

ISSUE 73

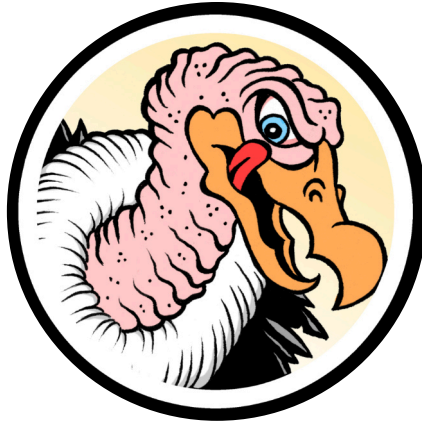
# EXPLOITS

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**LIMINALITY • BOTCH • A THEORY of HAUNTING •  
TELL ME a CREEPY STORY • TRUE DETECTIVE:  
NIGHT COUNTRY • PARANORMASIGHT**



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## **EXPLOITS**

A MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO THE REASONS WE LOVE THINGS

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COVER: "RESISTANCE, OR THE BLACK IDOL" BY FRANTIŠEK KUPKA, 1900

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This machine kills fascists.

# LIMINALITY: FEAR of TRANSITION

by Kasio Dalton

To call something “liminal” is to suggest it’s in transition – between a before and an after. Like the pandemic that accelerated its popularity, liminal aesthetics have faded from the forefront of internet consciousness, but haven’t gone away. They remain a favorite trope for communicating the uncanny, the unsettling and the horrifying, and it’s easy to understand why. Transitory spaces are restless and anticipatory; something must come before, something must come after. To be forced to dwell in the liminal can be extremely disquieting. It’s a terrifying suggestion that someone might call a transitory space *home*.

I am nonbinary. This isn’t reflected on my government documents, nor is it known by distant friends and family. Forgotten internet accounts resurface with disturbing regularity bearing old names. I’m in the process of changing.

My presentation is traditionally masculine, but decreasingly so. I am between man and other: I am liminal. It’s uneasy to be *between*. To never quite find certainty in a traditionally defined identity – neither one nor the other. Transition is rarely recognized as a state of being. There is before and there is after. Male to female. Female to male. Cis to trans.

*So where does that leave me?*

I may be liminal, but that doesn’t rob me of identity. In any context, for any subject, there is always a before and after. We needn’t always be understood by who we were and who we’re becoming. We are no less ourselves when in transition.

I long for alternative depictions of the liminal, beyond the simple aesthetics of horror. CosmoD turns transient spaces into vibrant loci of life in his exploration of train stations, streets and clubs. His game *The Norwood Suite* fills the halls of a hotel with people, their dreams, motivations and secrets. The game’s soundtrack integrates reactively into the building itself. All the hotel’s inhabi-

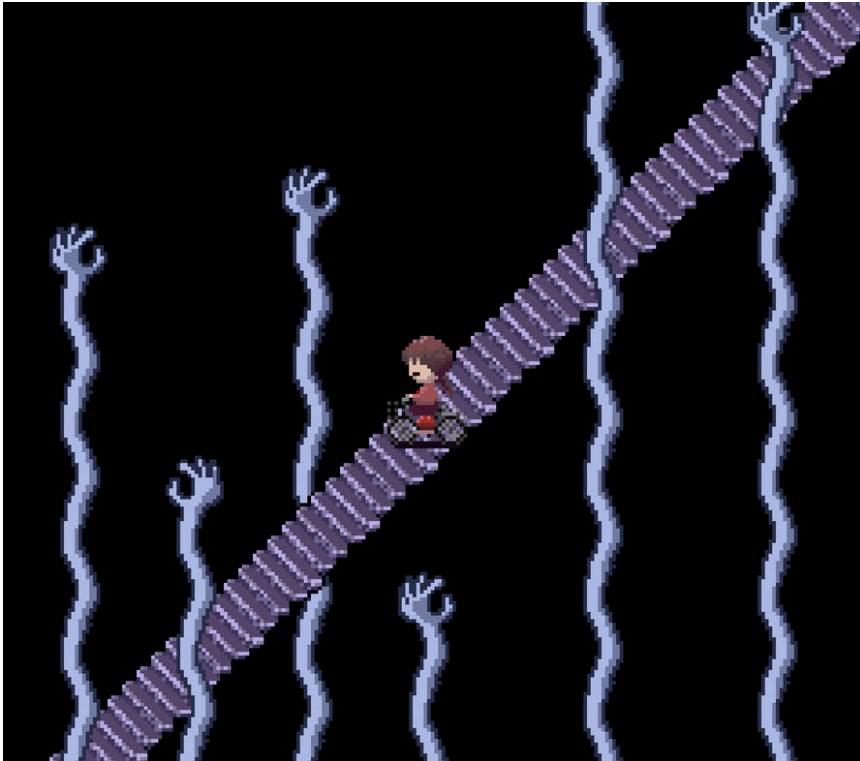
tants, no matter how permanent or ephemeral, are connected by its music. Liminality is used to explore the strange ways people are connected, and the life that thrives in places defined by inevitable departure.

