

# Game Narrative Review

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**Game Title:** Fate/Extra CCC  
**Platform:** PlayStation Portable  
**Genre:** Turn-Based RPG  
**Release Date:** March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013  
**Developer:** Type-Moon, Imageepoch  
**Publisher:** Marvelous  
**Game Writer:** Nasu Kinoko

## Overview

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*Fate/Extra CCC* is a follow-up to *Fate/Extra* and narratively happens in the middle of the events of the earlier game. *Fate/Extra* takes place within a supercomputer called the Moon Cell. The Moon Cell possesses enormous processing power and also records everything that takes place on Earth. As such, many individuals want to take control of it. The Moon Cell, which is nearly-sentient, organizes a competition referred to as a Holy Grail War, in which 128 competitors insert their consciousnesses into the Moon Cell and compete for the right to take the Moon Cell for themselves. The competitors fight by proxy using Servants, representations of notable figures from history and myth.

In *Fate/Extra CCC*, the Holy Grail War is interrupted by a rogue AI who wants to take control of the Moon Cell herself. She captures all of the remaining competitors and transports them to the Moon Cell's "far side." The trapped competitors, formerly enemies, band together in an effort to track down and stop the rogue AI in order to return to the "near side" and continue the Holy Grail War.

## Characters

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- **KISHINAMI HAKUNO** – The player character, who can be male or female, and who can be renamed at the beginning of the game. Despite functioning as a player avatar, Kishinami has significant characterization independent of the player, in the form of a running internal monologue throughout the game. Kishinami's distinct identity is less significant in the context of *Fate/Extra CCC* than it is in *Fate/Extra*, but their ability to diverge from the characterization imposed by the player nonetheless feeds into *CCC*'s core argument in favor of existential freedom.

- BB – A rogue AI seeking to take control of the Moon Cell for herself. She wishes to free humanity from the inhibitions imposed by societal structures, and she builds a labyrinth to delay Kishinami’s progress long enough to accomplish this.
- ELISABETH BATHORY – A serial murderer from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, manifested as a Servant. BB tasks Elisabeth with guarding the first, second, and fifth blocks of the labyrinth. She is presented as remorseless and fully evil in all three of her appearances as an antagonist, and she is firmly established as a thoroughly incorrigible individual. Near the end of the game, she is allowed a short but effective redemptive arc, which causes her to function as a core component of the game’s existential argument.
- JINAKO CARIGIRI – An agoraphobic hacker with a deep reluctance to take any form of action. In her 30’s and feeling her life has been largely wasted alone in her home, she chooses to hack into the Moon Cell, thinking the Holy Grail War will spark her to change. Instead, she is overcome with fear and takes advantage of a flaw in the system to hide herself away, abandoning the competition entirely and awaiting her own death. As with Elisabeth, Jinako is presented as fundamentally flawed and beyond help, only to be offered a chance at redemption near the game’s end.
- KARNA – Jinako’s Servant, a tragic hero from the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. Karna functions as CCC’s primary mentor character, and his unwavering support of Jinako and his willingness to push her to better herself are what ultimately spark her redemption.

## Breakdown

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The vast majority of Nasu Kinoko’s writing focuses on existentialism’s assertion that existent precedes essence—which is to say, that who a person *is* is determined by what they *do*, and not the reverse. Nasu’s first major work, the 1998 novel *Kara no Kyoukai*, develops a rich and nuanced argument to the contrary, asserting that essence does in fact precede existence, and that existential dread—the fear that comes with understanding that free will can allow for senseless behavior—is fundamentally misplaced.

Nasu’s writing following *Kara no Kyoukai* falls into two broad categories: works that reread *Kara no Kyoukai*’s themes, and works that make the opposite argument, asserting that the ideas presented by existentialism are fundamentally correct. *Fate/Extra CCC* falls into the latter category, asserting that individuals have free will and can act in ways that run counter to what may seem to be their “essences.” Traces of this concept are subtly present even within the game’s core premise—the central antagonist for most of the game, BB, is a rogue AI, which is to say, an entity exercising free will in order to behave in a manner contrary to her essential nature. Similarly, many of the “NPCs”—the non-human background characters who exist for the benefit of the Holy Grail War’s competitors, as well as the player—comment often on the strangeness of an individual acting against its nature and marvel at their own ability to imitate emotional responses despite their intrinsic inhumanity. These ideas are present in the background of the game’s narrative at all times, even while CCC addresses other unrelated thematic considerations.

