

ISSUE 63

EXPLOITS

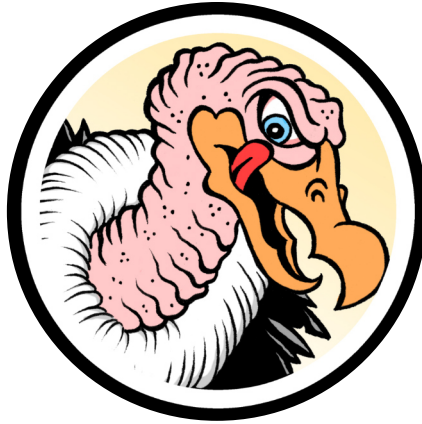
JUNE 2023

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A photograph of Sara Clemens in a library setting. She is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved dress and is leaning over a pool table. Her right hand is on the table near several pool balls (two red, one black). She is holding a glass of whiskey in her left hand. The background shows bookshelves and a lamp.

Sara Clemens on
SUCCESSION

**FIGHTING GAME COMMUNITIES • TOMBS
• The DIRTY NIL • HOLY MOUNTAIN •
ROLEPLAYING GAMES and the MUNDANE**



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EXPLOITS

A MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO THE REASONS WE LOVE THINGS

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This machine kills fascists.

I'VE MADE a LOT of FRIENDS by PUNCHING THEM in the FACE

by Thomas Wilde

I was 11 when I played my first fighting game, in the lobby of a Home Run Inn Pizza in the Chicago suburbs. I begged a quarter off my dad while we waited for our food, then went to play *Street Fighter II* out of pure curiosity.

A couple of other kids my age had the same idea, but none of us knew the first thing about the game, and one thing you learn very fast the first time you play Chun-Li in *Street Fighter II* is the input for her Lightning Legs. Just mash on any kick button. That's it.

The other kids spent the better part of 20 minutes, until well after our food was ready, trying to figure out a way around the Lightning Legs. If we'd been playing a later version of *Street Fighter II*, they'd likely have picked Chun-Li themselves, on the "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" principle. This was the original *World Warrior*, though, before mirror matches were a thing, so they kept trying with Ken, Honda and Zangief. No luck.

I eventually gave up my turn, at my dad's insistence, so we could finally go eat dinner. Driving away, he admitted it'd been entertaining to watch me demolish those other kids for that long.

That one-two punch – the thrill of victory and vague parental approval – ignited a love for fighting games that's carried me through the next 30 years. I've never been particularly good at them, outside of the first couple of hours with a brand-new game where everyone's forced to rely on pure fundamentals. Even so, I've got a love for fighters that's waxed and waned but never faded.

It's a hobby that's gotten me a lot of friends over the years. My first big online scene was about fighting games, where we'd argue about their weird lore for weeks on end, and play against one another when the tech arrived to make that an option. Some of those friendships are still going, decades later.

When I moved to Washington in the 2000s, I tried a lot of ways to get out and meet people, to counteract the infamous "Seattle Freeze." The move that finally

worked was seeing who in my neighborhood was part of the local fighting-game community (FGC). The moral of the story is, if you're someplace new and looking for friends, find out who's interested in some magical death karate.

There's a lot of talk about how to make fighting games easier for newcomers to get into. It's a genre that comes with a lot of institutional momentum; newer releases try to improve their play by adding additional systems, so there's a real issue with the mainstream games becoming increasingly complex over time. If you haven't been playing fighting games for the last 25 years, you start any new game at a distinct disadvantage.

At the same time, what a lot of people don't fully understand is that fighting games, more than any other genre, are necessarily social. You simply get more out of them if you're involved in the community that surrounds them, whether it's as a professional player, casual player, organizer, developer or content creator.

