside him can grieve. Yumemi and the nameless child watch as Ren takes his last few labored breaths, and uses them to give one final request - not from the will of the clan, but of his own will for the child.

He doesn't know what life this child will choose, whether it's the life of the Mushitsukai even as they tumble towards self-destruction, or escaping to the world outside the clan. But no matter what, they *must* live, and they *must* find peace. And thus... as the sun fades, and his last breaths leave his body to give one order of his own, Ren dies with a smile on his face. Yumemi is finally free from it all...



There's a refrain repeated throughout almost the entire of this game: '*Without adapting to the world, the Mushitsukai are headed towards ruin.*' Numerous characters state this at numerous

points, and if there is any arc in Mushai which makes good on this concept, it's Yumemi Hen, as we see firsthand the result of their own hubris.

Damn near every single tragic event that happens here could have *easily* been avoided had either the elders of the village decided to not stubbornly stick to their ideals, or if Ren did what Yumemi so often encouraged him to and made his own decisions. After all, Ren has more sway in the village than almost anyone who isn't an elder, and alternate endings show him as able to influence their decisions in ways that prevent more conflict than what's already happened.

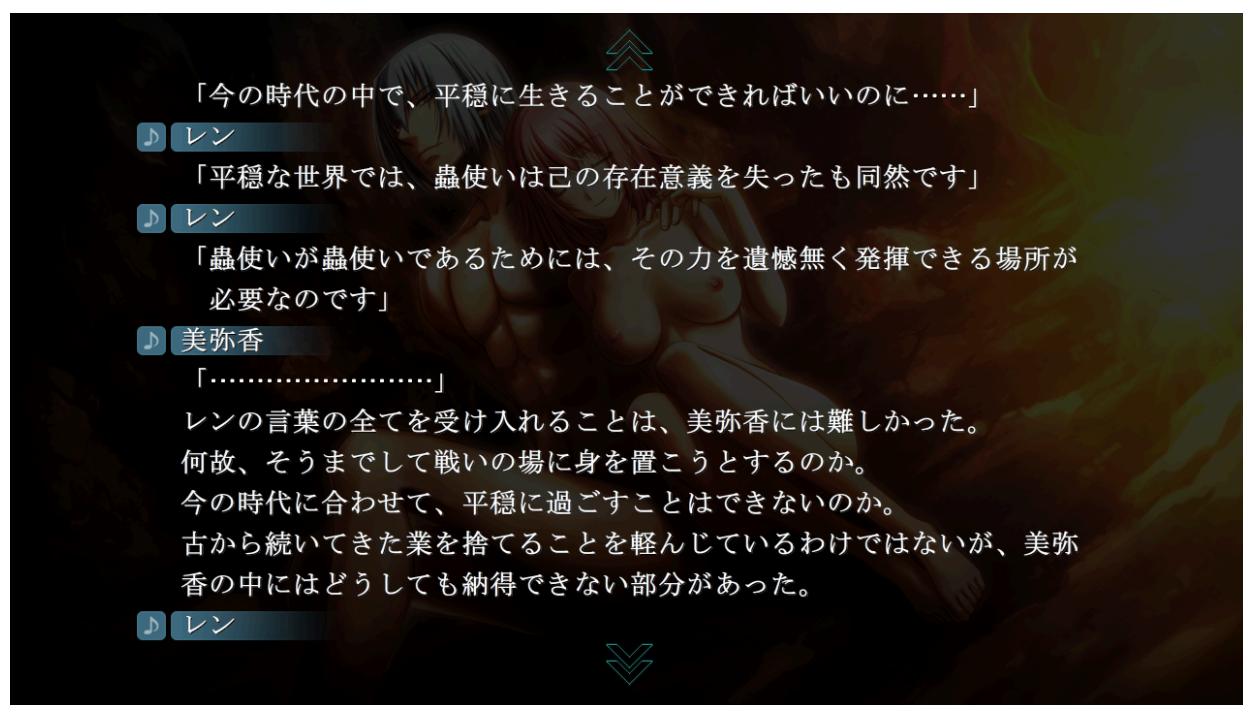
But instead, Ren's insistence on obeying the will of his superiors in the canon paths; to protect the rules the Mushitsukai value so dearly; leads to their death, as those rules become ways to justify engaging in brutal, unnecessary conflicts. And when you consider their existence as a clan of assassins dating back to Japan's bloodiest times, it does kinda make sense.

Mushigurui Hen makes explicit that the Mushitsukai are a society which *needs* conflict in order to exist. If the world were to become peaceful; and if they were to accept that the world is no longer embroiled in as much broad conflict and conquest as it used to be; then they would cease to exist. For them, admitting a battle is pointless would be a violation of their honor and ego, because war and dying for a cause is more glorious than anything else one can do.

And that's... kinda depressing, right? It's an entire group of people who have been raised to believe war is what they must live for and be prepared for; who are taught that their life is this one little village and nothing more matters. Even when they do venture outside for missions, they're so ingrained in this ideology of isolation that they cannot acknowledge the idea that perhaps the outside world has something to it.

Given things brought up later, I feel that this has a major impact on Ren's refusal to acknowledge a will of his own. It's not just out of a sense of duty, but because his life is so intertwined with this *one group* that denying an order would mean denying the foundation of his entire life; it may very well mean leaving everything he's known behind if he were expelled.

By making war their purpose, seeing isolationism as a necessity, and hierarchy as natural, the Mushitsukai have long held a society that discourages thinking for oneself, and instead desires rigid obedience to authority. It is a society that is the logical conclusion of violent ideologies: people with empty lives, living only for the next battle that may once again give them some sense of purpose.



