

vol.49 #05
mystery

KOZUE



Chiaki Nanami
Danganronpa 2
art by Athena Chen

THIS WEEK'S FEATURED SERIES

MANGA RECOMMENDATION

KURO (BLACK)

A young girl Coco and her black cat Kuro live alone in an enormous mansion. The two are inseparable, living a fun-filled life together. Things are not how they seem, however. Though Coco is unaware, the other inhabitants of the town live in dread and fear of an unknown force enveloping the town. Watch as Coco's happy, everyday life becomes less and less ordinary...



Summer 2017, Brain's Base
Directed by Takahiro Oomori

ANIME RECOMMENDATION

BACCANO!

1930's America. A train from New York to Chicago, destined for disaster. Intense wars between mafia groups. And a strange elixir said to grant immortality. Seamlessly blending realistic events with the supernatural, *Baccano!* follows several events which, while seemingly unrelated, are all a part of one grand story -- a story of alchemy, immortality, and survival.

WHAT MAKES A BAD MYSTERY?

ANDREW WING

4TH YEAR, MEDIA STUDIES

STAFF WRITER

Waifubot has consumed my life
(Kong Wenge where are you?)

Thanks to the anime tastes of my freshman year roommate, I've seen many mystery anime over the years - both the good, and the bad. Mystery is one of my favorite genres, so it's always tragic when one turns out bad. Some of the less-than-stellar ones I've seen include *Mayoiga*, *Ranpo Kitan*, and *HaruChika*, just to name a few. What makes a bad mystery?

The first characteristic of a bad mystery show is an episodic show structure. Don't get me wrong, there are some solid episodic mystery shows out there, such as *Death Parade*, however, most of the time they're a mystery-of-the-week gone wrong. One of the best things about a mystery is its complexity and mind-boggling nature. It's nice to see the investigation, contemplation, and suspense that leads to the mystery being solved. When mysteries are compressed to just one episode, the mystery-solving process becomes so abridged that it's just not as enjoyable. Not enough information is presented for the viewer to solve the mystery themselves. Each case ends up feeling unimportant due to how quickly it's solved. Another problem it presents is that it results in a collection of short stories, rather than a longer, ongoing conflict. Many of these mystery-of-the-week shows don't have a solid plot that connects the individual mysteries together. Examples of episodic mysteries are *HaruChika*, *Holmes of Kyoto*, and *Beautiful Bones*. *HaruChika* has this problem: Haruta and Chika solve random mysteries loosely related to their school's music club. This ends up making these shows very unfulfilling to watch, because previous arcs become irrelevant once the characters move on.



I thought this was going to be about band

Somewhat related are overpowered main characters. Frequently, the mysteries are short because the main character is ridiculously OP. Examples of mysteries with OP main characters are *Beautiful Bones* and *Holmes of Kyoto*. *Beautiful Bones* was actually quite solid, but serves as a good example of this trope. Sakurako knows everything and is able to figure out any mystery with little to no clues to work with. Holmes has ridiculous deduction skills and is like the best appraiser in the universe. There is very little suspense since you always know that the main character is going to save the day. It makes the show too predictable because you know going in that the MC will figure it out. It significantly lowers the story's sense of realism as the MC just knows too much.

The last aspect of a poor mystery is a huge cast of characters. Some mysteries can pull this off e.g. *Danganronpa*. Nevertheless, most mysteries with an ensemble cast just don't have enough time to develop all of their characters. For example, *Mayoiga* had 30 characters riding the same bus together, with most of them being nobodies who barely get any screen time. *King's Game* had a class of 32 classmates participate in a killing game together. Most of the characters were shallow caricatures who played to their stereotypes and ended up being uninteresting themselves. Not only are there many pointless, irrelevant characters, but also the MCs end up being underdeveloped because there are so many characters.



Squad

Looking back, mystery is one of my favorite genres. The genre boasts some all-star shows like *Death Note*, *Zankyou no Terror*, and *Erased*. It's tragic that many promising shows of the genre end up bad, often times to the same few tropes.



USING MYSTERY AS A VEHICLE TO GENERATE EMPATHY: UMINEKO NO NAKU KORO NI

MADS MAYFIELD

3RD YEAR, BUSINESS AND PSYCHOLOGY

I abused my presidential authority to write this.
PLEASE read *Umineko*.

GUEST WRITER

Suicide trigger Warning

To begin, I'd like to file a disclaimer that *Umineko* made me cry so hard it broke my laptop trackpad. If you decide to read this VN and the same happens to you, I am not liable for any damage incurred. Also, **this article will not contain spoilers.** Ahaha.wav.