The real reason to get into any fighting game is the FGC, and likely always will be. I'm not here for the games; I'm here for the friends I've made, and will continue to make, along the way. As excited as I am about new games like *Street Fighter 6*, it's all about who'll be my next challenger. 🇺





The DIRTY NIL – The Dirty Nil frontman and guitarist Luke Bentham’s pedalboard consists of nothing more than two ProCo RAT distortion pedals (and an Electro Harmonix Memory Man that’s used exclusively for making noise in between songs and serves no other useful purpose). The RAT is a classic circuit that has been popular since the late 1970’s thanks to its simplicity; you plug it in and it immediately sounds like rock and roll. Nothing more and nothing less.

Rolling with little more than a pair of RATs (especially in an era where guitarists’ pedalboards are growing exponentially thanks to effective FOMO-driven marketing) says everything you need to know about The Dirty Nil’s approach to riff-craft. It’s a choice that says if one filthy-sounding box of rock sounds awesome, then two should sound even better.

It’s the kind of “fuck it, we’re turning everything up to 11” mentality that has cemented the band’s identity since their triumphant 2016 debut *Higher Power* came out waving two middle fingers in the air.

Their latest album *Free Rein to Passions* continues their no-bullshit ethos. It opens with squealing pinch harmonics and textbook mid-tempo thrash-influenced guitars that feel like the auditory embodiment of slowly rolling down main street with the windows down and no fucks left to give. In a time where everything just feels like too much, The Dirty Nil once again remind us of the unmatched therapeutic power of the riff, and the unbeaten wisdom of keeping things simple. May we all strive to cut the bullshit in all that we do with such ruthless efficiency.

– BEN SAILER

MUSIC

PLAYLIST



"Nicer Guy," by The Dirty Nil

"Fog Machine," by White Reaper

"Honest Living," by Meat Wave

"Throw," by Single Mothers

"Hit the Breaks," by PLOSIVS

"Monterey Canyon," by Samiam



"The Waves Beneath," by 84 Tigers

"Macon If We Make It," by Lucero

"When In Rome, When In Memphis," by
Cory Branan

"Phone Lines Down," by Spiritual Cramp

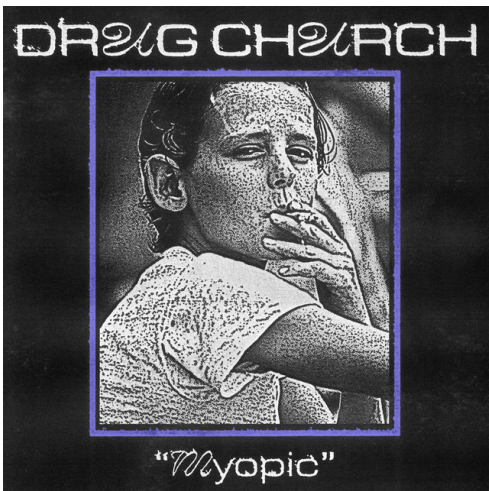
"Very High," by Militarie Gun

"LIKED U BETTER," by Jeff Rosenstock

"Totally Fine," by PUP

"Sideways Skull," by The Hold Steady

"Myopic," by Drug Church



[LISTEN ON SPOTIFY](#)



TOMBS – I don’t remember my precise introduction to the work of Junji Ito, save that it was recommended to me by fellow author Jesse Bullington. What I do remember, vividly, is reading every single thing I could get via interlibrary loan, including the now long out-of-print (and vastly expensive on the secondary market) *Museum of Terror* series, which collected several of Ito’s standalone short stories.

While Ito is best known for long-form (if episodic) creations like *Tomie* and *Uzumaki*, in my usual way it was these short stories that I loved best. Lately, Viz has been releasing a huge swath of Ito’s massive body of work in fantastic hardcovers, and I’ve collected every single one. These include his most beloved long-form stories, of course, but also numerous short story collections, featuring both tales that had previously been translated and others that were, up ‘til now, only available to Anglophone audiences as underground scanlations.

And I’m appreciative of every one of Viz’s releases but, and I don’t know how to say this without sounding like I’m *not* actually appreciative, many of the short story collections have felt like mixed bags, with a handful of classics slotted in among more minor works. Not so with *Tombs*, their latest release, which is top-shelf Ito pretty much from cover to cover.