Nasu develops his pro-existentialism argument primarily through the character arcs of Elisabeth Bathory and Jinako Carigiri, however. *CCC* spends a significant portion of its length dwelling on the respective flaws of the two characters. Both are given opportunity after opportunity to make different choices and to better themselves, and both refuse these opportunities on all counts. By the time the game reaches its final act, Elisabeth and Jinako are both portrayed as being firmly beyond help—Elisabeth due to her reckless disregard for human life and for her remorseless selfishness, and Jinako due to her complete inability to take action and to her paralyzing fear of the world outside of herself.

Jinako and Elisabeth are both fully aware of their own flaws. In Jinako's case, this manifests in feelings of worthlessness and self-loathing, which then reinforce Jinako's perception of her flawed essence and make it ever more difficult for Jinako to embrace change. Elisabeth, meanwhile, understands that she is evil and simply does not care. She is entirely void of compassion, and despite multiple attempts on the part of Kishinami to reach out to her, she stands by her behaviors.

It requires extreme situations to spark change in either character. Jinako embraces inaction until one of the final scenes in the game, when the far-side of the Moon Cell is vanishing and Jinako's continued inaction will lead to her death. In that moment, her Servant, Karna, is finally able to persuade her that she can change, and she then able to make the choice to leave the place where she is sequestered, signifying a fundamental shift away from her essential inaction and ultimately saving her life.

Elisabeth, by contrast, is allowed a hint of redemption only after she has been defeated three times and permanently sealed away. In preparing to challenge BB, Kishinami needs the help of another Servant. Karna refuses to help—in order, the player later learns, to make himself available to Jinako when she needs him—so Kishinami's only option is to enlist the assistance of Elisabeth. As a condition of being temporarily freed, Elisabeth is required to fully comply with Kishinami's orders, and she is offered no reward beyond being temporarily released from her prison until her task is complete. The lack of direct benefit to Elisabeth effectively forces her to act unselfishly for the first time, and in acting contrary to what she had perceived as her essence she finds an avenue towards personal change and growth that even she had not thought possible.

Were *CCC* to present these two characters in a more typical redemptive light—a string of failures, followed by a simple moment of realization and an opportunity for complete redemption—it would have resulted in a weaker case for the primacy of existence over essence. In order to allow its characters to serve as a believable argument in favor of the ability to exercise free will in the service of meaningful change, the game needed to firmly establish that Elisabeth and Jinako *were* flawed at their core and also fully aware of those flaws. This is especially important in the context of Nasu's *Kara no Kyoukai*-style writing, which typically presents perceived change as characters becoming aware of their existing essences rather than fully changing them.

Neither character arc ends with a full redemption, but rather with a first step towards change. The central point of *CCC*'s argument, in other words, is not that flawed

individuals can find redemption—elements of redemption are present even in Nasu’s *Kara no Kyoukai*-style works and consequently are not especially significant in and of themselves—but rather that it is possible, albeit very difficult, for a person to act in ways that run counter to their established personalities and, by making a concerted effort to do this over a very long period of time, eventually change those core traits.

While there is no true conclusion to the character growth Elisabeth and Jinako begin to experience as *CCC* approaches its climax, Nasu has revisited the characters in his writing for the mobile game *Fate/Grand Order*. Jinako, in particular, functions as the central character of *Fate/Grand Order*’s “Yuga Kshetra” story chapter. The chapter (which is roughly comparable to a mid-length visual novel in size) follows Jinako’s journey from the end of *CCC* until she becomes a fully proactive person worthy of standing alongside her hero and mentor, Karna. *CCC* does not inherently need this follow-up, but it does serve as an affirmation that Jinako’s first steps towards change in *CCC* are indicative of a broader, fundamental shift, rather than a one-time break from Jinako’s normal behavior.

## **Strongest Element**

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The strongest element of *Fate/Extra CCC* is the way it constructs its argument in favor of existentialism. Nasu had made several attempts to produce this argument in his earlier writing—in 2000’s *Tsukihime* and in 2004’s *Fate/Stay Night*, among other works—but *CCC* is the strongest example of a work in which he has been able to successfully present a compelling case in which a character has a firmly-established essence and then manages to exercise free will so as to change that essence—and *CCC* manages to do it twice, with two drastically different characters, at the same time.

