

創造聖俗循環

Fractals of Infinite Cosmos



創造聖俗循環 ~ Fractals of Infinite Cosmos.

1. Fragrance of the Tide

Original Composer: VCLN

2. The Festival Starts Today

Original Composer: Ocha, Slowbro

3. Nocturne of the Swelling Celestial Tides ~ Aflame Inviolable Illusion

Original Composer: H2SO4

4. Ridicule Rondo ~ Sneer of Woods

Original Composer: 深蒼穹

5. The Colorful Maiden, Through the Colorless World

Original Composer: Aka Kyuketsuki

6. Lazy Sands of Nakanotorishima

Original Composer: Spectral Nexus

7. Alleyway of Roaring Waves

Original Composer: Wanwan

8. Footprints of Trieste

Original Composer: 黒羽

9. Undying Flower ~ Immortal Lotus

Original Composer: Tokini11

10. Touhou Red Kappa ~ Interactive Dream

Original Composer: 153

Illustration, Arrangement, Story: Kirbio

Track 6 Transcription: GizmoTheDragon

Story Assist, Translation: Gilde

Special Thanks: Ocha

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1. Fragrance of the Tide

Lament of the Sea

It was a peaceful windy morning at the Port of Nagoya. Two girls-- Renko Usami and Maribel Hearn (Merry) of the Secret Sealing Club-- were standing on a balcony by the sea, staring into the vastness of the ocean.

In this era, dumping waste into the ocean is strictly prohibited by law. While the general environment of the ocean has improved as a result, the maritime trade routes are still in full bloom, and are very crucial to the area's development. Thus, the port is still as busy as ever. In contrast to the serene atmosphere of the ocean.

"We could've visited Ise Grand Shrine or Atsuta Shrine on the way here, you know. I want to see the legendary treasure already..."

"Sorry, Merry~. I just really, really wanted to fit this into the itinerary! We'll have tons of fun at those places later, I swear."

Renko rushed back into their hotel room to prepare some documents, leaving Maribel alone. Staring out across the ocean, she could see countless boundary seams weaving in between the ships on the horizon. The sunken kingdom, the lost island, even a scene from the era of the gods...

"The sea... is really mesmerizing, isn't it?
They say that it's the place where all life on Earth originated from.
Like a tape recorder of the Earth's memory, in a way."

If she closed her eyes and focused, she could almost see a spear being held aloft.

"Everything that we have today started from a drop of water on that spear.
Rising from the nothingness of the primordial ocean, against all the possibilities that every other drop held...
You could call it a miracle, of sorts.

...Sometimes, I wonder what might've been in those other droplets.
What would things be like for us, if just a few events had turned out differently?"

"Well, that's what we're here for, right?
Come on, Merry! The conference is about to start!"

2. The Festival Starts Today

Mundane & Extraordinary of Science

In the past, people used to delineate between "mundane life" and "extraordinary events".

Although much of one's life was taken up by drudgery and menial affairs, it built up to something special: a crop harvest that only came once a year, a festival that only came once every ten years, or perhaps a smaller, more personal success.

Everyday concerns melted away, with nothing to tie you down for that moment.

Those moments were the ones that gods lived in.

In this science-dominated modern era, there's no such thing as a god, and there's hardly any delineation left between "common" and "rare".

"Looks like that booth's showing the latest Martian probe footage."

"Still no Martian hotel plans on the horizon, huh?"

Workers are on the clock from the moment they rise out of bed. Marketplaces are only ever one click away.

But even as those borders erode, and the era of observational science reaches its limit, scientists and scholars still gather at conferences to share the fruits of their research every year.

Of course, nowadays, they're one part "conference" and one part "speculative trade show"...

"Artists' interpretations of Challenger Deep fauna? I guess they're still working on the pressure-resistant cameras."

"Gahhh. I hope those shrimps don't show up in my dreams tonight."

...And most of the visitors in attendance are doing so from afar, via virtual reality.

But the atmosphere is still far brighter than your average day at the research lab.

Sometimes, it's easy to forget that what feels mundane to people inside the circle can look very special to people outside, no matter how big or small the topic is.

"Hey, Renko." Merry smiled as she pointed at the venue map. "This is the presentation you wanted to see most, right? With the strings?"

