

Senku Ishigami

Dr. Stone

Art By Jen Zhao



KONSHUU

vol. 55 #1

Post-Apocalyptic

THIS ISSUE'S FEATURED SERIES!

ANIME RECOMMENDATION

KONO SEKAI NO KATASUMI NI (IN THIS CORNER OF THE WORLD)

A somewhat upbeat, sanguine take on the years surrounding the second World War, *In This Corner of the World* is an interesting take on slice of life anime. Despite not emphasizing the circumstances of the time quite as much as other films on the same subject matter, the everyday interactions sell the horror of this era far better than overembellished melodrama could.



2016, MAPPA
By Sunao Katabuchi
~3 Hour Film



April 28, 2016, HAL Laboratory
Directed by Shinya Kumazaki
Published by Nintendo

GAME RECOMMENDATION

KIRBY: PLANET ROBOBOT

To the inhabitants of Planet Popstar, their world was effortlessly conquered and converted into an unrecognizable robo world. To Kirby, it was just another obstacle in the way of some good food and rest. The stage design in *Kirby: Planet Robobot* incorporates a unique mix of sci-fi and cuteness that gives it a distinct feel from any other *Kirby* game. And if you couldn't guess from the title alone, the unstoppable force that is the pink puffball Kirby now operates a mecha. A mecha.

NAUSICÄ OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND - TRANSCENDING INTENTION



MAX R.

3rd Year, Japanese

Could explain what I'm talking about better if you had asked me several years ago, but it's been ages now since I revisited *Nausicaä*.

Writer

SPOILERS FOR NAUSICAA OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND

Years ago, Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* had been my favorite manga of all time, utilizing a post-apocalyptic backdrop of humanity on its last legs to highlight the potentiality for transcendence and philosophical implications regarding the inherent uncertainty of continual evolution. This may not necessarily initially appear to be the case, particularly for those who've exclusively seen the film, which unfortunately often overshadows the much longer, more intricate manga. However, the manga is what stretches beyond the more blatant political and environmental strife, encompassing such an array of subjects that attempting to explore everything would honestly be too daunting with even a few dozen pages. That said, I will make do accordingly and mainly emphasize its patterns of transcending intention.

Firstly, ever-present ideas of said evolution throughout the series are thematically tied to its many fictional creatures with beings such as the Ohmu, in their attainment of intelligence and facets beyond intended purposes of the ancients (old humanity), who forged them as vehicles for spreading the Sea of Corruption through the Daikaishou, or the mutant mold, experimented on by the scientists, to inadvertently further ravage the already limited inhabitable land. God Warriors as well, were intended as catastrophic weapons akin to nuclear warfare, yet Ohma who, upon being named, quickly evolves to form a personality and realize higher intelligence, demonstrating selective restraint over his destructive tendencies and the capacity to follow instructions, his tremendous growth over a brief span of time culminating in Nausicaä's lines to him of having become a 'fine person' at the moment of his demise, to which he had transcended his original purpose as a weapon.

In all of these cases, creatures grow to transcend expectations of their creators and Nausicaä's people (new humanity) follow suit. Her race's entirety and their collective struggles with the ancients center around this conflict of intention, with their existence intended solely as means of preserving culture and tending to the earth until the purification process completes itself, their deliberate weakness to the purification functioning as a built-in self-destruct mechanism. With this arises a duality between corruption and purity; Nausicaä's people are able to sustain themselves within a polluted environment, viewing the for-

est as the Sea of "Corruption" and purification process as toxic whereas the ancients, incapable of doing the same, view the pollution removal process as purification, engineered to remedy the aftermath of the Seven Days of Fire. Inhabitable for one may not be for the other and evident is this shifting dynamic of what "corruption" entails. It is by the unpredictability of evolution that Nausicaä's people gain agency and a sense of value far beyond what the Crypt's ancients had intended, granting opposition to their supposed destiny. Nausicaä being a messianic figure, the Crypt's destruction stands as an act of judgment, signifying new humanity's determination to live for themselves rather than as sacrificial tools for bringing about a process which only harms them. Even in the midst of bearing inherent weakness to the ever-purifying world, a more passive stance is taken of letting chips fall into place naturally, trusting in the potential to adapt beyond expectation and to new circumstances in hopes of overcoming vulnerabilities.