Umineko no Naku Koro Ni is Ryukishi07's second full length VN, preceded by the significantly more infamous *Higurashi no Naku Koro Ni*. The titles make up 2/3 of his yet incomplete "When They Cry" trilogy, a name referring to the "cries" of the respectively titular *Higurashi/Cicadas* and *Umineko/Seagulls*. While both *Higurashi* and *Umineko* fall under the "murder mystery" genre, *Higurashi* probably emphasizes murder and tragedy, versus *Umineko*'s heavy focus on a very technically written mystery. The VN does a deep dive into logical reasoning and the mystery genre as a whole, with its premise lifted directly from *And Then There Were None*, a tale complicated and supplemented by added logic frameworks like Knox's *Rules of Mystery*, Ockham's Razor, and Hempel's Raven.

Umineko demonstrates an added nuance and evolution in Ryukishi's writing since *Higurashi*, but it also reveals that he has taken time to more deeply consider the way he views the world at large. In *Higurashi*, our protagonists suffer time and time again until they understand the ultimate solution to their strife is to ask their friends for help. In any of the main casts' tragic life circumstances, be it abuse, mental illness, or even pathological paranoia and mistrust, the solution is to reach out to your friends. Even the main antagonist is extended a metaphorical "helping hand" by the end of the

series - finalizing the implication that people's problems, no matter how they've externalized them and hurt others, are forgivable and explainable, and can be broken down over time through the support and care of others.



*If you're not going to read *Umineko* for the writing,
at least read it for the memes*

Umineko, within its first arc, obliterates any notions that this is still how Ryukishi views the world. Mere hours after our protagonist, Battler Ushiromiya, arrives on the island that hosts the Ushiromiya family conference, the entire family is sucked into a repeating time loop of death and terror that mirrors *Higurashi*'s, with the then-antagonist Beatrice's insistence that this is all repentance for the "sins" of Battler and his family - sins which are the reader's job to understand and solve. But from its inception, we see that Ryukishi's view of trauma and forgiveness are much more complicated and less accepting than before. The sins the Ushiromiya family have committed are far more numerous than those of the *Higurashi* cast, and the path to forgiveness is markedly harsher. Especially in the case of our protagonist Battler, who is equally unsure as the reader as to what his mistake even was.

This is where the shift to a more mystery-heavy genre really makes its mark; while *Higurashi* had “question” and “answer” arcs in the same style as *Umineko*, the mysteries were laid out fairly simply and solutions were given with little effort. *Umineko*, conversely, never names the culprit. There is one definite solution to every main mystery in the tale, but these must all be discovered and understood by the reader. And they’ve been thoroughly vetted, too. Fan theories are encouraged, but by the seventh arc it becomes clear that each one of these has the tiniest conditions that make them impossible.

Thus, the experience of reading *Umineko* requires investment in the details, the characters, and their motivations for this complicated and highly interpersonal series to be understood. And by the time the puzzle pieces all fit together, the mysteries connect in their endpoints. The numerous sins of characters are repented for by their own simultaneously occurring analysis and understanding of their past actions. It becomes very clear that only one answer to the main mystery, Beatrice’s haunting “Who aaaaaam I?” at the end of the fourth arc, is perhaps the saddest solution that could be conceptualized within the plot conditions.

And god is it sad. Not just because of a layered stack of overused tragedy porn tropes that have turned me off from other “sad” visual novels in the past, but because at this point, to solve the mystery, you have had to fully understand the perspective of the culprit, their victims, and their reasoning. You have had to directly sympathize with someone whose trauma and past problems have been externalized to the point of mass murder, similar to that of *Higurashi*’s main antagonist.



Wow look at this happy OTP picture hahaha I'm not crying.....

But *Umineko*’s antagonist is not afforded the outstretched hand the *Higurashi* cast presents to their villain. The premise of *Umineko* rests on the fact that the events of this story, the mass murder of every introduced character, are over. There is no saving who has died. There is no possible in-universe redemption of our antagonist, as their body

lies buried among that of the victims that prompted their crimes to begin with. Who then, extends that outreach? Who understands the culprit, their systemic problems, how to prevent this in the future? Through solving the mystery, becoming the detective character yourself, it becomes you.

