

ISSUE 62

# EXPLOITS

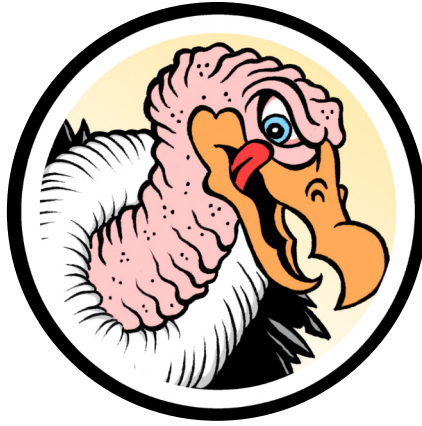
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Van Dennis on  
**FAR**



**LOVE is BLIND • The HIDDEN PALACE  
• HERCULES in the HAUNTED WORLD •  
ON TOP of the COVERS • CREATIVE DNA**



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## **EXPLOITS**

A MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO THE REASONS WE LOVE THINGS

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This machine kills fascists.

# ARTISTS on ART as GENETICS

by Dawn Davis

When Hideo Kojima published a book on creativity, I was enough of a fan of his work that I had to have it, not caring about what was in it at all. I read it a year after its release, in Christmas 2022. On its own, I found *The Creative Gene* amusing and a little strange – no less than what I’d expect from Kojima. I summarized it to friends by saying, “It’s a list of things he likes,” from *2001: A Space Odyssey* to *I Spy* books that he enjoys with his children. This is true, but an oversimplification. *The Creative Gene* (translated by Nathan A. Collins) is also a genealogy of art that made a true impact on him, and influences his work to this day. While it is a list of things he likes, it’s also a family tree revealing much of what made him who he is.

Kojima communicates this using Richard Dawkins’ concept of memes from *The Selfish Gene*, rather than how English speakers use the term “meme” for internet jokes. While genes are biological, memes are information, such as culture, values or traditions. Kojima argues that stories themselves are memes given form and passed on to the next generation.

Like genes are passed on through a connection from one person to another, memes are passed on through a connection between a person and a book or a film.

When I read this, I had a memory of another moment with a different artist. I am a proud Patreon supporter of my favorite band: Stars. As one of the perks of being a patron, I will spend some afternoons with other patrons in a Zoom call, listening as frontman Torquil Campbell plays music he likes (and some that he makes). He calls these his “spin sessions,” and I’ve been introduced to a lot of new music this way.

At one point I recall noting that a band he played had a similar sound to Stars, and Torq replied that it was “part of Stars’ DNA.” Thinking back on that moment

while reading *The Creative Gene*, I wondered if these spin sessions were, in a way, Torq's version of sharing his "memes." When I asked him about what he meant by DNA, he said:

All I know is this: you start trying to become the thing you love, and in the process, you become a version of yourself. In other words, at first art is a way of self-identifying, and later it becomes more of a mystery because your identity has become not just the sum of your parts, but something inside you that you yourself may not even be able to identify. That's for the listener to do!

So perhaps we are influenced by the things we consume – intentionally or unintentionally – and sometimes only those who witness what we create will see how our work has been changed.

*Steal Like an Artist*, by Austin Kleon, follows a similar philosophy; it regards art consumption as an important part of art creation. The book likens this process directly to genealogy as well. Kleon says that you can't pick your genetics, but you can pick your ideas and where those ideas come from. You can pick your teachers, down to the page. "You are, in fact, a mashup of what you choose to let into your life. You are the sum of your influences."

As an artist, I can see in my own work where Stars and Kojima have influenced me. Kojima's work has raised me on themes of personal agency and Stars' music has taught me how even the sweetest voice is fighting every day. These are only two of my countless teachers. Artists of the world: what's in your DNA? 🍷



# MUSIC



**ON TOP of the COVERS** – I don't really think "albums" are a meaningful way of interacting with music much these days. I've not purchased one in well over a decade. I don't listen to them top to bottom. Truly, I do not see the point of them as discreet units worthy of critical appraisal when so much more interesting work is being done at the EP and single level. 12-ish songs of an period is just not a "unit" I am interested in and increasingly, not how we interact with music in the era of streaming.

But T-Pain's *On Top of the Covers* has me believing in the power of albums again. I'm weirdly entirely serious. While his cover of "War Pigs" has perhaps drawn the most critical attention, *On Top of the Covers* is a masterpiece as a singular entity. Had "War Pigs" been launched into the internet void as a single it would have been a momentary novelty. A signal of limited broadcast into a noisy sea. Instead, the album endures.