I do find it interesting that the name Nausicaä, meaning "burner of ships" essentially describes the end of the manga, the Crypt's destruction, which served as a Noah's ark-esque safehaven of sorts as means of preservation while the aforementioned Daikaishou (Great Tidal Wave) batter the lands. Whether this was intentional or not ties into how transcendence of intention is not only present within the work's content, but also through its structure, in some sense exemplifying Miyazaki's creative philosophies. Notable is that *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* took about thirteen years to write with some significant events occurring over this time period including the fall of the Soviet Union, and Miyazaki himself changed drastically, notably shifting away from Marxism to entirely alter his worldviews. Originally, the series was simply a valley, a girl and the threat of war, mostly lacking any real outline, to which it nearly concluded around where the film had, yet the project's eventual continuation enabled evolution well beyond that intended endpoint. Through the writing process, Miyazaki describes himself as growing to understand his own characters better, admitting to not having fully understood the meaning or reasoning of many of his own characters' actions until much later down the line. The manga's evolution doesn't halt there either as transcendence of intention even transcends its structure and content. Through the act of interpreting the work, the series also continues to evolve as readers inadvertently come to their own conclusions. It could be that I am simply reading too far into things, and this recurring motif concerning the capacity to transcend intention wasn't intended by Miyazaki whatsoever, yet if so, said interpretations beyond his intentions remain as applications of the work's themes, even if unintentionally. *Nausicaä* as a manga transcends the intentions of its creator as a work that evolved over the course of its creation.

MEGAZONE 23: THE PROBLEM FACING 1980S OVAs



TONY T.

2nd Year, Intended Economics and Data Science

Cipher is the best 1980s OVA.

Writer



Those exasperated with the release format and style of modern seasonal anime often find satisfaction in original video animations (basically direct-to-DVD features) from the 1980s. These series are often cited as being more conceptually creative than anime released in theaters or serialized on television. A result of Japan's lax monetary policy and subsequent inflation of asset prices, creating a bubble which lasted from the middle of the 1980s to around 1991, the incentives existed to appeal to niche markets with bizarre, off-kilter video animation. Especially compared to subsequent years as over speculation resulted in the dramatic fall of asset prices and the decline of Japanese household consumption, along with investment, this period is remembered fondly for the artistic liberties it enabled in the field of Japanese animation. All these factors, and perhaps the intrigue of viewing something from a far bygone era have contributed to the 1980s being considered a golden age of anime, especially in OVAs.

Megazone 23 initially seems like the platonic idea of an 80s OVA. Its first episode, an hour long, is aesthetically impressive, with fluid animation and an interesting setting. Narratively, it features a plot regarding a small group of humanity in a far flung future wherein the majority of the populace are brainwashed into believing that they reside in Tokyo. Whereas those in the know understand that their colony ship is bound to fight a rivaling ship, general society is based on the 1980s. While not terribly unique in the midst of numerous cyberpunk narratives from the same era, the first of *Megazone 23*'s four episodes stands out strongly in the overall picture of anime. Its production values and narrative are, compared to the majority of more recent anime, stellar. Many of its sequences do not necessarily require the amount of fluid animation they receive, but are made all the more engaging because of it.

Yet, in the following few episodes, *Megazone 23* transforms into a radically different story which never really feels like it resolves the conclusion of the first. Though still narratively connected, the second, third, and fourth episodes differ far more in tonality and aesthetic. Beyond this, the third and fourth episodes feature a long time skip following which almost none of the first and second episode's main cast are still relevant. This potentially could have been interesting in that the way *Megazone 23* handles its later episodes are extremely creative. Still, there's a level of coherency sacrificed. It isn't as if *Megazone 23* devolves into an incoherent mess that is impossible to follow, but it isn't coherent in terms of being a proper narrative. There is a beginning and a conclusion that are somewhat connected, but between the four episodes, this connection is rather tenuous.