"Yeah, that one! 'Philosophical Models of the Universe: Past, Present, and Future!'"

3. Nocturne of the Swelling Celestial Tides ~ Aflame Inviolable Illusion Naught but Inviolable Illusion

"...You *did* buy the tickets already, right?"

"....."

Renko began hurriedly swiping through various screens on her tablet.

"Well, we still have an hour or two. Mind explaining a few of these to me while we wait?"

Merry gestured at a series of colorful posters lining the hallway as she sat down.

"Let's see... ah, Everett's World Lines. Now *that's* a classic.

Every possible decision creates its own new timeline, like branches on a tree.

They run in parallel, but they don't interact with each other."

"Different timelines? Like the world where Katō the Demon destroyed Tokyo in an earthquake?"

"Nothing THAT extreme... well, uh, maybe? Assuming the decisions that led to it started very, very far in the past. The past is what determines future events, after all. And the scale of the changes you can make is limited by the law of entropy.

You need to add a *lot* of energy if you want to disturb an otherwise-isolated system for more than a few moments, and..."

"It's not that easy to fight the weight of karma, in other words."

"Ooh, yeah, that's a good way of putting it.

We can change what we have for breakfast, whether it's synthetic bacon-and-eggs or synthetic steamed-rice and-miso... but it's not gonna change which branch we're on in the long run."

"Hmm." Merry frowned.

"So if I were to make a sliding scale of fate-changing power, breakfast foods would be on one end..."

Merry held up her notebook, which was filled with a list of locations to visit that evening.

"And a butterfly flapping its wings way across the globe would be on the opposite end?"

"Pfft! Yeah, something like that."

"...Are you still in the ticket queue?"

"Gah!" Renko looked back down to the tablet.

4. Ridicule Rondo ~ Sneer of Woods

Ridiculous Improbability

"There we go. Our future would've looked a bit more grim if you hadn't reminded me!"

"Or if there were just a few more people taking up physical seats."

"Heh. Or if you'd been a little more insistent on visiting the shrines first..."

"Hey now."

With their seats safely registered, the pair decided to spend the rest of their time before the show with an early lunch. Merry scrolled through the cafeteria's menu as they walked.

"Decisions, decisions..."

You said that breakfast food can't change much, but what if I'd gotten an upset stomach this morning?"

"Well... That'd only change things by a few minutes, right?"

"What if I'd had to go to the *hospital?* Again. Um, with an actual problem, this time."

"Hmm."

"...Ooh, I just thought of a good one. What if I'd gone to the hospital *instead of asking you for advice back then?*"

That one gave Renko pause.

If you're of a particularly anxious persuasion, you've probably thought a few times about "how you got to your current place in life". The more you think about it, the more surprising it becomes that you even got this far in life at all.

"Yikes, you're right. What if I hadn't taken the same course as you?"

"What if I'd just settled for going to a school back home?"

"What if neither of us were even BORN?"

"What if Izanagi had tilted his wrist just half a degree further to the right...?!"

"Huh?"

"I'll tell you about it later."

If the primordial soup had been just half a degree hotter, then perhaps we wouldn't even be on the same tree--let alone the same branch. But at the same time, from our present-day perspective, those events *had* to have happened. We wouldn't be here to observe the world around us if they hadn't. A ridiculously improbable statistic becomes matter-of-course in hindsight.

Our reality is just a tiny grain of sand in a vast sea of possibilities, and many of those possibilities don't even have anyone alive to observe them.

"When you put it like that, it feels more like a hedge maze than a tree."

5. The Colorful Maiden, Through the Colorless World

Extraordinary Girls in Mundane World

As technology progressed, people became able to completely synthesize any food. From an ordinary bowl of rice, to miso soup with crested ibis, or even the osechi-ryouri or tsukimi dango that you'd normally reserve for special occasions-- you could have any meal, with any ingredients, any time you wanted. Just like a child would dream of.

But once you actually tried it, you soon got tired of it. When the "extraordinary" becomes mundane, people's life energy constantly withers away, with nothing truly special to revitalize it.

"Wow, even the university cafeteria didn't have this many options...! You should pick, Renko. What do you want to get?"