While I would hardly call the Mushitsukai themselves fascist, as they lack a lot of the common criteria necessary to be considered as such, their ideology of needing wars and an ‘other’ to fight is reminiscent of reactionary politics that go into it. And in this regard, it’s interesting how they show – even if such a group were to achieve the ultimate desire some claim to have, to live a peaceful life separated from all of those icky outside groups, it would only ever be temporary.

Without changing the core tenets that more or less necessitate them engaging in conflict, they will *a/ways* find a reason to battle, no matter how pointless it is – because really, what difference *does* it make if Jinmu possesses a few of their insects which they themselves consider junk, or Yumemi has a little guy that’s grown into a sweet little boy?

Had they simply let these things go, they would have had peace. Peace sometimes means letting things go. But their need for isolationism is not wholly compatible with the modern world - and thus, conflict is inevitable, if not even desirable, because it gives them purpose. And if all you live for is war... then you are headed for ruin, be it through external forces as seen here, or self-destruction as seen in Mushigurui.

The worst part is, Ren actually does seem to have brief moments of realization about this. When Yumemi asks in an earlier chapter if what the Mushitsukai are aiming for is living peacefully with the Mushi, he answers yes, but... very apprehensively, like he *knows* it’s all a lie. And like I said a minute ago, there are points where he influences his superiors to let Yumemi live freely, and even others where he lies to them. Perhaps the most heart wrenching of them all, is an ending to this arc titled ‘Dissolving into the Forest.’



Earlier in the summary, I mentioned that Yumemi and Yuuto join forces with Ageha. Canonically this is true, but there *is* the option to not invite her along... and when the two leave the forest, Yuuto is killed by a Mushitsukai who was waiting for them. With nobody by her side, and no way to return to a normal life anymore with both Jinmu and the Mushitsukai afoot, Yumemi returns to the forest alone.

Hungry, tired, and scared, she survives for weeks on end only by the kindness of the child she saved giving her Mushi to eat, and eventually learning to hunt for herself. Clinging onto her memories of Yuuto for happiness, she continues to survive, even as she questions the futility of it; only doing so because something in her says she *must*.

Over time... her vision of herself begins to fade, as do her memories. The meaning of her life becomes making it from one night to the next, murmuring the word 'Yuuto' to herself over and over as if it were a spell; its meaning vague. But, one night, child she vaguely knows joins by her side – they exchange no words, not least because the woman once called Yumemi knows none anymore – and the two share their warmth. And yet another night, she spots a bizarre blue Mushi, and feels nostalgic... for whatever it is.

As the days pass, these three become a pack. They travel together, they hunt together, they stay together. They're precious to each other. The days and seasons continue as this, until one day, the woman hears a voice in her head; of someone crying. Somebody she used to know, maybe even be, leading her to a place that feels important: a beautiful, perfect pond, which used to mean something... just as the word Yuuto used to mean something.

Some time later, the inevitable has come and gone. Jinmu and the Mushitsukai fought, painting the forest in the blood of the clan. Though not gone, their forces have dwindled, with one of the few surviving being Ren. Exploring the forest after reports of supposed survivors, he holds his doubts as he walks. No one should be able to survive here, after all. It's too brutal for humans to weather. And yet... in a corner... near a pond... is a woman, a child, and a Mushi, cuddled together, in peace.



少女にも、そして子供にも気付かれないうちに、
その場を立ち去る。
あれ以上先へは踏み込めない。
それだけの資格が、自分には——
——あの少女と子供と、そして蟲以外にはない。
レン
「もしもし、僕です」
レン
「報告にあった件ですが、おそらくは何かの間違いで
しょう」
レン
「この森には……誰もいませんでした……………」
森を出て、すぐに報告をする。
願わくばこの森の安らぎが、永久に続くようにと胸に
抱きながら……。

To keep the girl and the child from noticing, Ren left.

He couldn't go any further than there.

To him, the only ones who had this right—

—were the girl, the child, and the Mushi.

Ren: "Hello? It's me."

Ren: "I'm sorry to say, but the information you were reporting seems to be mistaken."

Ren: "There... wasn't anybody in the forest."

*Ren left, and soon after gave his report.
He held a wish tight to his chest; wishing for this forest to stay in tranquility, forevermore...*

This is one of the endings of the game that had me *bawling* when it was over. There is absolutely no way I can do justice to how the prose depicts Yumemi's slow descent; from being a fully cognizant person desperate to survive, into a *thing* that cannot remember her own name, cannot even remember her own son; nor the melancholy I felt when I saw Ren actually *lie* to the village about what he saw, believing the happiness of those three to be more important than his duty.

I think, in a way, this ending also shows what the Mushitsukai could never achieve in Mushiai. Despite claiming to be those who live and die with the Mushi, despite claiming to be those who only desire peace, they never really were able to do either of those things. They used the Mushi as tools for war, saw them as nothing more than disposable objects; and rather than accept peace when it was available, they took the first bit of intrusion from the outside world as reason to begin a new conflict.

Yumemi, the child, and Mushi-kun, however, are truly a group of humans and a Mushi living and dying together; co-existing in a peace they created, undisturbed by the outside world. Even when Ren has the option to intrude into it, he realizes doing so would be wrong – perhaps, in some way, he realizes that doing so would be to repeat the same mistake from all that time ago, where he and the village could not let Yumemi go. Perhaps, this time... he realizes that peace can mean to let things go.