The final line of *Umineko* is “I dedicate this tale to my beloved witch, Beatrice.” Who this line is from and/or directed to is unclear without context - Ryukishi says a farewell to the viewers earlier on, and the character of Beatrice is also given a goodbye. Therefore, I believe this line is directed at the symbol of Beatrice, rather, the culprit who has died without repentance, without a voice. This tale, written by Ryukishi, is his way of giving them a voice through inducing the reader’s empathy. And on a more personal level, Ryukishi’s dedication is to someone else -- months before Ryukishi finished *Umineko*, the mangaka of *Higanbana no Saku Yoro ni*, a close friend of his, committed a relatively unexpected suicide. Ryukishi delayed the production of *Umineko* to begin working on a visual novel adaptation of his friend’s now incomplete manga. This event further shapes the context of his final line.



Ryukishi is saying goodbye to a misunderstood, tragic character whose voice was silenced. But in this, he sends a message to everyone else who died without redemption, without a voice. It is difficult to understand why someone would choose to die, especially someone we loved and cherished. It is even more difficult to accept that sometimes, systemic circumstances hold out over any love and understanding we have to offer. But Ryukishi brings up a powerful point in *Umineko*’s eighth arc. We may not understand those we’ve lost, we may even be confused or angry that our love was not enough. But, we can try to understand, love, and bring justice to their memory despite what we’ve lost. Through the content we create, we can directly combat the systemic problems that presupposed this tragedy.

Ultimately, *Umineko* uses the mystery genre to tell a love story to all of those who slipped through the cracks, who we could not understand before we lost them. It is one last attempt to give power to the story and voice of victims, though they themselves may no longer be around. Nothing better conveys this sentiment than the line repeated perhaps more than anything else in the visual novel as a hint to solve its ultimate mystery -

“Without love, it cannot be seen.”

A MYSTERY OF A GENRE



ABEER HOSSAIN

STAFF WRITER

2ND YEAR, MECHANICAL ENGINEERING/ASTROPHYSICS

My life revolves around the thirty-eighth minute of every hour.



Made in Abyss. *Monogatari Series*. *Haruhi Suzumiya*. *Death Parade*. *Gosick*. All five of these shows are listed under the Mystery category on MyAnimeList. Someone who has yet to see any of them would assume that they follow similar mystery story structures in similar settings with the occasional creative liberty here and there. Upon finishing them, that viewer would find that these shows are completely different in setting, plot, and most importantly, their take on mystery.

I watched *Gosick* about 6 years ago and was blown away by its story and characters. I looked for places and people to discuss the show with and found very few who had watched and even fewer who remembered anything about it other than its main character. After watching years and years of anime and many more “mystery” shows, I realized exactly why. *Gosick* is, in my and many others opinion, a very good mystery anime. However, it is the closest to what a new viewer would expect of a generic mystery show. An (or a couple) eccentric character(s) partnered with a straight-man of sorts accepting and solving a variety of mysteries with a larger overall storyline at work.

While other shows like *Monogatari* and *Haruhi* do have mini-arc structures, they avoid the pitfalls *Gosick* resides in by not framing the storylines as clear and outright “mysteries