At 32 minutes, it is a mercifully short, sharp, burst of flavor. There is no filler. T-Pain's "War Pigs" is almost fully two minutes

shorter than the Black Sabbath original. So lean is the offering I am actually wanting more. Where Weezer's similar effort in *Weezer (Teal Album)* feels like the joke has ceased to be funny long before it's 10-track, 36-minute length, *On Top of the Covers* feels like it has crested the height of T-Pain's power as he bellows "Satan laughing spreads his wings" in the final 90 seconds of the entire album.

In truth, my only regret here is that T-Pain chose to do "Stay with Me" by Sam Smith instead of the infinitely funnier "Stay with Me" by Faces. That we live in the reality where we did not get T-Pain's version of Rod Stewart's vocals is a damn shame. However, it must be said that the sonic clarity with which a man who built his throne on Autotune approaches Sam Smith is mind blowing. It is simply beautiful to see someone command the power of a discreet collection of music this way.

Thank you, T-Pain. Molto grazie to you, who I have long underestimated. Mille mille grazie.

– DAVID SHIMOMURA

# MUSIC



## PLAYLIST

"A Change Is Gonna Come," by T-Pain

"A Change Is Gonna Come," by Sam Cooke

"Don't Stop Believin'," by T-Pain

"Don't Stop Believin'," by Journey

"Sharing The Night Together," by T-Pain

"Sharing The Night Together," by Dr. Hook

"Skrangs (in K Major Sus)," by T-Pain

"Stay With Me," by T-Pain

"Stay With Me," by Sam Smith

"Stay With Me," by Faces

"Tennessee Whiskey," by T-Pain

"Tennessee Whiskey," by Chris Stapleton

"That's Life (feat. NandoSTL)," by T-Pain,  
NandoSTL

"That's Life," by Frank Sinatra

"War Pigs," by T-Pain

"War Pigs," by Black Sabbath

[LISTEN ON SPOTIFY](#)





**The HIDDEN PALACE** – Set from 1900-1914 in New York and Syria, it follows the lives of two immortals and nine humans during America's industrial revolution.

The main characters are: (1) a steadfast golem made of clay, a beautiful woman in love with (2) a blacksmithing, hot-headed jinni who imprisoned his (3) master in a lamp that belonged to (4) a humble coffee shop owner in Little Syria who is friends with the (5) blacksmith that accidentally released the jinni while fixing the lamp using parts from New York City where a (6) rich heiress lives, who goes on a pilgrimage to heal herself through the Middle East, uncovering secrets of the Jinni culture and befriending a (7) female jinni whirlwind that unleashes the climax of a book between (8) a messenger boy, (9) his mom and (10) a Jewish orphan girl who created a (11) golem of her own. Phew!

Normally it would be hard to care about this many characters, but Helene Wecker weaves every storyline in a way that feels

poetic and reads easy. Each character thread is set apart, developed, then woven into a metaphorical tapestry. I found myself compelled to read about character's struggles with grief, civil rights, motherhood, fatherhood and what it means to be human. My favorite parallels happen when the orphan girl who created a golem while her father was still alive mimics emotional struggles that occur with the single mom laundress and her son. Even though one is a girl from a rich family and the other is a woman in poverty, both balance themes of motherhood and creation in tandem with grief and destruction that resonate with anyone. Likewise, the different ways the jinni and the golem define freedom – rebelling against societal norms versus blending in – feels like it taps into a universal theme with a unique framework.

*The Hidden Palace* may be the second book in the series but is definitely the place to start this summer if you need a new novel to binge.

– ATHALIA NORMAN

# BOOKS

**JOHNNY WOULD YOU**

**LOVE ME IF MY**

**DICK**

**WERE BIGGER**

**JOHNNY WOULD YOU LOVE ME if my DICK were BIGGER** – Do I need to tell you more after the title?

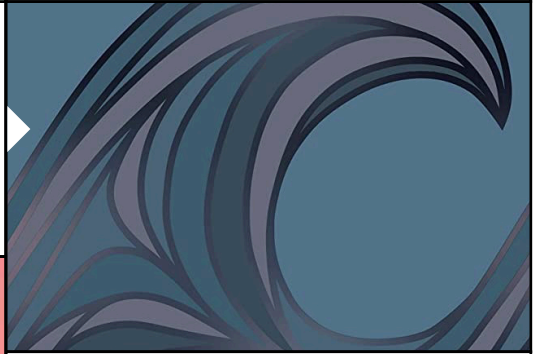
(I guess I should say that Brontez Purnell is on the cutting edge of messy queer writing and you'd be a fool not to keep up with his work? Or that it's witty and thought provoking and funny all at the same time? It's short and sweet, so go read!)