While *Megazone 23* would hardly be what I'd consider to be the pinnacle of the 1980s OVA (either *Legend of the Galactic Heroes*, *Gunbuster*, or *Gundam 0080: War in the Pocket*), I do think it is very representative of its ilk as a whole. In acknowledgement of the sheer artistic creativity on display in many 80s OVAs, many do seem to lose focus in their main ideas, choosing instead to focus on a plethora of topics rather than looking at one in great detail. This has, in my eyes, relegated many of them to being fascinating works of art akin to what one might view in a gallery, rather than a narrative that engrosses and influences an audience. Of course, the question of whether or not this can be considered a problem depends heavily on one's opinion of the purpose of media. Regardless, I believe the issue plaguing 80s OVAs lies in that many are so conceptually divergent from the norm of what is considered standard for media to where the amount of people that can comprehend them is extremely low. This is somewhat inherent to the 80s OVA—the very conceit and appeal of these series are the liberties creators had. There is something lost in their lack of universality. I don't just mean that these OVAs don't appeal to mass audiences, as very few things do, but rather, mass audiences cannot even understand their appeal. As such, *Megazone 23* illustrates to me how the notion of this era as a golden age is somewhat flawed, even if I ultimately still consider it as such.





Shion

No. 6

Art By Sharrel Jan Narsico

THE ERA SHIFTING



TONY T.

2nd Year, Intended Economics and Data Science

I feel like the series' title is misleading nowadays.

Writer

The original *Gate Keepers* anime, released in 2000, is an interesting period piece. Set in 1969, it depicts Japan during its rise as the second largest economy in the world, with a general sense of optimism. The show itself is not terribly original, a typical series depicting the escapades of angsty teenagers with superpowers derived from a vague ability to access alternate dimensions. Said characters are rather generic tropes of popular archetypes of the era (of release, not its setting). Structurally, the series is a monster-of-the-week cartoon with an overarching narrative that is relevant, but understated for the majority of its run.



For that matter, though *Gate Keepers* never looks terrible from an aesthetic perspective, its release date in the new millennium rather than the one prior inhibits it from ever looking excellent. Utilizing digital animation as opposed to traditional cels, *Gate Keepers* suffers from the same fate as many anime of the day—without physical cels, it is impossible to remaster in high fidelity, leaving the series

permanently stuck in low definition limbo. In spite of all these flaws, though, I can't really say that *Gate Keepers* is at all terrible. Obviously its premise has been done to death, yet the introduction of period-relevant elements keeps it somewhat unique. Events such as the Apollo 11 landing and the overall upbeat cultural atmosphere make what would definitely be a generic setting in a 1970s or 1980s anime feel fresh from the perspective of the early 2000s. Still, *Gate Keepers* itself does little with its interesting setting which mixes science and historical fiction, as it simply exists as an ancillary detail without much focus or relevance in the main narrative.

That is until the six episode *Gate Keepers 21* OVA, released between 2002 and 2003. Confusingly set not 21 years but 32 years after the original, 21 embodies a far more cynical, nihilistic tone. Given its more contemporary setting of 2001 as compared to its release date, the sequel is rather narratively dissonant from the original. With a cast almost exclusively composed of new characters, almost the entire original cast of *Gate Keepers*, as shown in 21, are either missing, dead, or decaying. Most notable is a character from the original series who was immortal, yet by 21, is slowly fading away and has ceased contact with any of the surviving members of the original cast. The main secret governmental agency which the original characters worked under is a shell of its prior self. The original series portrayed AEGIS as a nation-spanning organization of wide influence and utmost credibility, whereas 21 depicts its remnants as essentially one guy in a car. This morbidity is conveyed within the sequel's visuals too. While the original series often preferred to show action scenes in broad, sunny, daylight, *Gate Keepers 21* opts for far darker coloring to emphasize the ruin that society has devolved into within a few decades. Yet,