Requiem (Imago Arc)



And so, we enter the final arc of Mushai – a 10 years later epilogue which closes off the last remaining threads. It's also the arc where the budget cuts are unfortunately felt the most, as this stage of the game suffered the *most* in development; resulting in an arc with some kickass fights, resolutions to only a few themes, and a bizarre secret ending.

To briefly summarize what's happened within those ten years – Miyaka has become the CEO of Jinmu Corporation and repaired their public image, Yulia now works as a secretary there, Ageha is media personality, and Yumemi and Yuuto now live a normal life together, supported by money from running the AnzU cafe after Kagurazaka's health began to decline - now renamed Y&Y.

Most important in their life though is supporting that child they saved from the forest: Ayaka. Bratty, smug, and full of energy, she's one of the most entertaining characters in all of Mushai despite getting relatively little screen time. She's also got a *really* unique and deep voice for a child character, let alone a girl. Her actress, Shiokaze Yoru, appeared in barely anything after this, which is a real shame because there aren't many people out there who can make someone sound appropriately kid-ish without getting high pitched.

As it pertains to the story though, she exists in an odd state with Yumemi and Yuuto. They both see her as a daughter, and she seems to enjoy living with the both of them - as well as Mushi-kun if he's still around - but she's not yet decided if she wants to legally become their

daughter, or return to what remains of the Mushitsukai. A difficult decision that Yumemi understands, given that she's the one who killed who was then the most important person in her life, Ren.

What happens from here, is Nishi suddenly reappearing and informing Yumemi that Rengo is alive and roided up, Yumemi helping the illegitimate child of Anzu and Jinmu's former CEO to reconnect with her mother, Yumemi and Yuuto making plans to get married, Ayaka going on a journey to settle some unclear matters with the Mushitsukai, and Yumemi and Yuuto's wedding being crashed by said matters: vaxmaxxed Rengo!

Unfortunately for him, even with his body looking like a jacked up Senator Armstrong from Metal Gear Rising, there's no power he has that can counter the *real super power of teamwork* when Ayaka shows up, declares her intent to Yumemi's daughter, and defeats Rengo with the power of Mushi-kun at her side. In the last moments of his life, defeated by a little girl and her best friend, he wonders if his life could have perhaps turned out different had he not done what he had done to Yumemi - perhaps if he didn't seek a path of destruction, he could have lived happily.



Before he passes, Ayaka only has two questions to ask him: why did he, someone who gave up on the ways of the Mushitsukai, continue to rely on the Mushi after? Why did he, someone he knew the Mushitsukai were fundamentally broken, cling onto their ways of cruelty, of power, of wielding their weapon of choice?

To Rengo, as someone raised in it, he couldn't see another way to live. To be born a Mushitsukai is to live with the Mushi and die with the Mushi; to forever use them as tools for your gain, as the quickest way to achieve power. This is, after all, what that mantra of life and death means to the Mushitsukai – they cannot see them as companions with possible intelligence, but living weapons.

But as Ayaka says, if he truly wanted to get away from the Mushitsukai, he should have abandoned all of their means. Without doing so, he could never truly get away from them; and by seeing the Mushi only as tools, he failed to realize there were other ways to exist with Mushi. One can live with them. That's how Yumemi survived, where he could not... and survive she does, as with Rengo defeated and her new found family together, they finally have the life of peace and tranquility they had desired all this time.

On one hand, credit's due where credit is due: this final battle is pretty awesome to watch unfold. Ayaka has this truly astounding confidence and smugness that's hilarious to watch Rengo be taken aback by, and the final transformation of Mushi-kun that does him in is fucking *sick* in design. This whole sequence, along with its counterpart if Yumemi melded with Mushi-kun, are some of the best fight scenes in the game.

I also really like the slice of life portions of this arc. It's nice to see everyone who made it out alive growing as people and leading good lives; doubly so given these characters *have* to be in their 30s by this point, and it's not often that you get to see people older than 20 in anime absolutely kicking ass while looking amazing for their age, but still looking their age. Oh, and uh, I guess Yuuto went to Tibet for a self-discovery within these ten years and came back with a hilariously bad stubble. ...what the fuck happened to him in Tibet?

That's about all I have to say for this chapter's main portion I guess. Like, I could comment on what Ayaka says about the Mushitsukai's relationship to the Mushi, but not only does that come back later in Mushigurui, but it's expanded on so greatly there as to make the mention of it here kind of irrelevant. Really, all that's left to discuss is the secret ending: the Insect Princess.



In this ending, we learn that over the past ten years, Yumemi has been concocting a plan to realize the myths of the Mushihome. Seeing the ways of the Mushitsukai as evil and disgusting, needing to be purged from this world, she goes around and assaults everybody she knows who isn't already in on the plan in order to fuse their bodies with Mushi flesh; creating a personal army that, ultimately, wreaks havoc upon the few remaining Mushitsukai.

Aaaaand that's the whole ending. No, seriously, it's literally just Yumemi going "hehe... it's time to enact the secret plan..." and then fucking everybody with tentacles and committing genocide. Like, to give the game credit, it is rightfully played off as something horrific and not good, but uhhh... it comes out of absolutely nowhere? And it's a *bitch* to get too, as it requires a ton of extremely specific flags to be set.

Judging off of some unused files in the game from an earlier period in development, this was actually meant to be expanded upon into an entire arc of the same name, but was cut down to a couple of nodes and a shit ton of erosenes before release. I think as a full arc, Yumemi becoming a villain could have been interesting to explore in more depth than mere routes in Nishi's arc can offer, but as it stands, there's very little of value here.