Here, you’ll find some of Ito’s most famous stories, including “Slug Girl” and “Washed Ashore,” as well as a couple that were recently adapted into the Netflix anime series *Junji Ito: Maniac* – the title story is particularly welcome in English translation – alongside a few stories that were entirely new to me, at least. From the most familiar to the least, however, they are wall-to-wall bangers, and the collection makes a perfect introduction to Ito’s bizarre and uniquely unsettling short works. And the fact that the book itself is as predictably gorgeous as all the Viz hardcovers have been doesn’t hurt, either.

– ORRIN GREY

BOOKS

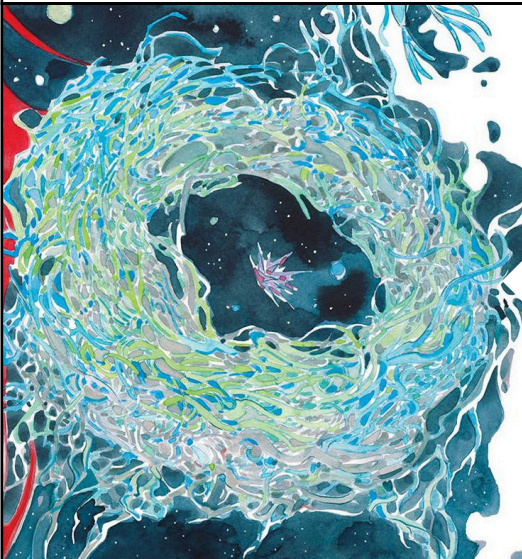


HIDE – Kiersten White takes a concept that shouldn't work (*Cabin in the Woods* meets *Battle Royale* in a theme park) and actually makes it work.

– AMANDA HUDGINS

TRUST – Was probably oversold on this one a little but still grabbed it at a discount and devoured it for my work book club. A book club book to be sure, in that it's a novel-length exercise in readers drawing their own conclusions over several sources on a single subject. Big revelation at the end that I wasn't expecting at all, which was pretty enjoyable, though it was a long way there. Not a slam on the craft, the book read quickly and well and satisfying in a lot of ways. Rife for analysis, a gift for English majors and the importance of analysis, though in the end I left a little hungry, for something that sang a little more.