"Good question. Today's a red-letter day for science, soo... how about Sekihan?"
"Sounds great! You know, I've never had that before."

Once they tapped in their order, the food vending machine produced the festive dish almost instantly.

"Mmm, this is **so** good! The rice and the red adzuki go great together. I feel blessed with just a few bites..."

"Hey, Merry. Did you know that Sekihan wasn't always eaten to celebrate festive occasions? In fact, a lot of places in the olden days ate it after **unfortunate** occasions, since it was believed to repel evil spirits."

"Mm-hrmh?" (Merry had her mouth full.)

"But most of those places eventually started eating it when good things happened, too. Maybe they were trying to reverse the negative association it had...?"

"That's a nice thought."

"Oh, but speaking of negative associations." Renko pointed at the adzuki beans.

"In either case, the way those beans split open looked a bit **visceral**. So people would also use black-eyed peas, or kidney beans instead."

Merry looked down, raised an eyebrow, then nodded as she lowered it again. "Makes sense."

5. The Colorful Maiden, Through the Colorless World

Extraordinary Girls in Mundane World

"It figures that the meaning would change throughout history, even for a special dish like this.
...Especially when you can order it out of a vending machine any time you want."

Renko sighed in agreement.

"It's the feelings that count, though, y'know? It's not just the food or the clothes that make an event special.
You can eat tsukimi dango any time you want, but it's not the same without looking at the full moon."

She gazed out of the nearby window, looking at the bright daytime sky with a slightly sad expression.

"I wish everyone else realized that sometimes."

6. Lazy Sands of Nakanotorishima

Sunken Language

Maribel fiddled with a bean on the end of her chopsticks.

"I wonder if that 'meaning' was ever the same for different people, to begin with."

"Oh, I know this one. Monochrome Merry-- uh, I mean, Mary."

There's no way to tell whether "red" from your perspective matches "red" from another person's perspective, even if they're both "red".

It's a puzzling thought experiment already, even before you bring linguistic relativity into it.

Where does 'blue' start and 'green' end? Which direction does time flow? And do those distinctions come from the language, or does the language simply describe what was already there?

Regardless of which one came first, the act of distinguishing different words goes hand-in-hand with the act of drawing boundaries. In the distant past, before words existed, the world was in a state of primordial chaos.

Then humans drew boundaries across it, splitting the world up into something they could understand.

Japan's islands rose from the sea, or a small spark blossomed out across the Planck epoch, or a gargantuan deity's corpse raised Heaven high above Earth.

Or something else to that extent.

And all throughout history since then, language has been used to reveal the true nature of things, or to hide away things that were undesirable for the advantaged parties of the time.

From the perspective of modern man, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the core element of the universe is "the word," not the quark.

"...And if there isn't a word for it, it just doesn't exist.

Like that so-called 'virus' you caught from the TORIFUNE."

"Like all the actual flora and fauna growing up there, too.

Rejected as dead cats, without even a proper observation."

"Written off the face of history before they were even born! Bah!"

Merry leaned back in her chair.

6. Lazy Sands of Nakanotorishima

Sunken Language

"I wonder what's going on in the places that were washed away by history.
Maybe they're still out there on another brane river, like little islands sticking out."

The gentle breeze on Nakanotori Island's shoreline.
The glory of the Yamatai Kingdom, once ruled by the famed Queen Himiko.
The legendary Dragon Palace, sitting at the bottom of a deep, narrow trench.

"If only I could take a peek across those borders..."

"Should we rent a boat later?"

7. Alleyway of Roaring Waves

Marching Electron Wave

The pair reached their seats just in time before the show started.
'Philosophical Models of the Universe: Past, Present, and Future.'

The first segment went over classical depictions of the world: from concentric spheres filled with angels flapping about, to flat planes with water running off the edge, to layers of Hell that stretched 40,000 yojana below the ground.

While audiences in past generations may have dismissed these notions as silly, both modern scientific research and modern spiritual research had found a kernel of truth to them. Superunified physics had indeed found layers stacked high above ours, while research into boundaries produced a model of the world that resembled many overlapping bubbles.

Renko and Merry playfully elbowed each other as a picture of the Flammarion engraving came up.