*Yume Nikki* takes place in a girl's uncanny dreams. Her waking hours are limited to a sparse room and balcony, but her dream world is expansive, labyrinthine and diverse, containing items called "effects" that allow her to change her appearance and identity. Her liminal dreams are often unsettling, but offer the freedom for self-exploration that is absent in the real world.

The animated short film *Goodnight, Sweet Dreams! Pajama Mammal-Saur* by Lychentropy similarly explores dreams, using them for respite from a confusing, anxious reality. The surreal, half-remembered dreamscapes offer quietude otherwise unavailable in quotidian life.

I enjoy liminal horror, but there can be so much more to liminality. There has to be. Transition can be overwhelming, and I'd rather not spend it perpetually anxious – there's no need to fear transition. Yes, it can be scary. It can be uncertain. But it can also be a place of sojourn, beauty and identity.

I am liminal. And I think I'm going to be okay. 🍵





**BOTCH** – There was once a time when you couldn't throw a rock without hitting a hardcore kid arguing that Norma Jean's legendary debut album *Bless the Martyr and Kiss the Child* was little more than a facsimile of Botch's sophomore mathcore masterpiece, *We are the Romans*. The similarities in style were undeniable, and while Norma Jean never denied copping an influence, it didn't stop comparisons between the two acts from becoming an endless tire fire of message board fodder. Whether or not it mattered was also subject for debate; both were (and are) incredible bands, their legacies inadvertently intertwined.

For better or worse, Botch personified quitting while you're ahead. After *We are the Romans* came out in 1999, they managed just one more release, the EP *An Anthology of Dead Ends*, before splitting up in 2002. The pressure to follow up one of the most forward-thinking hardcore records to date was too much, and with each member's creative muses leading them in different directions, they went out at the top of their game.

Singer Dave Verellen went the alt-country/indie rock route with the sorely underrated Roy before revisiting hardcore with Narrows,

bassist Brian Cook pushed the boundaries of post-hardcore with *These Arms Are Snakes* and post-rock with *Russian Circles*, and guitarist Dave Knudsen convinced a generation of indie rock kids that looper pedals and two-handed tapping are cool with the heretofore unmatched Minus the Bear and his own electronica-infused solo work. The quality of each member's post-Botch output proved their greatness wasn't a fluke, even if competing creative visions ultimately did them in.

Meanwhile, just as the members of Botch were preparing to mostly leave hardcore behind, Norma Jean emerged to carry the torch. When *Bless the Martyr and Kiss the Child* came out in the summer of 2002, it had a seismic impact on the metal and hardcore scenes. Before long, there were Norma Jean imitators emulating their brand of controlled chaos in basement shows everywhere. Whether or not those bands were fully familiar with the source material they were borrowing from, it became almost impossible to talk about either Botch or Norma Jean independently without the other act being brought up.

Regardless of how anyone felt about Norma Jean's ascendancy may have made the difference between *We are the Romans* being

## PLAYLIST

remembered as a cult classic versus being widely regarded as one of the most innovative albums in heavy music history in general. The ensuing discourse kept Botch relevant for years after they initially called it quits, and while there's no way to quantify this assertion, it's likely their fan base grew exponentially more after their breakup than while they were an active touring band.