So... yeah, that's Mushiai. An interesting journey with interesting themes, mechanics, lore, and narratives, but one that ultimately falls short by the end for its inability to resolve much of what it brings up. There are *so many* loose ends here; from untouched themes to unfinished branches to unfulfilling endings; that it's hard for me to recommend it on its own. So just how does Mushigurui tie this all together?

Freedom (Mushigurui Arc)



After a whole two hours of video or thereabouts, we've finally made it to the true last chapter of Extravaganza: Mushigurui Hen. Between some truly incredible fights with top tier philosophical dialogue, conclusions to all of the themes the game has only been briefly touching on up to this point, gorgeous new artwork, and a sob-inducing conclusion, this chapter embodies why I love Extravaganza.

Set five years after the Yumemi Arc, Mushigurui represents yet another possibility for the story. Rather than watch on as Ren passes, Miyaka instead orders an ambulance in order to tend to his wounds and save him. And though he recovers after half a year of medical care and half a year isolating in the mountains to reflect on his life - resulting in a Tibetan Yuuto-tier stubble - he's been more or less banished from the village for his past failures; put on duty of watching over the Jyuumachuu.

For the last while then, he's been living within Jinmu HQ as bodyguard and assistant of its new CEO: Miyaka, who's been working tirelessly to right the wrongs of the past. Between repairing their public image, trying to stop them from falling into bankruptcy, and doing everything in her power to gather Nishi's research and put names to his victims, she's giving it her all and she isn't alone.

Besides Ren, she also has Yulia by her side, working as her secretary when she's not busy with her blossoming new high school life. And, waiting for her at home is Ayaka – adopted not by Yumemi this time, but instead by the girlboss CEO, with occasional visits from her mother from another timeline, Mushi-kun, and her absentee dad, Ren.

As a whole, the whole opening segment of Mushigurui Hen is quite possibly the best slice of life Extravaganza has to offer, taking place during what is ostensibly the *most* peaceful time we see in the entire series. And the stars of the show are, of course, Miyaka and Ren - finally given their much deserved spotlight after getting shafted in Mushiai - as well as Ayaka.

Oddly enough, her form in Mushigurui is... **VERY** different from Mushai. Instead of being a dorky brash brat, she's a sweetheart that wants to make her mom happy, actually see her dad, and very occasionally switches off her kind girl personality and becomes very, very blunt about what she doesn't like. Which seems to be most sea mammals that aren't her favorite thing, sea otters. She also has a *much* more typically childish voice, provided by eroge newcomer Suzuki Kuruta. I wish they could have gotten Shiokaze back, but I think Kuruta *is* just as good in terms of talent.

As for the other two, I'm just happy to see them actually get developed. Ren's shafting was sorta understandable as his entire point in Mushiai was his inability to accept free will and be his own person. But if there's any complaint I had to lodge against Mushai's character writing, it's that Miyaka was a damsel in distress in a game with a 30 year old woman kicking the ass of a roid raged man, and her best friend Yui got to do barely anything but disappear into the background and be a jobber in an alternate route.

Yui... actually has even less of a role here now, sad to say, but at least the other two develop a hell of a lot; much of it spurred on by Ayaka. I love the relationship she has with Miyaka – she's an absolute sweetheart of a mom, and you can really feel it in the dialogue and even the artwork. Ayaka is always so gleeful and happy to see her mom's reactions to her cooking, and has this wonderful spark of curiosity and love towards her that you can't help but smile to see.

Ren, however, does not start off so great. He's so focused on his duty to watch over the Jyuumachuu that he completely neglects doing anything for his daughter – which all changes when Miyaka comes home one day and sees Ayaka adoring a commercial for an aquarium, leading to a long chain of goofy events where Miyaka and Ren have an aquarium date and grow close as a couple... but not TOO close, yet.

Most of the opening hours are a sorta romcom that work to develop them as a family, and I adore it. There's so many memorable parts here, like Yulia going out with Ren to find him 'daddy attire' and poutily texting her classmates who think she's found herself a hot boyfriend, to said 'daddy attire' being... THIS. And of course, there's how Ren upfront personality and Miyaka's more reserved demeanor clash adorably, as well as some hilarious moments in the aquarium that play off of Ayaka being a fickle child, it's all a blast.



I really can't express how much I love the way these three develop within a mere two and a half hours; I was rooting for Miyaka and Ren to get together by the end, and desperate to see more moments of Ren opening up. Plus, they crammed a *ton* into this timeframe; not just all that, but Yumemi's cameo at AnzU, the Gore Screaming Show reference with it being Ageha's acting debut, plus all sorts of references to things in Mushiai that ties stuff up. It's peak, simply *peak*.

But of course, all good things must come to an end. Towards the end of their big day out at the aquarium, and after Ayaka leaves them alone to spend time getting closer together, Ren gets a sudden phone call from a woman named Shio Kazenomiya: the Mushitsukai village has gone to hell. Leaving for it the next day, he's informed there that the head of the Kazenomiya clan has been performing rule-violating experiments to craft stronger Mushi based on documents that Ren retrieved when he infiltrated Nishi's manner.

Not long after his departure, Yulia and Miyaka head out by car as well, finding the village to now be in ruins: ransacked houses, dead Mushitsukai abound, and only a mysterious girl named Kyou around to greet them. Seeming untrustworthy yet with no other choice but to tag along, they follow her to a cave where she claims Shio is being held, with Miyaka told by Yulia to wait outside as she and Kyou investigate.