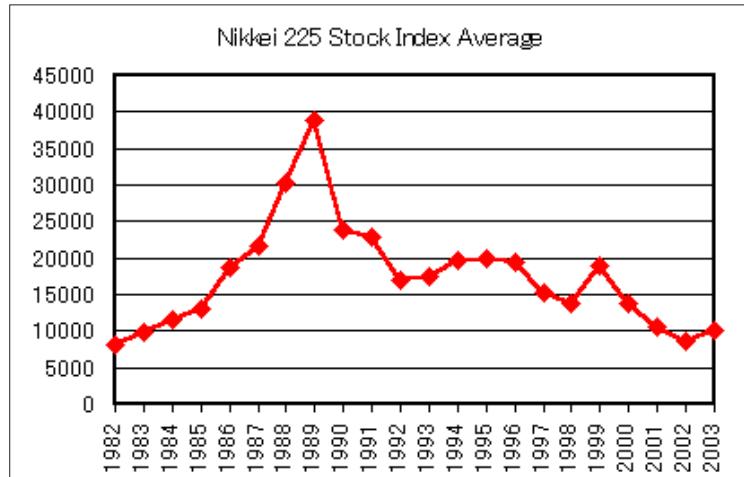
GATE KEEPERS 21

Gate Keepers 21 is itself not particularly innovative, using the same routine monster-of-the-week format as the original. 21's shorter runtime allows it to be less monotonous, yet its cast is also significantly smaller, featuring a less diverse set of personalities.

Where both of these series shine is as companion pieces to each other. Given events in the latter half of the 20th century, such as Japan's bubble economy bursting in 1991, the 2001 shown in *Gate Keepers 21* feels markedly purposeful in its contrast to the

between the two series is particularly fascinating given the otherwise dearth of unique ideas. Seeing as the original was at least somewhat based on a video game (though online sources seem to indicate that this connection is rather loose), the majority of what could be read into it likely comes from hindsight as a result of the second series' distinct tone.

From that perspective, then, *Gate Keepers 21* is absolutely brilliant in turning a somewhat generic game adaptation into a relatively interesting series depicting the inevitable decay of human society. Beyond that, the overwhelming presence of modern digital technology in 21 is somewhat precedent in showing the era of apathy following its release. *Gate Keepers 21*'s 2001, as a dismal "future" for *Gate Keepers*' 1969, thus conceptually parallels the very culture shifts occurring within the era it was released. This extends to the in-universe antagonists, which can be read as representative of far more human struggles in 21, as opposed to the largely external forces of the original. As such, while neither of these series are terribly original, *Gate Keepers* and *Gate Keepers 21* are particularly noteworthy anime in that they represent the cultural hysteria of their era. In spite of their faults, these series are interesting in that they act as a mirror to show the increasing cynicism and reliance on digital technology of the early 2000s, which itself has had a myriad of implications for modern-day society. Perhaps, then, the franchise's appeal lies not within the external action scenes, but what its more broad societal shift predicts about an increasingly self-centered, pessimistic future.



"The Nikkei 225, which comprises of 225 publicly traded Japanese firms, hit its peak in 1989, at the height of the Japanese Asset Price Bubble, and then dropped heavily in the following decades. The decade following the bubble's burst, generally considered to be around 1991, is referred to as 'The Lost Decade'."

1969 depicted in the original. From my perspective as an American, it reminds me of the marked shift in tonality between post-9/11 media and that which came prior. *Gate Keepers* and *Gate Keepers 21* are not at all insightful in a way that, say, *Metal Gear Solid 2*, might be considered on this sort of culture shift. Yet, the very existence of this implied theme