Now in the middle of a much-hyped reunion tour that no one would have ever thought possible before, what may matter most is that we all have a rare opportunity to shine a light on the originators of the source material that inspired so much of the last two decades of metal and hardcore. One last chance to reflect upon a band that ended too soon and to finally give them their due, regardless of how anyone might have arrived at their fandom. As Botch ties up their own loose ends and arrives at a sense of long-lost closure, so too do those of us who always wished they could one day play for those who missed out the first time around.

— BEN SAILER



"To Our Friends in the Great White North,"  
by Botch

"Pachuca Sunrise," by Minus the Bear

"Big News," by These Arms Are Snakes

"The Company, The Comfort, The Grave," by  
The Chariot

"Rewind It," by David Knudson, Sam Bell

"One Twenty Two," by Botch

"Memphis Will Be Laid To Waste," by Norma  
Jean

"Youngblood," by Russian Circles

"Chambered," by Narrows

"Darryl Worley Forgotten," by Roy

"Hutton's Great Heat Engine," by Botch

"The Task," by Sumac

"Catching Cold," by Harkonen

"Undone," by Nineironspitfire

"Jet's Jets," by Sharks Keep Moving

"The Laugh Track For Contemporary Music,"  
by Kill Sadie

"D4," by Unbroken

"You'll Be Happier With Lower Standards," by  
Some Girls

"Micaragua," by Botch

[LISTEN ON SPOTIFY](#)

# BOOKS

**A THEORY OF HAUNTING** – Had I been asked, several years ago, to name my favorite single-author collection, odds are I would have told you it was *The Bone Key* by Sarah Monette. And while it's been some time since I last read *The Bone Key*, if that's not still true, I couldn't tell you with any certainty what has usurped it.

For those who aren't familiar, *The Bone Key* collects several stories featuring Kyle Murchison Booth, a socially awkward archivist at the fictional Samuel Mather Par-rington museum whose work brings him into contact with "the dead and the monstrous," as the back matter would have it, more often than he would prefer.

Written as an homage to the classic ghost stories of folks like M. R. James, the tales combine the coziness and intellectual approach of those stories with the modern sensibilities of an author who has won the Locus Award and been a nominee for the Hugo, Nebula and World Fantasy.

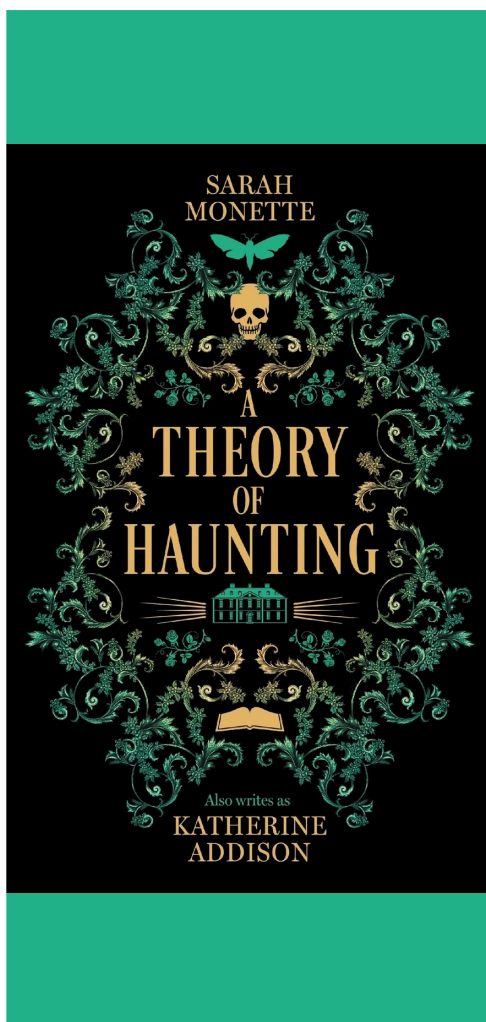
In spite of my affection for the adventures of Kyle Murchison Booth, however, I was unaware until recently that Monette had released a new short novel or novella (I wasn't exactly counting words) starring Booth, which was published by Solaris in 2023 and was – an even more tempting proposition – an example of one of my favorites of all horror subgenres: the haunted house story.

And what a haunted house story it is. In *A Theory of Haunting*, Booth gets yet another unwanted assignment, in this case cataloguing a library of occult books at the notorious residence known as Thirdhop Scarp. His real purpose for being there, however, is to try to shake one of the mu-

seum's benefactors from the clutches of an esoteric order who have made the infamous house their base of operations.