– OLUWATAYO ADEWOLE

**GHOSTS of the TSUNAMI: DEATH and LIFE in JAPAN'S DISASTER ZONE** – A some-

times gazey reminder that while earthquake and tsunami are natural phenomena, disaster is not.

– AUTUMN WRIGHT



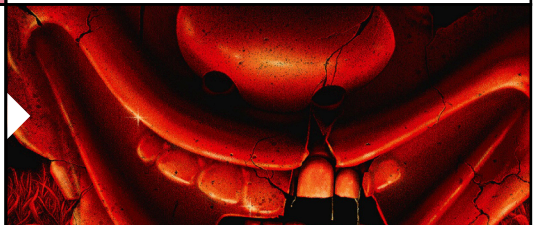
**FRIZZY** – Don't be fooled by Rose Bousamra's adorable pastel art, this middle-grade graphic novel written by Claribel A. Ortega can be quite intense at times. Especially so for individuals from the Black diaspora who have dealt with texturism and anti-Black sentiments towards natural hair that is on the kinkier side of curls. It's a wonderfully affirming narrative about Marlene, the book's spunky Latina protagonist muddling her way through her natural hair journey as she finds her voice both at home and at school.

– PHOENIX SIMMS

**CLOWN in a CORNFIELD 2: FREND0 LIVES** –

That thing you always hope horror movie sequels will be? Adam Cesare's *Clown in a Cornfield 2* is absolutely that.

– ORRIN GREY





# MOVIES



**HERCULES in the HAUNTED WORLD** – When most people think of peplum movies they don't think of Hades or armies of the undead. Luckily for us, Mario Bava did.

Bava was used to working with limitations. By 1961, he had already proven his ingenuity when it comes to creating big visuals on a small budget. *Hercules in the Haunted World* is where that ingenuity met his painter's eye.

Bava was an artist and a cinematographer before he was a director. He knew how to set up a shot so that the audience doesn't see the wires when a cart flies into a hayloft, or that it's cornmeal rather than lava that's bubbling in the depths of Hades.

It also means he knew how to build up every scene. Bava's distinctive color palette plays a huge part in this movie: crimson red, lime green, royal purple and that stunning shade that can only be described as Bava Blue because he's the only one who can make blue do that. The colors mute and brighten, depending on how close the characters are to the supernatural. Costumes are calculated to speak subtly to a character's proclivities. The

actors move with a deliberate, poetic slowness on slightly over-sized sets, giving everything the feel of a staged Greek tragedy.

But for all the elements of drama on display, this is a horror movie. Faces are reflected in pools of blood, evil rituals are performed in cemeteries, vines howl and bleed in pain when cut, zombies emerge from tombs that creak so impressively it would make a vampire jealous and Christopher Lee is, well, Christopher Lee. But Bava's strong artistic sense and the careful pace add a lushness to the horror that is palpable and breathtaking.

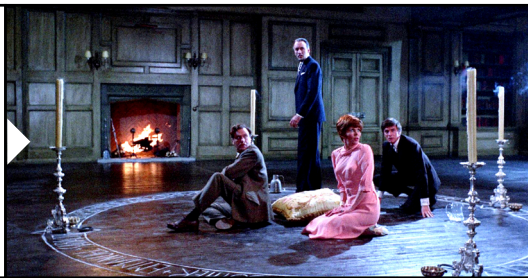
At the end of the movie, Theseus says, "I had the strangest dream, beautiful yet terrible at the same time." In a realm where humans are simply the playthings of belligerent gods, our actions are meaningless and we learn that the only way to find beauty is to face terror. Few works have ever been so adept at weaving beauty and terror together as *Hercules in the Haunted World*.

– DOMINIQUE LAMSSIES

# MOVIES

**The DEVIL RIDES OUT** – Another in a growing list of films I thought I had seen, but hadn't. A rare treat to see Christopher Lee as a kick-ass hero. I also love how the camera treats the magic circle. And Baphomet!

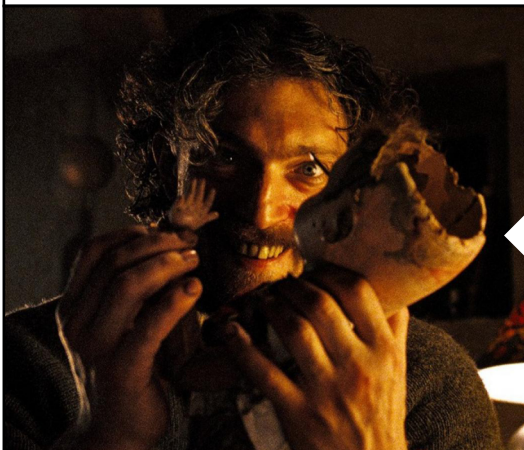
– STU HORVATH



**SHEITAN** – I'm kind of surprised at how much I dig this! A French cabin-in-the-woods story mixed with *Deliverance*-level inbreeding, a whole mess of very unsettling dolls, and a dash of Satanism equals a solid horror movie. Once you add in a genuinely unhinged performance by Vincent Casell, well then, you got yourself a fuckin' Christmas classic!