BLAME! - OUR LAYER OF REALITY



BLAKE MORRISON

2nd Year, Intended English and Japanese

Living (and dying) in the database

Writer

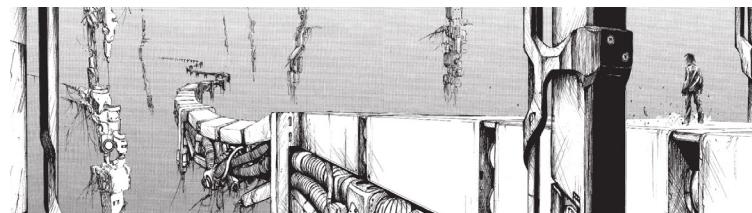
You look down to an abyss of metal and concrete, endlessly attenuating into the dark. You look up to a spiraling vortex of metal and concrete, endlessly constricting into the light. You look side to side to repeating corridors and chasms and shafts, echoing ceaselessly into the Megastructure. To you, there is no "outside" the Megastructure, and there never has been. There is no flora or fauna in sight except for the rare human settlement or nest of gargantuan grubs among other insectoid-mechanic life, writhing in and gnawing on this inexhaustible jungle of concrete. But despite this world being nothing if not man-made, or at least man-envisioned, you are not welcome here. In these endless chasms, corridors, and shafts you are hunted as a virus, and your hunters are supremely good at their job. Stay put in any one place for long, even (perhaps especially) in a cozy settlement that has fully-functioning amenities and fortifications, and they will find you. And they will kill you.



So you keep moving. North, east, west, south, it doesn't matter which direction, because there are no coherent maps for the interminable Megastructure, constantly under construction by gargantuan "Builders," an engorged mix of biology and machinery that construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct cities' worth of structures in days. But the Builders aren't the ones hunting you, the "Safeguard" and its "Exterminators" are, AI constructs of gangling limbs and many bladed claws that have somehow turned against their supposed human masters. Not to mention the cyborgs and other silicon-lifeforms who also seek to kill you as efficiently as their armaments allow. So you run to and



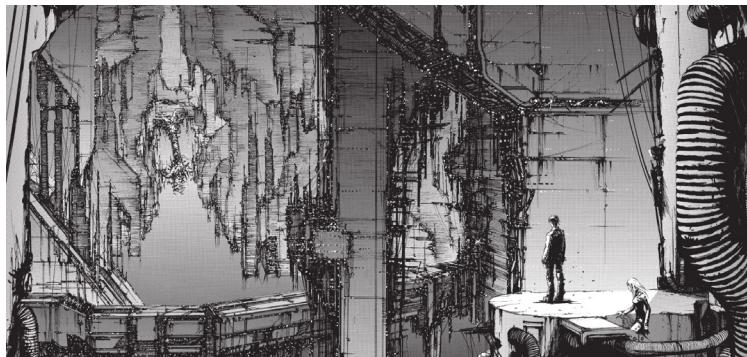
fro, perhaps instinctively seeking out some light that is no longer there, until it's not enough. You can't go on like this, routed and beleaguered by forces so much greater than yourself until it seems like the brutalist and surrealist architecture of the Megastructure itself has entombed you and is trying to crush you beneath its expanse. Then one day, what remains of some governmental body for humanity, the "Governing Agency," informs you that if you head upwards, perhaps you will find a human with "Net Terminal Genes"; in other words, someone the Safeguard and its Exterminators will not attack, someone who can tap into the Megastructure and stop the Builders from endlessly expanding it into the dark of space. Grasping onto this slim hope, you begin your journey, upwards and onwards. But what man-made, non-man-made, and man-unmaking wonders and horrors await you in the Megastructure's upper layers? Welcome to the world of *Blame!*.



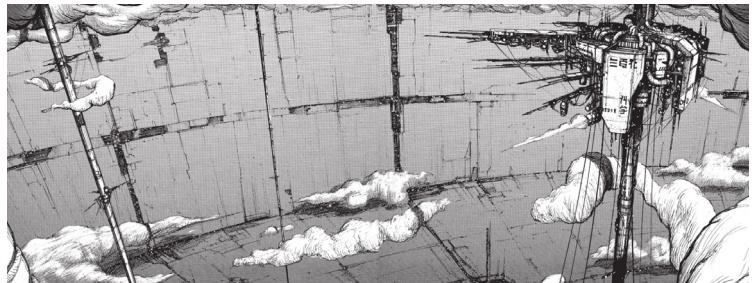
The situation I just described is the one in which Kyrii (transliterated as "Killy" in the manga's early scanlations), the protagonist of Nihei Tsutomu's sci-fi post-apocalyptic manga *Blame!*, finds himself in, but that's just the surface level of what this manga has to offer. This is because the main appeal of *Blame!* is actually ineffable, which is to say that its appeal is chiefly the art. And as no amount of description could ever fully capture the experience of viewing even just semi-competent paintings, I have to admit that the art of *Blame!* all so far exceeds "competence" that attempting to express it through words rather than just showing you it would be an exercise in