However, while the Order Aurorae Aeternae may be charlatans, the house is very definitely haunted. Monette seems to share my conviction that the difference between a ghost story and a haunted house story is that, in the latter, the house itself becomes an antagonist, and she has created a very memorable one in Thirdhop Scarp.

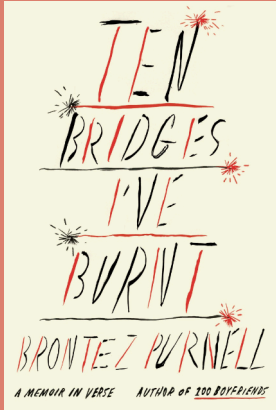
– ORRIN GREY



# BOOKS

**HOUSE on the BRINK** – The fact that this folk horror-ish novel for young readers boils down to “four teens and a mourning widow are menaced by a muddy log” and still manages to be chilling is testament to John Gordon’s craft.

– STU HORVATH

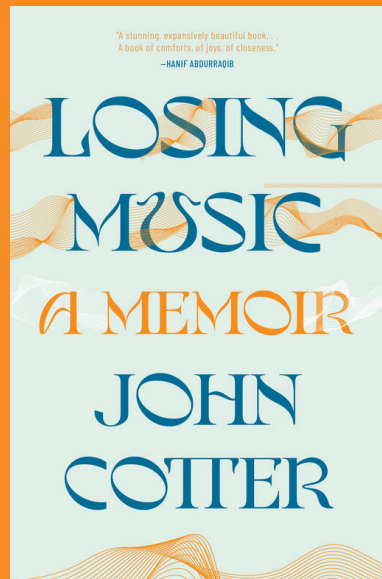


**TEN BRIDGES I'VE BURNT** – “What would you do if you had a time machine, of course the only answer is kill my parents.” I am such a skeptic about both memoirs and poetry but this got me! While I would argue it isn't as form-shaking as Purnell's ventures into short stories and films, he's still got a great way with words and swings from infectious humor to gutting moments with ease.

– OLUWATAYO ADEWOLE

**LOSING MUSIC: A MEMOIR** – A poet friend recommended this memoir by a poet on the experience of his hearing and dealing with terrible vertigo. It's one of the most terrifying books I've ever read. I haven't quite finished it but I do not expect any tidy resolutions, as the fear is summoned by a malfunctioning body, a clueless medical field, the understandably limited compassion of friends and loved ones and the absolute disinterest by society at large in accommodating people who aren't able to function within its narrow parameters. In one crucial chapter, author John Cotter lives in a recovery center as a volunteer in order do something to mitigate the dark bubble he finds himself in, only to have a panic attack at the realization that anyone can hit rock bottom and get cast aside and slip to a life of struggle. Clearly he's written this book and moved forward, but for now, here I sweat, fixated on ear protection and mistrusting doctors.

– LEVI RUBECK





# MOVIES



**TELL ME A CREEPY STORY** – We have all seen the marketing ploys warning us that, “This is the most disgusting film of all time!” Or we’ve read the headlines that boast about troves of people fainting in the theater or the irate viewers storming out and demanding refunds due to the depravity they’ve witnessed. Usually – and unfortunately – those movies don’t live up to the hype. Without playing into exaggeration, truly, my only warning is not to watch *Tell Me a Creepy Story* while you’re eating.

Generally, horror anthologies are tongue-in-cheek campfests, often with a central narrator. In *Creepshow*, we follow the Creep through the pages in Billy Hopkins’ comic book with vengeful glee as the characters get what they deserve. *The Mortuary Collection* gives us Mortician Montgomery Dark reminiscing about the strange ways people have ended up in his morgue via fables with a moral at the end.

Anthology lovers probably expect that satisfyingly dark humor and a suitably ghastly guide when they tune in, and for

that reason some will be disappointed in *Tell Me a Creepy Story*. Presented as deep, brooding and artsy, there isn’t an ounce of humor involved in any of these four parables. Furthermore, the stories don’t necessarily share a theme, style or even a language. If we look at them as four disparate shorts, however, they are each visually compelling, boasting amazing practical effects.

