"Ex-Arm" Review

Ah, yes. Ex-Arm.

Oh, no. *Ex-Arm*.

Ex-Arm is one of those rare anime where literally everything is wrong. It's also one of my favorite anime series I've ever watched, and it has been from the very first episode. It has the same natural appeal as the Street Fighter USA cartoon and (the one and only) The Room.

This is a show that got its source material literally *canceled* only hours after the very first episode aired. And even more mind-bogglingly, this is a show that was created by animators who had never animated anything. You read that right – ANYTHING. They were literally *just as qualified* to animate this show as they were to conduct a symphony orchestra, perform open-heart surgery, or scale Mount Everest itself. Just let that sink in for a second.

From the moment the OP plays and you see the abysmally CG-rendered MC whirl around with an inexplicably stunned look on his face – as though you, the viewer, are his worst nightmare and not the other way around – you know that you are truly in for something special. And it only gets better from there. Oh, it gets so much better.
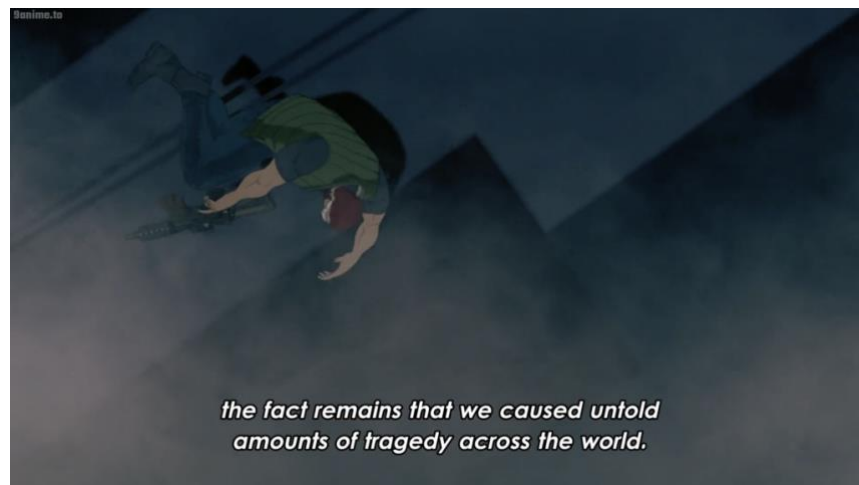
Ex-Arm is a fascinating creature. It shifts, it morphs, it *adapts*. Just when you think you've got it all figured out, it finds new, unimaginable, *unthinkable* ways to be bad. And by the time you've lowered your already-emaciated expectations to compensate for this sudden turn of events, the show is already asking you to lower them once more.

Let's start with the visuals, as that is by far Ex-Arm's most glaring fault. The 3D models are not shaded to look in any way like they were created in 2D – which means they clash very, very hard with the characters that actually *were* created in 2D, who are occasionally placed onscreen alongside them. This is made even worse by the fact that the 2D animation is very bare-bones – more often than not, the 2D characters are completely static images. As the viewer, you have no choice but to watch in pity as these poor souls stare into the abyss just offscreen, unable to communicate their resentment towards their 3D counterparts who have been granted the power to move, talk, and freely interact with the world around them.

That said, the 3D characters are not *dynamic*, per se. Take one glance at any character's face for more than a second or two, and you'll see what I mean. It's very apparent that the studio behind Ex-Arm had no idea how to animate complex and emotive facial expressions – in fact, every 3D character has a go-to expression that the animators very, very rarely deviate from. The MC, Akira, is stuck in a state of near-perpetual shock. And his counterpart, Minami, literally cannot stop smiling. She smiles when she's getting tortured, she smiles when her brother dies, she smiles when the MC announces his intentions to **SACRIFICE HIS OWN LIFE**. Her happiness simply cannot be broken – that goofy grin will be plastered across her face until her very last breath.

Now, the animations. The characters' movements blatantly defy the laws of physics, tearing *science itself* to shreds with deep-seated confidence and overflowing pride. There are so many strange and off-putting fight scenes in Ex-Arm, I honestly don't even know where to start. But my absolute favorite moment in the show (animation-wise, at least) is when the big guy with the visor (Kondou, I think?) unexpectedly turns into a full-on rag doll after falling from a precipice. The camera angle is from directly above, so it looks like he's just rolling around on the ground for literally no reason. It's one of the most hysterical things I've seen in my life XD

the fact remains that we caused untold amounts of tragedy across the world.

Story-wise, I might not be the best person to weigh in, as I've never read the manga that the show is based on. That said, from what I've heard people saying, the anime cut out pretty much all the worldbuilding that was present in the manga and left many of the characters' most defining moments on the cutting room floor. Honestly, I don't have a hard time believing that to be the case – when you watch the show, there's a strange feeling in your gut that something is just *missing*. A lot of things don't make much sense, and you just kind of *know* that you're not getting the whole story.

Anyway, watch this show. It will make you laugh, it will make you cry. It will change your life.