futility. A synopsis of the plot would also do little to convey the scope and scale of *Blame!*'s world given that it speaks for itself in every hyper-detailed page and panel. Moreover, while what little dialogue there is in *Blame!* does a fine enough job of reinforcing the dark, desolate, and desperate tone of the world, (with the banter between Kyrii and a certain other character even sometimes reaching endearing and humorous heights), all of the words of *Blame!* could be excised and 95% of the experience of reading it would be retained. This isn't because the story and the characterization as conveyed through the dialogue is forgettable and unengaging but because so much of it is already conveyed through the art, which intimately follows Kyrii's journey through the agoraphobic and claustrophobic nightmare that is the Megastructure. Keeping this in mind, I've done my best to include in this article art from *Blame!* that I feel best evokes its atmosphere. If you find any of the art here even a little bit intriguing (and I'd bet that it's statistically impossible for you not to), please, go give *Blame!* a read. For those who have already read it, I'll be discussing some heavy spoilers hereafter.



Those who haven't read *Blame!* probably won't get what I meant in titling this article "Our Layer of Reality." Some might guess that it has something to do with the Megastructure being built of many layers (called "Stratum" in canon), and others might figure it has something to do with simulation theory and that *Blame!* takes place in, as my cheeky comment earlier seems to suggest, a database/simulation. But I only seemed to suggest this because *Blame!* only probably takes place in a simulation, kind of like how we're only probably living in one ourselves. The world of *Blame!*, or "Base Reality" as it's called, is never confirmed to be simulated, and it also wouldn't be directly verifiable that it's simulated unless the creators of Base Reality decided to make contact with those inhabiting it. This is similar to how the evidence we have for living in a simulation is entirely theoretical (the speed of light representing a processing limit of the simulation, the naivete in assuming that humans are the only species in existence to ever come close



to reaching a technological singularity, etc.), but this evidence is still highly convincing and forwards a postulation that is more probable than not. This brings us to the Netsphere, which controls the expansion of the Megastructure, and is for all intents and purposes a simulated reality, with all the layers of the Megastructure making up the grid of processing power that allows the Netsphere to run at the advanced level (that is likely indistinguishable from Base Reality) it does. Nihei Tsutomu himself has compared the composition of the Megastructure to a dyson sphere, a hypothetical structure that encloses the sun and harvests a high percentage of its power output. But beyond this authorial commentary, details within the manga itself suggest that the megastructure encompasses the sun, and if we return to commentary given by Nihei, we can confirm that the megastructure approximately stretches to the orbit of Jupiter, which would give it a diameter of a whopping 1.6 billion kilometers. All the power in the solar system and a structure with an area (let alone the potential volume) of 2 trillion 10 billion 617 million 600 thousand kilometers squared is what it takes to power the net sphere, and within the netsphere it's certain that yet another layer in this unknowable long line of Russian doll simulated universes will eventually be created. This is all to say that *Blame!* makes you think about existential bedrock, and not just in a "I'm fourteen and a half and this is deep" kind of way, but in a "I'm nineteen and so incredibly insignificant in the grand scheme of all things that I can't even begin to imagine everything that goes into a grain of sand" kind of way, a feat only a few manga series have managed to pull off effectively in my eyes. I only hope that in our layer of the simulation, in our version of Base Reality, we will not have to entomb our planet, or maybe our solar system and beyond, in transistors, metal, and concrete in order to create the next layer. And here's hoping we don't leave anyone behind in the mainframe that powers this next layer as "viruses" our own creation tries to destroy. But if that does happen, or already has happened in some twistedly obvious way we've yet to realize, please let that post-apocalypse, existentially terrifying as it is, look as cool as it does *Blame!*.