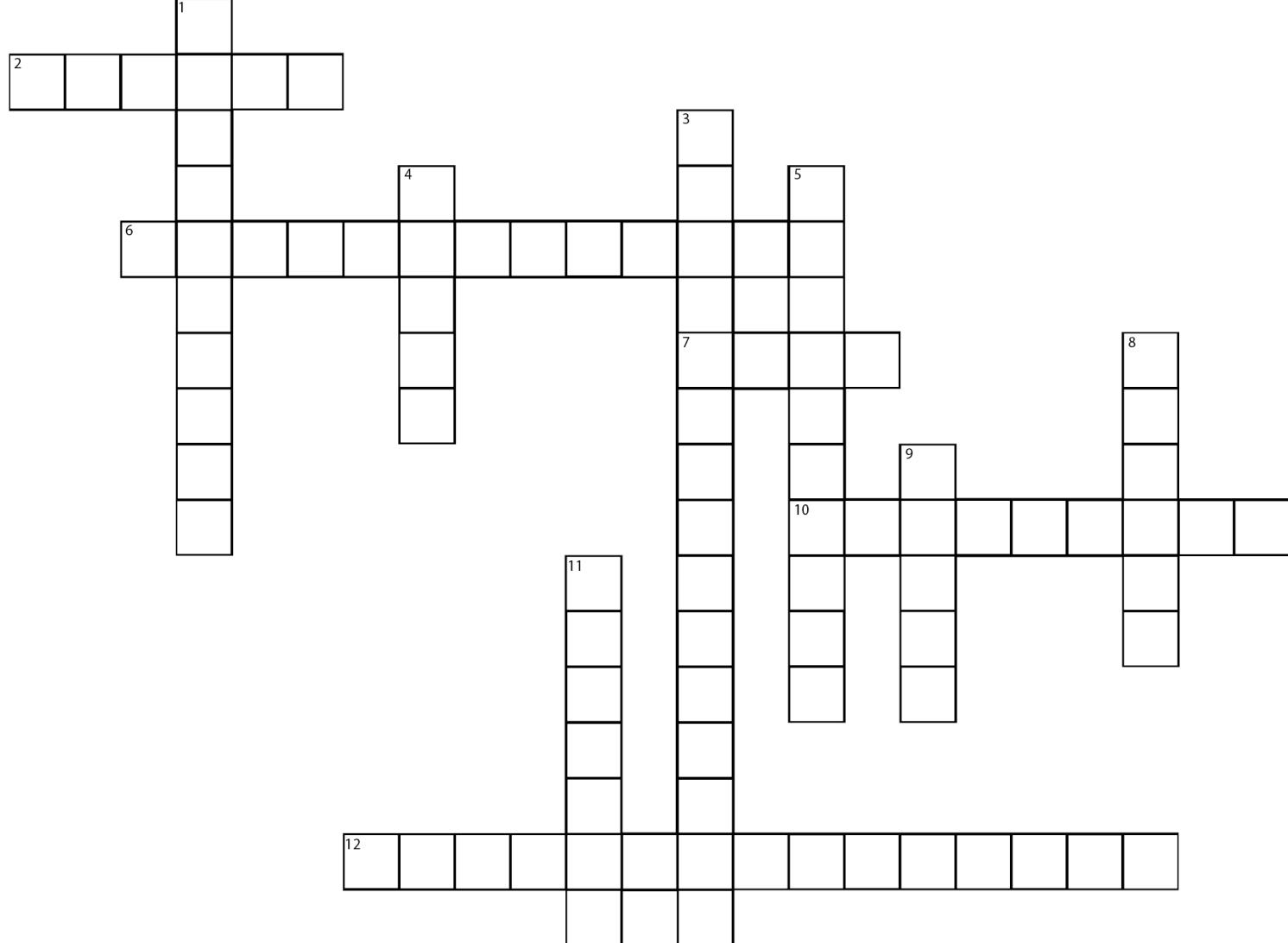
Made in Abyss ensnares viewers in a mystery as large as the world itself.

to be solved by a Sherlock Holmes archetype.” *Monogatari Series* and *Haruhi* are two of the most memorable series of all time not because of some Mystery Inc. group, but because they have worlds and characters viewers are dying to know more about. There aren’t singular, straightforward mysteries to be solved. The world is the mystery and every subsequent episode peels back further layers. *Made in Abyss* takes this concept a step further. The Abyss is a complete unknown to both the viewers and most of the characters of the show, including the protagonists. We don’t know how the Abyss came to be, what it contains in each level, and the personalities and ambitions of those who have managed to venture to its depths. *Made in Abyss* departs completely from the “mystery of the week/arc” formula.



These shows beg the question of what is a mystery anime/show? Any show, whether romance, shounen, mecha, slice of life, Sci-Fi, etc., includes some form of mystery. However, not all of these are then classified as being a mystery and those that are take drastically different approaches towards the genre. I think a mystery anime is one that forces the viewers to question everything about its world and its characters. Every location could be just as benign or just as dangerous as the next. These shows make us beg for answers to cure our unease and provide peace of mind about the next step. We also hope they don’t spell everything out for us so we can interpret and analyze the world for ourselves, just as we do in real life. Mystery is an essential part of storytelling.

The Mystery Manga Crossword



ACROSS

- 2 Boy gets more than he expects when he time travels to the past
- 6 Lawyer with a penchant for being right
- 7 Precocious preteen noble turned detective
- 10 Main character dreams of supernatural nightmares
- 12 People get powers at the cost of stars in the sky

DOWN

- 1 The Minority Report of anime
- 3 The most well-dressed thief you'll ever know
- 4 Anti-hero whose writing brings upon death
- 5 Anime with a "mad scientist"
- 8 Manga about an energy conserving detective
- 9 A not-so-young child detective
- 11 Neurosurgeon in German meets an unexpected child

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AMURO TOORU
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