As the presentation moved through a brief summary of turn-of-the-century hypotheses, Merry muttered a few comments about the eternalist variant of the so-called "block universe."

"That one's scarier than the tree branches, if you ask me. The whole thing, just frozen in place like that? Even the future?"

"Like the Eight Cold Hells, with everyone stuck in ice..."

"Or like the jello molds on the dessert menu earlier."

The show's main attraction, however, was an exploration of extremely recent hypotheses made with the help of quantum computing technology.

Normal computers operate on concrete values. 1 means "on", 0 means "off". Even if the range of numbers goes up, the computer can still only observe one state at a time, before moving on to the next one very fast. But thanks to how particles behave at quantum scales, a quantum computer can observe both states simultaneously, and can thus compute much larger and more complicated scenarios.

...At least, in theory. Prototypes developed in the past had simply cost far too much, and were impractical for general use. But the quantum computer that the presenter had brought out on stage was surprisingly small--not much bigger than a large laptop, with a bulky, tube-shaped extension attached to its side.

7. Alleyway of Roaring Waves

Marching Electron Wave

Renko whistled. "I thought it'd be a couple more years before they got them that small."
Merry tilted her head. "A computer that can see several worlds at once?"

"Several circuit boards, at the very least. But compared to you, I think it's still got a lot of catching up to do."
"And more downsizing. My brain doesn't weigh nearly that much."
"But maybe your brain IS secretly a quantum computer!"
"...Don't say scary stuff like that."

These advancements were thanks to the discovery of certain subatomic behaviours in easily-procured materials. Perhaps it wouldn't be that long before quantum computers entered the market for household appliances.

8. Footprints of Trieste

Down in Forbidden Deep

You could argue that the basis of human progression is fear.

Just about any invention you can name was made in response to fear of the unknown, or unease about one's current circumstances. Fire and electricity lit up the darkness, agriculture and livestock reduced the fear of starvation, and shelters and forecasts put people's minds at ease about the harsh reality of nature.

Most people enjoying life in Renko and Merry's modern era didn't have much to fear any more, so it was only natural that science would turn towards more philosophical anxieties. Quantum explorations of the universe's shape, the existence of an afterlife, theories on where thoughts and qualia are born from and pass on to...

Their earlier talk about the ocean had introduced a particular metaphor to Renko's mind.

Merry had said, before, that **something** strongly prevented travel between different brane worlds. Although she could see the youkai on the underside of the universe, their forms were hazy, and they'd made a consistent effort to shove her back into the waking world thus far.

It was a bit like water pressure. Humans weren't built to survive the pressure of the Challenger Deep, and needed to ride down on submarines like Trieste to even hope of seeing what lay below.

From this perspective, it was truly amazing that Merry had made her way to the TORIFUNE out in space... but then again, she **had** gotten scratched. A scratch was nothing compared to the crushing pressure of the ocean (or a giant squid), but it did make Renko worry about what future club activities might have in store for them.

One of the earlier slides had shown the universe as a flat plane, densely packed with information, with different facets appearing in response to different angles of "light". Another slide had depicted the universe as a series of bubbles flowing down a long river.

Merry had told her about wanting to see what was in the droplets that hadn't been picked up and flung by the divine spear.

It might've been inaccurate to call them "droplets," since they'd never left the ocean below. But the ocean was still made up of individual water molecules, stacked in layers upon layers on top of each other, all making up one shifting mass.

Every possibility that might've grown into a different tree, vying for space and pressing upon each other, squeezed tight with the weight of countless unborn and unchosen lives.

If the universe was shaped like that...

Renko shivered. Of course they'd resent **us** for setting foot down there.

9. Undying Flower ~ Immortal Lotus

Manifold Garden

So, the presenters asked. What truly **is** the shape of the universe? Was it a spanned branching tree? A folded-up, 11th-dimensional shape? A series of vibrating strings? They couldn't quite answer that question-- though they were, of course, confident that an answer was just around the corner.

Merry shifted, preparing to stand up from her seat.

"Now that I think about it, would seeing the boundary of other worlds count as peeking into a whole separate 'branch?'