Why is there a vaguely medieval looking knight in a cyberpunk world? It's cool, so don't question it.

THE SHORT STORTELLI



MITCHELL MADAYAG

2nd Year, Intended Japanese and Business

Somehow, I find myself talking about the 5th iteration of franchises two times in a row

Editor-In-Chief

SPOILERS FOR SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI V

As someone who used to confuse *Persona*'s Teddie with *Danganronpa*'s Monokuma, it wasn't until *Persona 4 Golden*'s release on Steam in 2019 that I really started getting into Atlus's games, though I did play the long forgotten *Trauma Center: New Blood* on the Wii at my grandmother's house when I was young (never beat it though, that game was too stressful for an elementary schooler). I enjoyably played through *Persona 4 Golden* and eventually its predecessor and successor, *Persona 3 FES* and *Persona 5 Royal* respectively, but I found the mostly sullen atmosphere and the grindy, often do or die gameplay of *Persona 3 FES* to be the most fun I had out of the three mainline *Persona* titles. Part of the appeal of *Persona 3 FES* was what drew me to the roots of *Persona*'s origins: the *Megami Tensei* series, a series that prides itself on its ongoing narrative of law versus chaos as well as its unforgiving dungeons and boss fights. Although I have yet to play many other *Megaten* games to compare, the latest entry on the Nintendo Switch, *Shin Megami Tensei V*, greatly surpassed my expectations and made me thankful for buying it over *Pokémon: Brilliant Diamond*. That being said, *SMT V* is far from being the best JRPG out there as its seemingly incomplete story sticks out as the game's most obvious flaw. The story is told only in short outbursts spaced far apart that I struggled to really piece together what exactly was going on during my first playthrough. Even as I ran through *SMT V* a second and third time to achieve the other endings, I was able to better understand the general image the devs were aiming for, but could only be reminded how cutscenes and other story elements should have been more evenly placed. It's less about "show, don't tell," but rather that the game neither shows nor tells the finer details and expects you to recognize supposedly relevant information that seemed so minor prior to any important plot point.

Within the first 15 minutes of the game, a cutscene plays after the unnamed protagonist, Ichiro Dazai, and an unnamed classmate black out after a tunnel collapses on them. A group of narrators introduce the forbidden past of the Nahobino, the original form of the myriad gods before being stripped by the

God of Law as He took the Throne of Creation for Himself. The gods are then rendered to mere demons as their Knowledge is secreted away, until God of Chaos Lucifer tempted humans into bearing said Knowledge and becoming closer to god. While I practically paraphrased the backstory the narrative of *SMT V* primarily revolves around, first-time players will most likely gloss over what was said in this cutscene due to the overwhelming dump of exposition. Even if one would try to retain the collection of jargon of important deities and powers, these details are not elaborated on further until the game's climax. Funny enough, I did the Neutral route first and pretty much forgot Lucifer even existed until rewatching this same scene during New Game+ as he only appears as the final boss in the Law and Chaos routes.



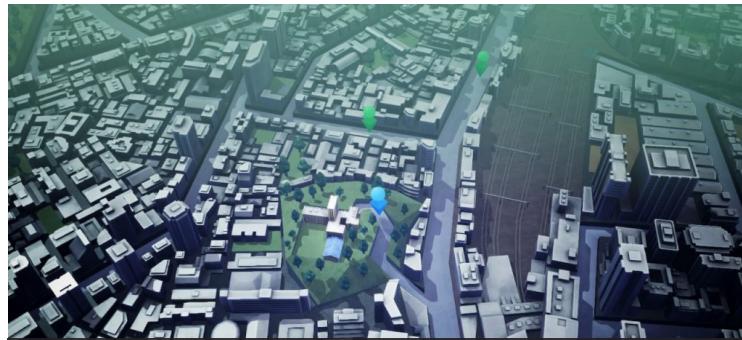
If SSBU had DLC for another year, Nahobino most definitely would have made it in