That is, of course, a trap, which Yulia just barely manages to escape with Shio in hand, and Miyaka avoids getting caught up in by pure accident; stumbling into another part of the forest after getting spooked by Kazenomiya walking around her general vicinity. It's around this time that Ayaka *a/so* makes her appearance, her favorite sea otter bag in hand, as she snuck in the trunk of the car since she picked up on something fishy happening.

As Shio and Yulia battle through the forest against Mushitsukai and Kyou alike, the tides suddenly turn when Ayaka manages to catch up, and something about her makes Kyou's mood dampen. Not even Kazenomiya entering the scene and questioning Kyou's insolence makes her move, leading to the two parties to make their separate escapes.

On the other side of things, Miyaka's at least been found safe and sound by Ren. Even with her phone lost in all the ruckus, the two are able to make a campfire in a nearby cave as Ren recounts how he got here – battling Kyou and Kazenomiya, being captured, tortured, and having all the details of the mystery woman's existence explained to him.



Kyou - a name written with the kanji for 'mental abnormality' - is Kazenomiya's attempt to build on the Gochuuningan that Nishi had been constructing. By implanting a compatible Mushi womb into a human woman, and impregnating it with the seed of a strong Mushitsukai, Kazenomiya was able to create a humanoid creature which not only contains some of the best of the Mushitsukai's bloodlines, but an incredible connection to their weapon of choice as well.

Not only does she have the ability to usurp control of any Mushi around her, but her part-Mushi physique makes her abnormally durable. And Kazenomiya, having proven to himself this concept can be realized, has kidnapped Ren to try and force him to impregnate Kyou under the influence of an aphrodisiac and give birth to an even more powerful bioweapon than her. Which Kyou *does not* like the idea of existing.

But to Kazenomiya, these are necessary measures because the Mushitsukai are headed towards ruin and he *knows it*. He believes the reason is not due to their ways of war, but because they've stagnated in technique and power for far too long; hence why they suffered

such a great loss five years ago. In order to survive, they *must* begin breaking their own rules to create new, stronger weaponry, as without it, they will simply fall again – hence, the civil war breaking out, as many other families saw this cross-species bioengineering as a violation.

I think the most fascinating thing about this conflict is how it shows that the Mushitsukai really *aren't* a singular entity. Despite there being all these talks of The Elders and The Council by Ren throughout Mushiai, and this mythical adherence to rule that goes beyond even the most nationalistic nerd's interpretation of Bushido, there are very clearly strong disagreements about what's best for the clan and who their ancient rules are actually serving.

To the people outside of the clan who peer in, such as Yumemi, it's pretty clear what purpose they serve. The Mushitsukai lead lives of isolation, emotional detachment, and conflict; passing down generational trauma, all while claiming to serve some sort of greater honor and purpose, and maintain their ways of 'living and dying with the Mushi.' Except, as Ayaka points out in Mushiai's true ending, they don't really do that – they see them as tools, and never think to co-exist with mutual respect. Ultimately, these rules exist to maintain power, and keep at least *some* sort of checks and balances on that power as honor.

But then there's some people within the clan like Kazenomiya, who see that the rules are fundamentally inhibiting the existence of the Mushitsukai – and yet because he still believes in their ways of power and control, all these rules add up to is limitations that prevent them from realizing their full potential as a military force. The irony here is that this... *also* isn't sustainable, but we'll get to that shortly.

What's important to know now is that Kyou is a massive, potentially world-ending threat akin to the myths of the Mushihome, who also has the impulsivity of a chipmunk on crack. Like, the entire reason Ren escapes is because she got all hot and bothered trying to fuck him, and is so frustrated by his lack of interest that she runs off to bang another guy while Kazenomiya is out elsewhere, presumably snooping around the part of the forest where he spots Miyaka.



At the very least, her idiocy allowed Ren to escape and link up with Miyaka, where she *finally* learns more about his past and of the Mushitsukai's practices; of Ren's inability to feel pain after injecting himself with an outlawed Mushi's venom, of the loveless arranged marriages and intercourse purely for creating stronger warriors... and the name of Ayaka's real mother: Sayuri. Remember her from the first chapter, Ren's former partner?

She might not be a major character there, but she is one of importance, and leads to some of the only moments where Ren shows actual emotion during Mushiai. First, during a phone call where Ren calls her cell and is surprised to hear Rengo's voice informing her of her disappearance, and second, during a possible story outcome where Yulia takes her away before Rengo defeats her, and she becomes a Gouchuuningin; later discovered by Ren when he breaks into the mansion, mortified to find her name tag attached to the grotesque monster.

He recounts that encounter during this sequence, and it's... honestly amazing how his voice actor manages to instill emotion into his line while still making it feel characteristically 'Ren,' quiet, reserved, and attempting to hold everything in, even as he recounts words she etched into his memory when they conceived Ayaka: a wish for them to lift the curse placed upon the Mushitsukai.

That conversation about the past and practices of the Mushitsukai is cut short however, when Ren starts feeling something he hasn't in forever: excitement. While he initially thinks it's due to the aphrodisiac, the fact he felt nothing before leads him, and has built a resistance to it overtime, leads him to realize that it's not a poison acting on him, but that he's feeling something abnormal: love. And in that moment, Miyaka presses him to say what he couldn't earlier; to confess what he truly feels for her... and so he does.