After the initial letdown, realizing that this collection wouldn’t be a fun or easy watch before bed, I allowed the heaviness of the subject matter to sink in and took each part as its own movie. With very little dialogue until the final short, this compilation demands your full attention. I had to put my phone on the charger and buckle up to really appreciate this visceral, disgusting, sometimes purely agonizing compendium, but the stories, the effects and the visuals were well worth the headspace. If you have an open mind and ninety minutes to spare, this alternative anthology may just be a hidden gem.

– STEPH HOWARD

# MOVIES

**ALIENS** – Watching *Aliens* again for the first time in a decade, and I still can't believe how badly I want to murder Paul Reiser from the get go. Just fuck that guy from day one. [Later] I'm starting think Sam Altman's resemblance to baby Paul Reiser is on purpose.

– NOAH SPRINGER



**LISA FRANKENSTEIN** – Is *Lisa Frankenstein* good? Foolish question. Is *Lisa Frankenstein* the kind of movie that would have absolutely demolished my brain chemistry and rewritten me from the ground up at age 17? Yes. Not like Tim Burton, but like how you remember Tim Burton feeling, *Lisa Frankenstein* is a dark comedy that isn't afraid to get weird.

– AMANDA HUDGINS



**WALTZ with BASHIR** – Ari Folman's surreal yet harrowing meta-documentary about how memories and inter-generational trauma constantly operate on us subconsciously is essential watching. I saw this back when it was first released and having rewatched it I can say that I was not exaggerating the emotions I carried with me since that first viewing. This is also a great film for understanding how Israel and the IDF's system of dehumanization works and how brainwashed soldiers in their ranks are. The use of animation in this film as a mechanism for communicating all the above and more is mesmerizing. I could go on and on.

– PHOENIX SIMMS



**WICKED LITTLE LETTERS** – This is my *Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris*.

– OLUWATAYO ADEWOLE



# TELEVISION



**TRUE DETECTIVE: NIGHT COUNTRY** – *Night Country* is a perfectly great detective story. A “true” detective story, even. In a nutshell, a group of scientists wind up outside in the cold, inhospitable wasteland that is Alaska. Two detectives with messy families work together to figure out what happened to them. In the climax, they find out not just what happened to them but *why* it happened to them. There are certainly deeper themes and visuals and hooks that go much further down than that but that’s just a nutshell.

If you watched the show each week you saw a pacey, drawn-out story of two damaged detectives trying to solve a crime that intersects with their lives in troubling ways. But increasingly there’s a “new” way to watch television. It’s not enough to watch it, people coalesce around blogs and forums to dissect every aspect of something. Instead of taking a work as it comes, each work becomes some problem that can be solved by wielding enough logic and reason against it. And if you watched *Night Country* that way, I could see how you’d be disappointed.

Of course, this is also because *True Detective* season one casts a massive shadow. *Night Country* does itself no favors by throwing a few connections to that season that people on the internet loudly adore.

But I can separate the two. And actively did and was largely rewarded for this. The world of *Night Country* is the world of the Louisiana Cult but it’s not the story of it. It’s not a sequel to it. And we can all find value in simply being more normal about a TV show.

There’s nothing in *Night Country* for which there is not an explanation. Sometimes, there are multiple ones. Sometimes, they conflict. And sometimes, the explanation is just a little shallow. In life, sometimes a bad thing happens to you, and you find yourself running into a mythology of your own making. Tragedy has a way of rewiring a person.

*Night Country* is worth watching on its merits. And a show worth watching with as little time in between episodes as possible, maybe on successive evenings. But do it without reading everything you can about it. Meet the show where it’s at and savor the experience.

– DAVID SHIMOMURA

# TELEVISION



**MASTERS of the AIR** – As a pilot, I love it. As a movie buff, I can't recommend. As a historian, it's fine. The main takeaway is that yes, this one is chocked full of schlock, but has a few moments of temporary brilliance. *Masters of the Air* isn't bad on the whole, but I can sense a missed opportunity, especially when compared to classics like *12 O'Clock High*.

– JUSTIN REEVE

**GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL MYSTERY CLASS (SEASON 2)**

– This is the level of celebrity show I want – a bunch of Korean celebrities wander around a live-action roleplay of a high school where a murder has taken place, attempting to find the killer. It's fun and silly and incredibly well done.