Also, dudes suck.

– NOAH SPRINGER



**DUNGEONS and DRAGONS: HONOR AMONGST THIEVES** – Officially speaking, I am of the belief that there is no such thing as a fun game of D&D, but if such a thing were to exist then this would be it! It seems like they've finally landed a movie which understands why people engage with the game in the first place!

– OLUWATAYO ADEWOLE



**EVIL DEAD RISE** – Combines the viciousness of the Fede Alvarez remake with the camp and absurdity of the Raimi originals and, while it's not quite the best of both worlds, it carves out a satisfying niche for itself that feels unique from either.

– ORRIN GREY



**ANT MAN and the WASP : QUANTUMANIA**  
– This is a theme park ride.

– AMANDA HUDGINS



# TELEVISION



## **LOVE IS BLIND** – Is *Love is Blind* good again?

That's the question on everyone's mind since Season 4 dropped earlier this month. Launching in 2020, the series that traps singles in pods and then asks them to get married to each other within six weeks has now blown through three previous seasons, of which the last two have been criticized for being boring and really mean, respectively. More than anything, this newest season is the convergence of two groups learning the tricks behind the illusion: the producers, and the contestants themselves.

This season, the producers seem to have learned that spreading out the drama, rather than concentrating it all in the weddings, leads to a more satisfying show. They have also gotten better at letting the contestants squirm, or, more frequently, say incredible things with zero self-consciousness. For instance, Paul the scientist at one point says he is usually attracted to “witches who make potions” rather than makeup gurlies like his fiancée Micah. Zach says the phrase “well, Romeo and Juliet didn't work out” so often that it's like a cryptic personal mantra. It's almost like the producers gave a prompt and it got lost in translation, and instead of cutting it they just left it in.

When it comes to the contestants, half of them feel like real people and the other half like acting tryouts. This feels more honest than

the show's usual format, in which everyone pretends (or believes) that their actions are reasonable and they are in the right; some of these characters are evil on purpose, and that's very fun. The show also gives more time to their doubts about the experiment, though it inevitably comes back to the artificial tagline they all eventually say: some variation of “love really is blind, isn't it?” But at times, the delivery of the catchphrase stretches belief so much that it's almost like they're daring you to think this person actually believes what they're saying. Blink twice if you don't think love is truly blind, Jackie.

There is a sense of cosmic justice at the end of this season of LIB, or at least there was for me. And rather than just making me consider the ethics of this experiment where bonding too close, too fast is encouraged and required – which, believe me, was still there – it was more revealing of the wires and seams behind the whole thing. And yet there are a few moments – laughter between a recently broken-up couple as they dry their hair, or the re-emergence of a broken-hearted contestant later in the show to support his pod colleague who genuinely seems to have become his friend – that tug at your heartstrings. I still wouldn't call it good TV, but it's providing a look behind the curtain that is, if nothing else, a compelling diorama.

– EMILY PRICE

# TELEVISION



**SHADOW and BONE (SEASON 2)** – I've only watched the first episode, but I'm already enjoying how they've expedited the plot of *Six of Crows* to integrate it into the *Shadow and Bone* adaptation. I also really am just jonesing for shows with casts that have great chemistry with one another and so far this show continues to deliver on that front! Everyone seems like their having a lot of fun on set and it translates to great vibes for those who want some fast-paced adventure-fantasy.

– PHOENIX SIMMS

**The GLORY** – We were told we had to watch this but the first ep was tough. This was not enough warning, as it's an excruciating establishment of teenage abuse, bullying, and neglect from the family level through every lever of the state. If you can stand the torture or at least are willing to fast forward through it, the rest is a timey-wimey and perhaps overlong exploration of the joys of revenge. A little knotty, fantastic, long-winded, but ultimately very satisfying, in no small part because the lesson isn't that "revenge is wrong" but rather the importance (and necessity) of acknowledging our sins against others and growing from there. Otherwise all is lost and whatever relationships one might think they have are wet tissues.

– LEVI RUBECK



**The GAY and WONDROUS LIFE of CALEB GALLO** – So much of this is obscenely quotable, it feels like being let in on someone's else's friend group – confused, unabashedly queer, incredibly strange.