If you forgot Ueda Metawo directed an otome game and illustrated one in-between his final B-Eye-era Black Cyc project and Mushigurui... I'm sure you won't forget again now! This CG is so otomege that it's not even funny. The composition of the shot, the tense panning to the kiss, the way he holds her so tenderly and lovingly, and of course the context leading up to it.

Up to this point, we've only really seen Ren as he describes himself – a man who silenced all of his emotions, who even went as far as to kill his sense of pain just to be better at fighting. And then, all throughout Mushigurui, we get to see little glimmers of him opening up. Being attentive to Miyaka, wanting to care for his daughter, and having to deliberate on his thoughts; thoughts that are his own and not those of the Mushitsukai.

And then there's this whole scene where we go through a whole rollercoaster of him thinking he's poisoned; and then him realizing he has a strong resistance so that makes no sense; and then realizing, "oh man, this might be... love?" It plays *so good* into that otome fantasy of a cold, beautiful, handsome man opening up because of your warmth, and, oooooHHHH GOD IT'S SO **FUCKING GOOD!**

Not only is this scene *incredibly hot* despite how little it shows, but it's the key turning point for Ren's character. Because after the two make love, cutting to black since I guess Ban'ya hates vanilla hetero sex, Ren finally admits what *he* wants in his life: to live with Miyaka as her husband, Ayaka as her father, and to do whatever it takes to reach this conclusion... even if it means fighting the Mushitsukai.

Because it's now that he sees what they really are: a society who exists *for* war, who can only sustain themselves *on* war, and cannot exist outside of times *of* war. As someone who has dedicated far too much of his life to it and has now seen what beautiful things the world and humanity has to offer, he knows he has to be the one to end Kazenomiya's reign of terror, and end their twisted system once and for all.

The two manage to regroup with Shio, Yulia, and Ayaka, locked in a fierce battle with Kazenomiya and Kyou, their appearance breaking things off for long enough for him to tell his daughter what she's been waiting to hear, and what he had just told Miyaka: that he wants to be family and will fight for it. And after fierce fighting on the part of all involved, we learn just what Ayaka had been carrying in that little bag of hers... Mushi-kun!

Which just so happens to be the exact thing that was pissing Kyou off. As a being melded with Mushi, she knows better than anyone else how to control them – and yet, for some reason, Mushi-kun *refuses* to even acknowledge her will, standing beside a mother and her daughter to protect them from the onslaught of Kyou's Mushi.

Though Ren initially struggles to benefit much from his presence, unable to command him and only having a few blows deflected here and there, things change when Ayaka asks Ren: doesn't he want to fight *alongside* him? Which finally, makes it all click into place... as Mushi-kun is

more than happy to form a bond of mutual respect with Ren – something the Mushitsukai would *never* do with other Mushi.

This is why the Jyuumachuu had been feared all this time by the clan. In a society built on power and subjugating the will of the creatures it uses as weapons, one which sees hierarchy as key and emotions as unnecessary, the Jyuumachuu became reviled not *because* of its power, but because it was the one thing which the clan feared the most: a living, breathing, independent being, who would not be subjugated.



Kyou completely loses her mind upon hearing Kazenomiya and Ren discuss this, and uses her powers to ‘free’ the Jyuumachuu’s fellow Mushi from subjugation; yet remains baffled as to why Mushi-kun does not join his brethren, and instead fights to protect his family. After all, the humans have spent hundreds of years turning the Mushi into weapons with no regard for their will, so why does he continue to fight for them?

As the fight progresses on, and Ren continues to grow closer to Mushi-kun, he realizes that if he wants to wield his power in full, he must forget everything he knows about *using* the Mushi, and learn what it means to be *with* the Mushi; to treat them as companions who deserve respect and care. And so, after all the others evacuate, and after saving Ren from death by Kyou’s poison Mushi with an anti-venom, he wishes for Mushi-kun to aid him in one final battle to save all that they love... and the true power of the Jyuumachuu is revealed. *It’s hype time.*

The *true* final battle of Extravaganza begins here; between a man, his beloved family, and his new found humanity – and an inhuman woman destined to suffer from birth, brought into this world only to fight wars for people who exploit her kind. No matter how much she resists, no matter how many attacks she launches, all are worthless in the face of two beings who see each other as equals; sharing a common will to protect those they love.

Even as Kyou proclaims that Ren has gone insane, and perhaps from the view of a Mushitsukai he has, Ren affirms that what he's doing is right for him. Because now, having been away from the Mushitsukai, he's willing to face any battle to protect those he loves and the life that's become important to him. If that's insanity, then so be it – *because **this** is the life he's chosen, and he'll do whatever it takes to protect it.*

With the undefeatable power of love and respect on his and Mushi-kun's side, Ren manages to use Mushi-kun's powers to paint the forest in frost, as *all* of Kyou's Mushi are downed in one fell swoop... annihilating the parts of her which are Mushi in blood as well. Now no more than a defenseless, weak human, she faces her final moments in front of Ren – telling him before her death, that he was the most insane person she's ever met. But even if so... Ren will embrace this, and live the way he wishes to.



With the battle over and all allies alive, Kazenomiya asks Ren his final questions: just what did Ren want so badly that he would throw away his existence as a Mushitsukai? And his answer is that he simply wanted to protect what was important to him – he doesn't intend to deny his existence up to this point, but he sees no reason for him to continue as one. The Mushitsukai... do not need their strongest warrior anymore.