– AMANDA HUDGINS



**The BEAR (SEASON 1)** – Haven't finished this yet but I'm finally catching up on this – it only recently was made available for streaming in Canada. Definitely worth the hype (thanks Phil)! My favorite part of this show so far is how strong the visual storytelling is. When they want you to head hop to various POVs, you perceive immediate changes in the psychology of each scene. There's something kaleidoscopic about this technique and it's wonderful to see the patterns of reaction and interaction emerge.

– PHOENIX SIMMS



**MONARCH: LEGACY of MONSTERS**

– Someone working on this *really* liked *Lost* but I was surprised by just how quickly I got invested in a Godzilla "monsterverse" spin-off show that deliberately focuses on its human characters. Kaiju (or I guess Titans) are still in it, though.

– ROB RICH



# GAMES



**PARANORMASIGHT** – It's Tokyo in the 1980s. The panoramic view of an empty playground in Honjo greets you at night. You circle around yourself, as if put in the street view of a GPS application set to the aesthetics of an urban thriller. The eerie darkness of the playground is broken, unexpectedly. A young woman, drawn in manga style and colorfully clad, greets you with an unexpected bubblyness. However, things go wrong (this is a horror story, after all) and a fatal choice is made. You are pulled out of the view of the player character, who is not quite your avatar, it seems. Placed in the black expanse of background, the Storyteller greets you beside a CRT TV, explaining why you are pulled out of the story and what you did wrong. After a brief bit of discussion, you are shunted back to the point of view of several Honjo denizens; the enablers, the users and the victims of the curses of Honjo. Controlling these people and their curses, you are faced with a simple question: What lengths would you go to bring someone you loved back from death?

This is *Paranormasight: The Seven Mysteries of Honjo* (2023), in a nutshell. One of

the most striking design choices for the visual novel is its utilization of the panoramic street view. Across scenes, the realistic visualization of the urban setting convinces the player that they are in a modern city. All the while the mystery of the occult acts as a bridge into the history of Honjo, way back into the Edo period. The pre-modern survives into modernity in some form, and the weight of the dead keeps haunting the minds of the living. *Paranormasight* shows us the potential of well-crafted and deeply historicized environments in visual novels. Everything feels lived in, despite the absence of a technically advanced recreation of the Honjo ward.

The inclusion of a metanarrative is one of the striking aspects of *Paranormasight*. The CRT TV we see beside the Storyteller also forms the shape of the UI for the menu where the codex resides. Moreover, even simple accessibility settings for the game are made part of the puzzles sometimes. Negating the effect of a curse which depends on *hearing* it is overcome by . . . turning off the sound in the settings! I should note that, much to my shame, I would never

# GAMES

(continued from previous page)

have the creativity to solve this without on-line guides (thank you, walkthrough writers!). In another instance, we help one of the playable characters, Mayu, through our own knowledge as the player, which Mayu would not have. This is reflected within gameplay, as Mayu notes the mystery of acting on this knowledge, as if she is possessed . . . goosebumps . . .

The metanarrative directly amplifies the eeriness of the setting. It disturbs the internal coherence of the setting, while also paradoxically pulling you, the player, even deeper within its enveloping immersion. You as the player are the manifestation of the curse. The invisible hand that guides things towards what they should be, fixing century-old mistakes in the process.

*Paranormasight* is an exceedingly clever visual novel that knows how to play into the urbanism, the occult and the immersion of eeriness.

– TAYLANUMUT DOĞAN



**AMNESIA: The BUNKER** – Finally was able to access the latest of Frictional Games' iconic series and I'm having a blast so far. Sometimes literally, as I seem to be adept at blowing myself up in a panic when running from mutant rats and a ghoulish beast. I love the emphasis on a limited, claustrophobic space this time around, as well as the many different strategies you can employ with key items and the environment to get ahead in the plot. *Amnesia* is at its best when the horror comes not just from the supernatural, but from real world horrors, like WWI. No one else can deconstruct player's expectations in the sinister way Frictional Games can.

– PHOENIX SIMMS

# HOROSCOPE

THROUGH SMUDGED LENSES YOU CAN SEE THAT ONE STAR IS ACTUALLY SIX,  
THAT THEY CONTINUE INTO INFINITY, THAT YOU'LL NEVER SEE THEM ALL.  
CLEAN YOUR GLASSES. 🧼