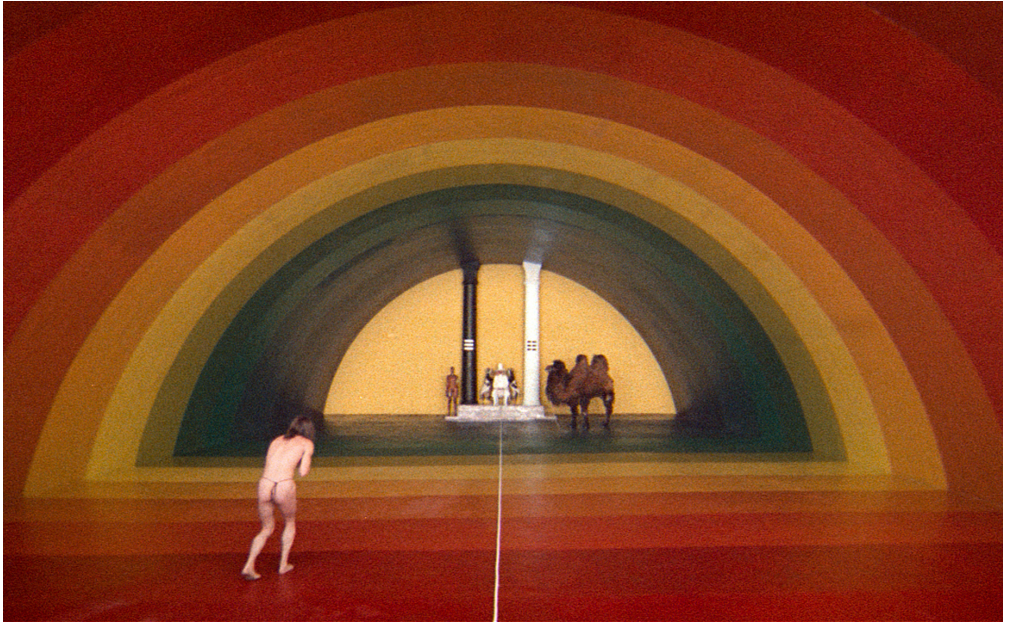
– LEVI RUBECK



MIRROR: The NEST – This science-fantasy graphic novel is the second and final volume in a duology written by Emma Rios (a.k.a. the artist of Kelly Sue DeConnick's weird western *Pretty Deadly*) and illustrated in gorgeous watercolors by Hwei Lim (previously known for the unique webcomic *Hero*). The series explores Othering and existentialism via a time-bending narrative that at times can be hard to follow, but always compelling. If you're like me and like to re-read something and take away something new from a text every time, you'll enjoy *Mirror*.

– PHOENIX SIMMS

MOVIES



The HOLY MOUNTAIN – There’s this scene in *Community*, where Troy is being inducted into the Air Conditioning Repair School, and they have this elaborate ceremony with an astronaut making paninis and Black Hitler, all designed so nobody will believe Troy when he tells them about what happened.

Alejandro Jodorowsky’s *The Holy Mountain* feels like that scene expanded to a whole movie. If I tell you individual beats (a hippo in a baptismal fountain, a candelabra gun, a giant ice penis, a naked tattooed woman playing a cello with steel nails, a boa constrictor in knitted rainbow sock, a sanctuary of 1,000 testicles, etc.), it would feel like something not designed to hold together as a coherent unit – some sort of insane collection of ideas brought about through some peyote-induced hallucination.

And, truth be told, I’m not sure *The Holy Mountain* actually does hold together all that well. Yes, it’s a visually sumptuous film full of magnificent set design and costuming thanks

to Jodorowsky himself, and an overabundance of psychedelia only available to the early 70s. There’s also probably a metaphor about fascism and Christianity somewhere in there as well, but I’m a little too lost in all the esoteric occultism to quite figure it out. Movies like this make me crave narrative and structure – I just want something to make sense.

Theoretically, Jodorowsky’s coup de grâce, revealing the movie set at the end, should help tie everything together, exposing the artifice of the hallucination. More or less, with the final statement, “Goodbye Holy Mountain, real life awaits us,” Jodorowsky is telling the viewer to go outside and touch grass. By effectively undercutting what we’ve seen, Jodorowsky asks us to dispose of his movie. Maybe that is why the disconnected hallucinations make up the holy mountain, so that when we tell someone how great it *seems* to be, it will be impossible to believe.

– NOAH SPRINGER

MOVIES

JASON and the ARGONAUTS – I try to let my kid develop his sensibilities without foisting my own tastes onto him. Lately, though, I have grown concerned that his current media diet is not fostering the necessary vocabulary to appreciate the rich field of 20th century monster movies, particularly Ray Harryhausen's film. Enter Jason, Talos, and a bevy of skullies. The kid enjoyed it. *Godzilla* next, I think. At some point.

– STU HORVATH



INSIDE – Much closer to the traditional spectrum of horror than some other French new extremity (other than maybe *High Tension*) but still extremely fucked. Maybe the most fucked, to be honest. It's 15 years later, but has anybody checked in on France to see how people are doing? I may need to go watch some Marvel movies or something for a bit.

– NOAH SPRINGER

TERROR at LONDON BRIDGE – This unlikely made-for-TV movie from 1985 about Jack the Ripper with an incredibly made-for-TV cast including Adrienne Barbeau, Clu Gulager and David Hasselhoff takes as its jumping-off point the even-more-unlikely but somehow true fact that the whole-ass London Bridge was relocated to Lake Havasu City, Arizona at the end of the 1960s.

– ORRIN GREY



DON'T WORRY DARLING – This was so incompetently made it ruined any goodwill I have for the director, as well as for Harry Styles, who should probably never be allowed to work with a script again.