And thus, we come to a close. Ren rejects Shio's request to come back to the village, valuing his own will and family more than anything else. All those in the village who have survived the attack have been found and are alive. And just before leaving, Ayaka notices that despite Mushi-kun killing all those Kyou commanded... there are somehow still a few little ones crawling around. Perhaps from here, they'll find a way to live peacefully with them, and rebuild together.

But that is not Ren's trouble to deal with. Holding hands with his daughter and to-be wife, they walk off into the sunset and admire its beauty, as Ren begins to feel a sudden pain in his hand from Ayaka's tight grasp. Though he wants her to separate at first, he realizes... perhaps Mushi-kun's anti-venom did more than save him from poison. Chuckling to himself for the first time in years, he remarks to Miyaka that he has found things he had lost, and many he didn't know he needed. Perhaps all can come back with time... and they can begin life anew.

New Beginnings



If Seichuu was a middling conclusion to an ambitious game, then Mushigurui's is like the ending that one could only dream of made real. Like, for starters, can we talk about the fight scenes for a moment? Because I feel like my abbreviating of them *really* doesn't do justice to how cool they are here. Yulia, Shio, and Ren, all kick some serious ass throughout this game, and nowhere is that seen better than the final fight.

I've seen some people criticize it for being a bit too long, and... yeah, admittedly, it takes like an hour and a half to read. But it not only has some amazing prose that keeps it feeling fresh and active, but it's where Aoki Kodoku plays. Seriously, a seven minute long prog metal epic recounting the series story as its concluding battle plays out in front of you is one of the coolest things I've ever read.

But most importantly, it's all of the philosophical dialog and the monologues throughout that make Mushigurui so impactful as an ending, and a title which successfully manages to wrap up every loose end; like with the legends of my boy, Mushi-kun. Throughout all of Mushiai, he's

teased as this thing which has the power to upend the world should he not be sealed away – and the reason for that is... never really answered, except recursively.

Within this final encounter though, we finally learn why: because he's the one creature which the Mushitsukai couldn't control, and that *terrifies* them. As a society built on control and aiding in war, even if they aren't necessarily one that begins imperialistic efforts, the fact there exists something out there which they cannot conceivably control is a threat to their very being.

More than any other dialogue, I think it's the exchange Ren has with Kazenomiya during the final fight which reveals this that puts every single philosophical debate in this game into frame, as it shows the fear which the Mushitsukai have for uncontrollable beings. And that gives a *hell* of a lot more weight to the themes Ren as a character embodies.

Throughout all of Mushiai, he's someone who is completely subservient to the rules he's grown up with, unwilling to question or bend them not just because of the necessity of authority instilled into him. But unlike, say, Yulia, who knows her emotions and is able to leave when she's made aware of how bad her situation is, Ren is so shut off from himself that he can't even begin to comprehend it until he's out of the village and experiences human warmth once again.

It's not too dissimilar to how a lot of men who've grown up in very emotionally closed off spaces can't seem to understand themselves or others. Whether it's because they're told emotions are for girls or simply neglected without an explanation, many of the environments that purport themselves to be masculine discourage developing emotions in favor of obeying authority and keeping a cool at all times.

And... I get it. From my early teens up until around 16 or 17 - before some of my mental health had rocked the way of instability, and years before I had begun therapy and entered transition - I... honestly wasn't too different from Ren around many people. I cracked more jokes and clearly displayed more feeling, but in general I was quiet, to the point, and barely ever took off the 'cool guy' mask. It wasn't on purpose, but just because I didn't really know anything different.

I was never raised to understand my emotions, and I knew that guys were supposed to be able to take anything and deal with it, so it just *made sense* to be like that, just as it *made sense* to never question what I was being asked to do and why. I had apprehensions in my head, but did that mean I was going to follow through on them and let my stability crumble? No, of course not.

As I can say now though, living on the complete other side of the emotional spectrum, that way of life fucking *sucks* and hides so much from you. You don't realize just how sad it is to not express emotions, not have anything beyond what's approved by those around you, until you cry out of joy for the first time and know that's what it is, or feel love for somebody and know what's what it is, or, **hell**, even know what peace feels like!

By societies wrongly framing emotions as feminine, and misogynistically framing femininity as weakness compared to the strength of masculinity, men are kept away from their emotions that

everybody as a person innately has. This is at least in part because it is beneficial to the systems-that-be, to not only keep those in higher social rungs from having the emotions to be cognizant of their own abuse, but to keep them from sympathizing with those who are disadvantaged.

After all, what worker is better than one who doesn't understand their hours are exploitative, their conditions deadly? What soldier is better than one who doesn't question their allegiance to their duty? What citizen is better than one who will never look outside their own country, and become inspired to change it? Not understanding your feelings makes you governable, and may even lead to the same mantras being passed onto the next generation; forever perpetuating systems of abuse that corrode humanity.

But you know what's far *less* governable? People who know when they're being dealt injustice. People who band together with other oppressed peoples. People in power who boost those with less than them. People who open bridges and realize they have much in common with others. People who know they have a right to their free will, and fight against those who call them insane for pursuing their happiness. *People who become in touch with their emotions.*

And I think ultimately, *that* is what Extravaganza is about. All of the different characters I've talked about who have escaped their abusive places of origin in the story, are people who banded together to resist the systems that oppressed them, and pursued what they wished for most. Yumemi found her peaceful life by standing her ground, Yulia found hers with the help of others, Ageha did so by talking to the one she hated most, and Ren did so by finding family that meant more to him than duty.