Like, do you think those worlds are still part of our universe? Or are they something that could've been born instead of us?"

Renko rubbed her chin.

"I'd assume the former until proven otherwise. Your eyes are amazing, but actually setting foot into a different branch should be a different story from peeking out at one, or exploring within our universe.

We're part of this world, right? Like how plant cells are part of their branch.

It'd take a lot of work and a lot of protection for a cell on one branch to jump past the bark, the thin air, and then more bark, to land in a another branch."

"That **would** be a lot of work for a regular old cell. Especially if the tree is the size of a whole universe."

Renko laughed. "Yeah, there might be giant squirrels you have to watch out for out there."

"If I had to guess..."

Renko paused.

"I'd say that our universe and its border worlds are shaped like a lotus flower."

Merry clapped her hands together.

"With a petal for each brane! Now **that's** a pretty-sounding view of the cosmos."

It was no coincidence that lotus flowers were an important symbol across many religions.

The lotus symbolizes purity, divine power, and immortality. Sometimes, it's associated with creation itself.

It grows up from murky water, reaches the sun and air, and blooms brightly with many layers.

A symbol of something celebratory, in the midst of dark clouds.

9. Undying Flower ~ Immortal Lotus

Manifold Garden

"We're at the center of our lotus flower, the branes we can peek into are stacked around us like petals... and the other possibilities are other lotus flowers sprouting from the same root network."

"Wait, we're at the center? So we've returned to geocentrism and anthropocentrism, in the end."

"Oh, that's a fun thought. If we're *not* at the center of the flower, then who's peeking out towards us?"

"...Or maybe UP towards us, from the water."

"D-don't say scary things like that..."

The duo's conversation continued back out into the hallway.

10. Touhou Red Kappa ~ Interactive Dream

Interactive Multiverse

As the sun began to set, the Hifuu Club's two members reviewed the list of stops on their tour.

"Hmm. I know that Atsuta Shrine was a high priority for you, but for tonight, maybe we should... start somewhere a bit further upstream?

The shoreline used to go right up to the shrine's gate, after all."

"Oof, you're right. If I keep thinking about all the islands I want to visit at once, we'll probably get swept out to sea."

"Diver training in a shallow river it is, then."

Merry chuckled. "A kappa can still drown you in a foot of water, though. We'd better stop by the vegetable market and buy some peace offerings first."

"Plus a bunch of 'safe voyage' charms, for when we go sailing tomorrow night.

And purple paint to draw some seiman-doman sigils with..."

Renko stifled a laugh at the mental image of them in sleeping bags near Atsuta Shrine, with piles of good-luck charms dumped on top of themselves.

"...Oh, and speaking of peace offerings.

Let's make some pinwheels and dress up some jizo statues, too. In case we meet anyone who didn't make it to the surface."

As the "extraordinary" science conference draws onto a closure, Renko and Merry immediately start resuming their "mundane" days and preparing for their next journey.

...But that's a story for another time.

Afterword

Hello, Kirbio's here. It's been a while.

This is my first time trying to make a proper Sealing Club album! It was a great learning experience.

Story-wise, it isn't about the usual Sealing Club shenanigans.

In that sense, I guess you could say it's "extraordinary"?

It was a quite strange theme to work with, and I was struggling at first to put a coherent story together.

However, Gilde has stepped in and helped me with a lot of things, and it made me realize that we have ended up making something quite nice.

Theming-wise, it was written straight from my experience.

I am attending an International Academic Conference soon to showcase a part of my thesis work.

It is stressful, but also really exciting nonetheless.

The Touhou fanworks scene has been blooming a lot over the past few years, and I wanted to make something that celebrates it as a whole.

I hope that I managed to present a slice of everything, both new and old, and across all communities.

(...But with only 10 available song slots, it was really hard to pick which songs to do while keeping the overall balance. (lol))

Shoutout to Ocha for helping out with some of the tracks as well, and for teaching me how to master the track. These are all completely new experiences to me!

Throughout 2023, I've been learning and practicing a lot of different skills such as making illustrations or making music to realize my vision.

While it is not exactly perfect, I still hope that you can enjoy this homemade album for what it is.

- Team α lternative Σ nding: Kirbio (Finishing up my paper)