– AMANDA HUDGINS

TELEVISION

SUCCESSION – Spoilers, yeah? If you don't like it I can call you a taxi to the subway so that you can go home to your little apartment. Imagine, if you will, watching the entirety of the final episode of *Succession*, wherein the Roy siblings form a panicked alliance to fuck the Waystar GoJo deal by putting all their eggs (board votes) in a Kendall Roy-shaped basket, seeing Roman Roy barely fit his mouth around the word “no” when it comes time for him to keep his word and vote against the deal (mere moments after melting down in his dead father's office and having his newly stitched headwound opened afresh against Kendall's shoulder in a rough embrace of brotherly “affection” which would rival the one Michael gave Fredo if Fredo leaned into the kiss of death like a little masochistic weirdo and Michael were somehow also Fredo, or at least equally as dumb), witnessing Kendall scream petulantly (not to mention incorrectly!) “I'm the eldest boy” over and over within earshot of the rest of the voting board and every other poor intern scheduled to work that day, and then deciding to get on Twitter to call Shiv Roy a cunt and accuse her of throwing a temper tantrum after she does something so perfectly in character as changing her deciding vote to “yes” at the last minute. Imagine, for that matter, watching the whole of the series and seeing the Roy siblings, whose loyalties to themselves and everyone else ebb and flow like the tides, laughing and joking together in their mum's kitchen like children after forming the slapdash alliance and thinking, ah yes – this is how it's all going to end. My kingdom for an iota of media literacy.

The *Succession* series finale was good – great, even. Every character behaved

exquisitely true to form, like the filthy creatures of money and darkness they all are (yes, even the Roy with the vagina, and no, she's not any shittier than the others – let us all endeavor to fit a whole woman in our heads, yeah?), the ending was unpredictable yet screamingly inevitable, just as series director Mark Mylod describes tragedy to be in a post-show interview. The penultimate episode, though, was the real star in the stellar final run. It gave us a monster's funeral that allowed his family to give him the grace of humanity and in doing so, grab white-knuckled onto bits of their own. Not me getting misty for little Logan Roy as his brother described how their guardians planted the seeds of emotional abuse that would bear overripe fruit once he raised children of his own. Not me wiping away the wet watching his youngest son Roman, who made me wince with recognition more than once over the course of the show, lose his words for weeping. Grief comes like a shiv to the ribs, even for people who don't deserve it.

The writing on *Succession* was so good it could wound. It was so good it made you laugh at pain and flinch at a joke. It was so good whole swaths of people missed the narrative forest for the quip-laden trees and got on Twitter to talk about it anyway. Did it make me give a shit about horrible people, at least in a way that ultimately delivered the comfort of knowing I contain the empathy to see the human in the brutes? Uh-huh. Will I miss it? Fuck off.

– SARA CLEMENS

waystar|ROYCO

TELEVISION

SUCCESSION – Shiv the Shiv vs. the Roy Boys, and who comes out on top? The Disgusting Brothers.

– NOAH SPRINGER

It was a show, and now it's done.

– DEREK KINSMAN

Ain't falling for this scam to humanize the Murdochs.

– LEVI RUBECK

Genuinely surprised the show pulled off that landing after four seasons of ever-higher stakes. I was a *bit* disappointed the finale never circled round to reveal where Fitz took that oil painting in season two, or *why*, but then great drama isn't really about explanations, right?

– STU HORVATH



Oh, no, not the end of another prestige grimdark television show about the blandest looking white people who all hate each other, what will we do?