## **Unsuccessful Element**

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While *Fate/Extra CCC* is a well-written game with a strong central argument, it suffers from significant pacing issues throughout. The deliberate pace with which the game establishes the seemingly-intractable nature of its characters can at times cause the game’s narrative to drag. Elisabeth, in particular, is the central enemy in three full chapters—nearly half of the game—each of which is structured effectively the same way. The resolution to Elisabeth’s character arc is interesting and satisfying, but by the third of her focal chapters her character notes feel somewhat repetitive.

## **Highlight**

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The highlight of *Fate/Extra CCC* is the final exchange between Jinako and Karna. This is the final scene before the game’s climactic sequence, and it is the moment where the game’s thematic argument resolves. Jinako stands in the last remnants of the far-side of the Moon Cell, having just made the decision that she would rather allow herself to die than take action to change herself. In response, Karna tells her in no uncertain terms that she has value in spite of her repeated mistakes and her crushing self-doubt. In this moment of heightened emotion, Jinako finally comes to believe this, and she accepts his one final offer to save her. Jinako’s final line is a summation of *CCC*’s core argument: “Even if I am never able to do anything meaningful, the freedom to take action will forever be left with me”[1].

## Critical Reception

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Unfortunately, there are no critical reviews of *Fate/Extra CCC*, even though Nasu's writing is quite popular in Japan—*Fate/Grand Order*, for example, is often among the top-grossing mobile games worldwide. *Fate/Grand Order* was the highest-grossing mobile game in August 2019, earning \$162.7 million in worldwide consumer spending, with approximately 81% of that revenue coming from Japan [2]. Much of that game's appeal comes from the appearance of Nasu's well-known and much beloved characters—including *CCC*'s Elisabeth, Jinako, and Karna.

*CCC*'s lack of critical attention is likely due to a combination of factors. It was released quite late into the PlayStation Portable's life cycle—over a year after the PlayStation Vita was released—which likely hurt its performance. Additionally, it was a follow-up to an existing game that was not particularly well-received; the original *Fate/Extra* has a Metacritic score of 58 [3], with GameSpot's Shiva Stella writing that it “boasts an intriguing story” but “poor exploration and repetitive combat undermine the adventure”[4]. The mixed reception to the prior game may have reduced interest in critical impressions of *CCC*. The game was also never released outside of Japan, further limiting its potential reach. The game did, however, sell more than 110,000 copies in its first month of release, which, given the relatively niche status of the game and the timing of its release, amounted to a reasonable degree of success [5].

## Lessons

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- In narrative-heavy games, secondary characters can be particularly effective avenues for developing or exhibiting central thematic ideas, as they can be effectively separated from the demands of the central plot in order to make their thematic arguments more directly. Jinako exemplifies this, existing alongside but largely independent of *CCC*'s main plot goals and ultimately diverging from the path of the protagonist in order to pursue her own personal growth.
- Repetition can be effective in establishing an idea, but only to a certain point. In the case of Elisabeth, more quickly cementing the nature of her character and eliminating the third of her focal acts would have helped facilitate *CCC*'s pacing.
- Mentor-type characters who consistently embody a game's presented thematic ideal can be helpful in clarifying to the player what is intended to be a thematically “correct” worldview. *CCC*'s Karna functions as a stable and aspirational character for the entirety of the game, helping to guide interpretations of and clarify the reasons behind the flaws in the other characters, especially Jinako.

## Summation

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*Fate/Extra CCC* is effectively a visual novel presented as a turn-based RPG, and this shows in the relative degree of attention it gives to its writing and characterization. Even on its own, *CCC* presents a fascinating analysis into the concept of identity and the possibility of personality change, and in the context of the larger corpus of Nasu Kinoko's writing, it stands as a strong antithesis relative to the pointedly anti-existential thesis that is *Kara no Kyoukai*. Nasu's writing remains poignant and effective regardless

of the medium in which he writes, and *Fate/Extra CCC* presents a compelling argument in favor of the ability to effect meaningful personal change.

## Sources

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[1] *Fate/Extra CCC*. PlayStation Portable. Japan: Marvelous, 2013. Translation by Isaiah Hastings.

[2] <https://sensortower.com/blog/top-grossing-mobile-games-worldwide-august-2019>

[3] <https://www.metacritic.com/game/psp/fateextra>

[4] <https://www.gamespot.com/reviews/fate-extra-review/1900-6347088/>

[5] <https://www.famitsu.com/news/201304/22032274.html>