From a design perspective, the game is not a good medium for storytelling due to the open-world exploration in each area of Da'at. The gameplay cycle of *SMT V* is intrusive to the narrative as the average player is likely to leisurely explore the world, grind some levels, and complete various side quests before heading towards the primary objective to advance the story. Therefore, the 8+ hours of enjoying the game's mechanics and all it has to offer is unbalanced with the few minute cutscenes sprinkled after finishing a main quest, creating the impression of the story's slow pacing. The second act in Da'at Shinagawa could be considered the most active in progressing the story as the protagonist and Tao Isonokami are in a wild goose chase after Lahmu and his captive, Sahori Itsukushima, but the stakes didn't feel high enough for me to be compelled. It is possible for the player to learn a bit about *SMT V*'s lore through scattered flavor texts just by playing the game alone, but character and worldbuilding details are often hidden away behind random NPC dialogue rather than being introduced in a more meaningful manner, like Yakumo's backstory being only told through a simple polygonal character in Tokyo's overworld at a very specific time in the game. Miman essentially being demons' botched attempts in



COMINGS OF NG IN SMT V

changing back into a Nahobino is another interesting fact likely to be missed as it's only mentioned by a concealed Miman in the game's biggest explorable area, which by that point, those who are uninterested in what the Miman have to say after collecting hundreds of them are prone to skip this single line.



Tfw when your life story is only known by a green no-face NPC

There is also a hilariously small number of nine main quests meant to direct the protagonist's actions, most of which are simple "head to the next spot marked on the map" type of objectives. Some of the 63 side quests could have made more engaging plot points to follow had they been closely integrated into the main storyline, instead of being shafted in the end like the whole Miyazu/Khonsu quest sequence. It makes me wonder if Atlus plans to release a "Royal" version of *SMT V*, akin to *Persona 5 Royal* with added content, quality of life changes, and a revised story in the future, since it feels that *SMT V* has many great ideas it tackles in its plot, such as the concept of the Nahobino, but the execution is slow and uninteresting. One gripe I had with how the game handled its finale was that the alignment choice could have been made either earlier in the game or had a more substantial world to explore after choosing which side to support. Like how Abdiel was hinted at being an ally-turned-foe character as we are originally forced to aid her in preserving God's, I would have liked to see more inner conflict among the forces of chaos, the side one could interpret as the "good guys" at a glimpse. Imagine a battle with Yuzuru Atsuta and his companion Hayataro (Pokemon rival style) in addition to a battle against his fused form with Koshimizu/Tsukuyomi at the Throne of Creation, had the player decided to not side with chaos. I can only dream of Dazai calling the protagonist a heretic and unrequitedly praising God as you fight him and his legion of angels, but instead his personality was represented little in the single fight against his and Abdiel's Nahobino form.



What too much angelness does to a mf

Dazai and Abdiel are actually on the better end of the spectrum of compelling characters within *SMT V*, but most just end up feeling forgetful and one-dimensional. Amanozako, the navigator companion I originally thought I would despise, turned out to be pretty memorable as her character was more fleshed out in optional side quests than prominent figures like Tao and Yuzuru in the main story. As much as I gripe about the lackluster narrative in *SMT V*, I still absolutely enjoyed the game regardless. Turn-based JRPGs have always been a pleasure to play and *SMT V* did not disappoint me in the slightest with its intense difficulty and interactive demon-building mechanics. The melancholic overworld of Da'at and creepy demon models are made of some of the best graphics to ever grace the Switch's screen and I honestly would consider *SMT V* to be the best game I played in 2021, granted I didn't actually play many great games that year had to offer. Perhaps the True Neutral route will wrap up this incomplete storyline better than the other three, but I'm just having too much fun building an unstoppable demon compendium in New Game+ Reborn mode to get to it quite yet.



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	Erik Nelson Writer
	José Cuevas Writer
	Max R. Writer
	Kev Wang Writer



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