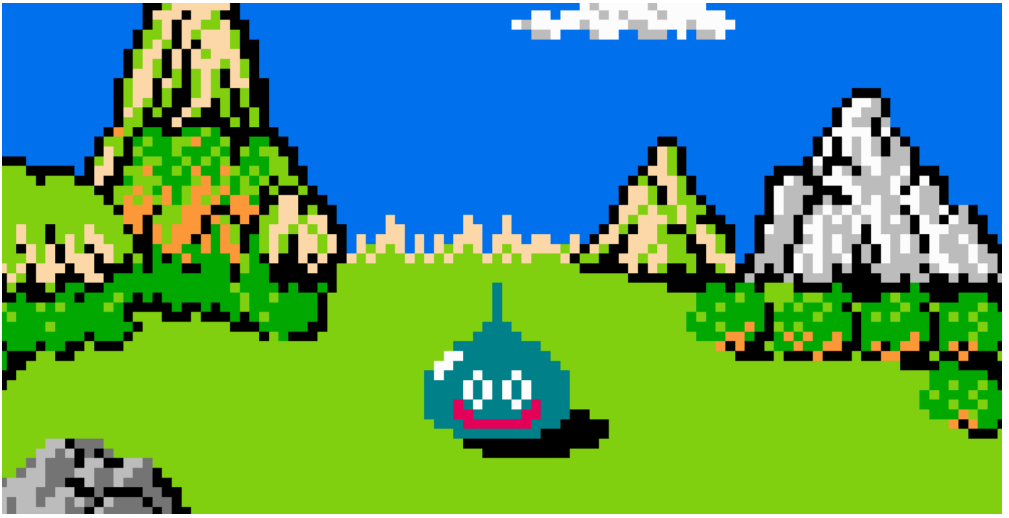
– AMANDA HUDGINS

Succession is, more than anything, a story about the inability to progress, to move on. Its central siblings are trapped in an oedipal struggle against their “world of a father,” who, even in his dying throes, cannot fathom relinquishing an iota of his once-grand empire to his idiot children. *Succession* tells the story of personal, familial tragedy, of family members tearing each other down over lifelong toxic dynamics, but it also presents a very public tragedy playing out for the rest of the world. Throughout the show's four-season run it deftly portrays how the blinkered and besotted wealthy, who have all the money, throw it casually around based on their barely understood desires, out of tantrums, to win favors with each other, to get one over on daddy, to win back daddy's love and so on. It's all tragically pointless. We're all stuck on the same boat, moored to the same gargantuan capitalists, men of power who will die before giving it up, who will curse us all to live out their aged dream, who will drag us ceaselessly back into the past.

– YUSSEF COLE



GAMES



ROLEPLAYING GAMES and the MUNDANE –

If you are reading this, you have probably seen the meme about every generic roleplaying game in existence. The beginning of the game involves a young (often naïve) boy or girl waking up around mid-day to their mother or father yelling at them to get up. The story progresses into them running around town helping the townsfolk with day-to-day tasks such as a finding a child's lost cat, or clearing out a farmer's field filled with oversized gophers. After some progression through the main story, something bad usually happens that takes the hero out of their comfort zone and they eventually find themselves thrown into a much bigger story that goes beyond the safety of their home town. Ultimately, they come to the end of their journey and face-to-face with the ultimate antagonist. Which is usually a supreme being that has God-like powers capable of destroying the planet.

Throughout the story, you see a progression of circumstances that push the main character to their limits and beyond. What I love about these games and these stories is the fact that you get to witness this person's own

story first hand. You are with them on the dusty road, to massive cathedrals and sometimes even to the end of reality itself. It is so cool to watch these stories unfold. I especially like the beginning of these games; where the world seems so fresh and new, and you know that there is more to this world than what is in front of you.

I find inspiration from these stories. I like to think that our reality is similar to that of a roleplayed game. We are just living our lives in a much greater story, and we are made stronger by the monsters that we face and the dragons we slay. We go to our jobs, we do what needs doing, and we come home. But have we ever stopped to wonder what lay beyond the grind? Sometimes I can feel stuck, as I'm sure most of you do from time to time. But always keep in mind that there is more going on behind the scenes than we think, and we can live our lives as if it were a backdrop to some great fairy tale – and maybe even some day we can find ourselves at the edge of reality facing down our own demons.

– ANDREW BRISTOL

GAMES

The LEGEND of ZELDA: TEARS of the KINGDOM – As if answering the wishes of gamers to play *Breath of the Wild* for the first time again, *Tears of the Kingdom* is an unexpected, yet utterly apparent evolution of *Breath of the Wild*'s mechanics that artfully introduces new areas of friction to make getting lost in Hyrule something we *can* do all over again.