Were all these people 'insane' from the viewpoint of society for doing what they did? Maybe so. And yet, these are all people who not only chose their own path, but they chose the path of empathy. We see all throughout this game what choosing revenge and hatred does to people, and we see in Kyou that a pursuit for power will inevitably backfire and destroy all who pursue it. The path of empathy, though bizarre as it may seem to much of the world now, is the path that will lead us to be able to coexist; and the first steps to it are looking around you, and seeing we're all on this bitch of an Earth together. Even the little creatures in the forest share it with us.

At the end of the day, there is a message of hope in this game. That no matter where you are, no matter what you are suffering under, there is hope in other people. There are ways to claw out of the machine and never again be a cog, and listen to the You that knows what it wants to be. You may not be able to hear it now, but you *will* find that voice so long as you keep trying – because you *have* to live until you can. You *have* to live far beyond then. Because no matter what happens, living is the most important thing you can do... next to finding those you can do it with.

As I write this, I'm mere weeks away from leaving the state I've lived in for the last few years of my life to spend a huge portion of the year across the ocean, before coming back to somewhere else I've never been before in the US. And it's because... these last few years haven't been the

happiest for me. I've struggled a lot. I've been depressed a lot. I've suffered a lot. It's been hard pushing through it all. And I've had many, many people say I'm crazy for making all the gambles I have, taking all the leaps I did.

But I did all of it because I saw within those gambles, a path to the life I wanted. Taking those risks, rather than obeying what made 'sense' by the systems I was raised in, brought me to where I am now. I've become an empathetic, expressive person; certainly imperfect, but I don't need to be. Following what I wanted has given me people in my life I can rely on, and a special person who means more than anything else to me.

If you've already found those people for yourself, then my only wish at the end of this long journey is that you treasure them, and continue to stay by their side as they do yours. And if you've yet to find them... then please know, that nothing short of death will ever stop you from finding them. Hold out hope, and know eventually, that you will find people who will protect you, and you can protect them.

Maybe people will call you crazy for taking the steps you need to live the life you wish and finding those people. Maybe the road will be wrought with challenges, and you'll feel as if walking it means losing what you've known. But at the end of that road; the road you decide and nobody else; lays happiness somewhere within. At least... despite all I've suffered, that's what I've decided is true. And I've decided, for that reason, I'm going to keep holding onto all I treasure. I can say , with confidence, that through everything I've been through... *I'm happy I've decided to live.*

What a Story, Mushi-Kun!



Clocking in at 50 hours total, even without going through all of the fandiscs, Extravaganza is *quite* a journey. Now, is it worth all that time? I absolutely think so, but it *is* a game I have to recommend with caveats. For starters and most obviously, this game **DOES NOT FUCK AROUND** with the extreme content in it. Like, seriously, if you have any aversion to gore or bugs or tentacles or body horror or anything of the sort, this game will probably land you in an ambulance. And let me tell ya, if you're in the US, you DO NOT want to be in an ambulance.

As well as that, I can't deny at all that the gameplay in Mushiai is a serious pain in the ass to deal with. Conceptually, it's cool as hell. Thematically, it's absolutely sick. Practically? It not only makes the story harder to understand due to it forcing you to randomly stop reading to skip through a million scenes, but it makes the game sooooo tedious to play through as you stumble around baffling chains of causality.

And, lastly, though I think Mushigurui's story is an absolute masterpiece, Mushiai's by itself is... very good, but very messy due to the cut content and rather thematically underwhelming endings. I have no regrets playing through it, and the sheer emotional rollercoaster of Mushigurui alone made it worth it for me, but I don't blame people if they get a bit tired going through Mushiai.

If all that's too much for someone, I totally get it. But if those sound like things you can deal with, then I seriously cannot recommend playing through Extravaganza enough. For all of its faults with unfinished routes, inconsistent pacing, and lacking assets, it is *still* one of the most meaningful journeys I've taken in the VN medium, capped off by what must be one of the greatest sequels I've ever read.

If you wanna get a hold of it, then the good news is that both games are *super* accessible for Japanese readers. Mushigurui is still being actively printed, Mushiai was released *tons* of times with no bad version to speak of, and the whole series has been bundled into Extravaganza Complete, available digitally on basically every eroge distribution platform, including the foreigner friendly DLSite.

If you don't know Japanese and want to play the games though, then... well, do your part and bug JAST about it on Twitter. Like I said, they have the platonic hookups with Black Cyc, so if anyone is gonna get gems like this, Gun-Katana, and Yami no Koe in English, it's gonna be them.

Now, whether or not I'd call this game my favorite of the Black Cyc titles I've played up to this point... I'm honestly not sure. But what I do know is that it's a game that I'm gonna be thinking about for a long time; and as a game that I interpret as all about finding your own path through life, and embracing empathy with the people who matter beside you, I think it's pretty fitting this video is coming out mere weeks away from me making the biggest change to my life I have yet: living alone in another country for months on end, before coming back to live by myself in the US for as long as I need.

It's gonna be a huge change for me, and it's something I've been called crazy for doing. I've had people pushing back every step of the way, and I've had to pick myself up more times than I can count to keep going. But all of it has been worth it. Taking the path through my life that I wanted to take, rather than others wanted for me, has made me happier than I could have imagined, even with all the pain I've gone through to get here. So... I welcome the change, and I can't wait to see you all from across the ocean next month.

[1] <https://vndb.org/p365>

[2] Mushigurui Hen, Ban'ya Staff Comments

[3] <https://web.archive.org/web/20160402170552/http://blackcycblog.blog.fc2.com/>

[4] Mushi Mederu Shoujo, Ban'ya Staff Comments

[5] Game executable name