– AMANDA HUDGINS



# GAMES



**FAR** – Despite a solid soundtrack and an intriguing setting, *Far: Changing Tides* somehow didn't click for me. The core gameplay of managing a sub, less driving it and more keeping it fueled up, paired with occasional ventures outside of it to do some basic platforming, wasn't enough to keep me hooked. Afterwards, I found out that *Changing Tides* was actually a sequel; a predecessor came out back in 2018 called *Far: Lone Sails*. I gave the older iteration a shot. A smaller, more focused game where you manage an off-road steam engine? That one worked for me. It's not too surprising that *Lone Sails* originally started out as a student project, because it's a game that's wonderfully, almost perfectly simple. Straightforward gameplay, excellent pacing and an underrated musical score made it one of my favorite gaming experiences of 2022. Better still, it got me to understand *Changing Tides* better. While it isn't as strong as the older game, once you get a better understanding of the series' atmosphere and flow, the sequel really opens up.

The *Far* series has something in common with *Spiritfarer*, as the two franchises not only have gameplay based on managing tasks to keep giant vehicles running smoothly, but both are about forging connections. Where *Spiritfarer* has you bond with an expanding cast of quirky characters, *Far* sees you bond

with a single machine that carries you throughout the entire game. The core idea of *Far* isn't just to use an automotive to traverse a post-apocalyptic landscape – it's to develop a relationship with it as you go along. You keep track of what it needs, you upgrade it in order to progress and over time you gain a sense for what it wants in specific situations. The vehicles in these games aren't sentient, but they have distinct characters, so much so that they almost feel like they're alive. These games are an excellent introduction to the concept of mechanical sympathy, where you learn to care for a machine to the point where you see it as more than just metal.

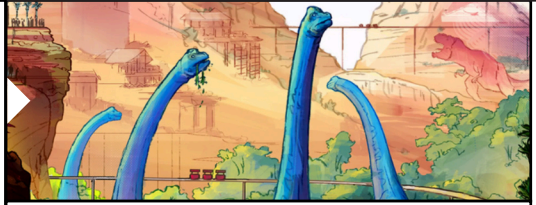
There's another kind of mechanical sympathy present in these games. *Far's* environmental collapse is the result of a society's overreliance on fossil fuels. The games give an inkling as to why the people of this fictional world came to overuse machines that lead to their downfall. A steam engine, a submarine, a massive walker; these vehicles weren't just incredibly useful, they inspire a sense of wonder. I can't help but find myself wanting to like them, even with the subtextual baggage. Experiencing a piece of media that has sympathy for the mechanical devil feels quite relevant concerning our own complicated relationships with dirty, yet endearing, machines.

– VAN DENNIS

# GAMES

**DINOSAUR ISLAND: RAWR & WRITE** – The roll and write is a well trod genre, but *Rawr & Write* takes it to another, more interesting level. Is this because of the *Jurassic Park* theming? Probably. But it's a game that is fun to teach, fun to play and fun to replay.

– AMANDA HUDGINS



**DEEP ROCK GALACTIC** – The children yearn for the mine, as the tweet goes. Children and old men. Truly a hang-out game if ever there was one. Like *Destiny 2* and the others I suppose, but less FOMO. Get in and mine and do your job and maybe fuck around a little with the memes and shoot the shit and complain about management. Stakes can be raised for the tactically inclined with enough range in flora and fauna to keep each run interesting. All the usual looter accouterments but overall feels less gross about it all. Fun to click on gold for twenty minutes and slam that voice emote. God damn wish I was drilling right now.

– LEVI RUBECK



**BACKBONE** – Smart noir adventure that features an *Animal Farm* meets *Beastars* anthropomorphic narrative. Really happy to see Vancouver city featured in a game like this, although I keep thinking of the "Vancouver Never Plays Itself" take from *Every Frame a Painting*. As someone who used to live on the west coast, however, I think this alternate universe Vancouver actually does portray that place in an authentic manner. At least, what you know of that city within the ominous Wall bordering it in the game's narrative.

If you're a fan of controversial endings (stylistically, not thematically), definitely check this one out. I want more people to discuss this one with. Overall though, this title's well worth your time and I dig Eggnut's studio philosophy, which is definitely threaded throughout the game: "make art, make rent, and help others do the same."

– PHOENIX SIMMS



# HOROSCOPE

IN THE SKY IS A GOD AND IF  
YOU WAIT 800 YEARS,  
SOMEDAY YOU'LL BE WORTHY  
OF THEIR LOVE... 🍷