– AUTUMN WRIGHT

Despite being the sequel to a game that's the most self-differentiating in its franchise, *Tears of the Kingdom* is Old Zelda. I realized this first when I saw a Like Like, the shield eating monsters from earlier games, and hit it with a frost gun; and again when I fell down a well in Castle Town and realized not only was there a whole ecosystem down there, there were 50 more wells for me to find. Nintendo has broken the temporality of Zelda (to say nothing of the now Very Messed Up timeline) by leaning into the unwillingness to elaborate that accompanied its older puzzles while also giving you cheat codes (literally) to solve the new ones. It's the mystery without the frustration. *Twilight Princess* called, and it wants its vibes back.

– EMILY PRICE

I can't wait for this to stop taking over my group chat.

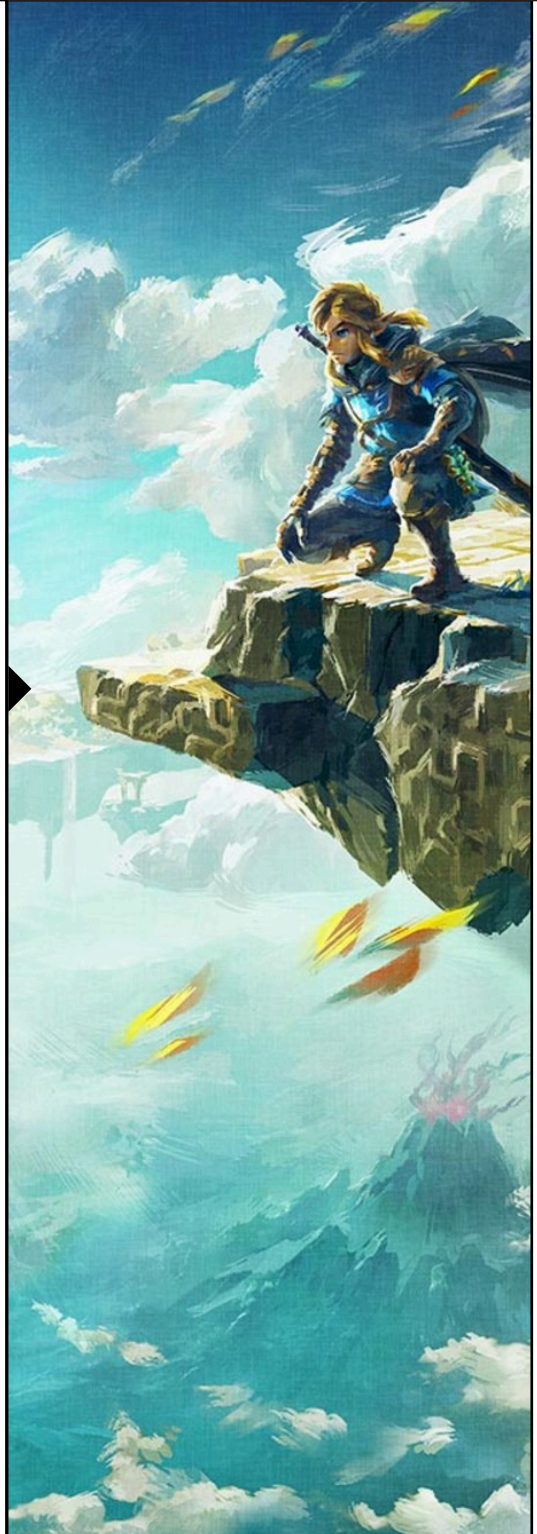
– AMANDA HUDGINS

Heard you like *Breath of the Wild*, here's more and then some.

– LEVI RUBECK

Make Zelda the playable character already, you cowards.

– STU HORVATH



HOROSCOPE

THE NIGHT IS LONG AND THE
WATER DARK; WE'LL FIND
OUR WAY TO SMOOTH WATER
TOMORROW. IF WE MAKE IT
THROUGH THE NIGHT. 🍷