

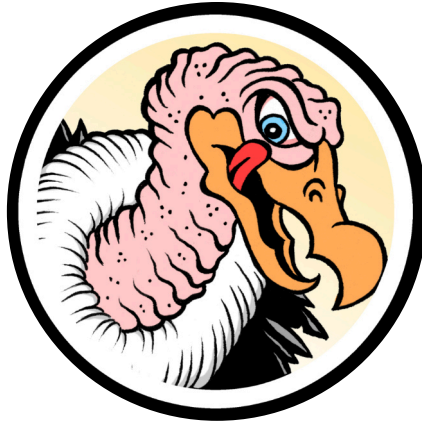
# EXPLOITS

an UNWINNABLE publication

MAY 2024



**MODS • LITTLE SIMZ • REAL MEN DON'T DO  
THERAPY • TRUCKER'S WOMAN •  
INVINCIBLE • CYNTHIA WEAVER**



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## **EXPLOITS**

A MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO THE REASONS WE LOVE THINGS

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COVER: "A HUNTSMAN VANQUISHES THE SEVEN-HEADED DRAGON" BY KAY NIELSEN, 1925

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This machine kills fascists.

# The IMPOSSIBILITY of MODS MAKES THEM SO VALUABLE

by Elijah Beahm

Any videogame that actually manages to release is nothing short of a small miracle. The intricacies of the medium have grown so vast and complex that the biggest titles cost millions and are developed by tens of thousands of creatives working tirelessly. So that begs the question: why would anyone do it, with minimal support, working uphill against someone else's code, for *free*?

Mods have always been a divisive yet crucial facet of the gaming space. Without mods, you don't have *Counter-Strike*, *The Stanley Parable* or the MOBA genre. As funny as it is when someone finds a way to swap out Spider-Man for Kermit or Shrek or a toilet (or he's naked), the reality is, mods can be much more powerful than generating memes.

Just the other day, I was browsing online and came upon a mod for Treyarch's *Spider-Man*. That's the first tie-in game they made based on the Raimi trilogy. There are no tools for modding *Spider-Man*. This is someone shooting in the dark, making the impossible happen, because they're annoyed that Green Goblin – who you can unlock as an alternate playable character – lacked some of the abilities he had when fought as a boss. They're currently at version 3.0 of this mod.

Now picture the sheer number of hours going into something like *Skyblivion*, which is recreating the entirety of *Skyrim's* predecessor, and has to try and support the original release, and two re-release versions. Or *Halo SPV3*, an ongoing total overhaul of Halo that's been worked on for longer than *The Master Chief Collection*. That's not just programmers but modelers, animators, voice actors, testers. These are profound works of art that extrapolate from the foundations poured by professional developers.

What's more, many mods keep classic games viable. *Daikatana* was rightfully roasted at launch, but the fan patch for it makes it genuinely fun and still playable on modern hardware. The recent *Dark Forces* remaster wouldn't have been possible without years of reverse engineering from its fans to source port it. *Just Cause*

2's fan-made multiplayer was so incredible the developers gave the official nod and support to the modders.

Still, it's not hard to understand why some developers see people rooting around places that they thought were closed off and panic. Capcom's embarrassment over a nude mod being seen in an official fighting tournament is valid – even if that's far more on the tournament participant than anyone else. Yet fighting modders with lawsuits or locking them out of the code isn't the way to improve this situation.

As platforms like Steam – and to a lesser extent, Xbox – start to welcome mods as a concept, they're ensuring not only legitimacy, but better moderation. A modder might not realize the potential controversy of a *GTA* Hot Coffee mod, but platform holders do, and they can better highlight outstanding projects. Valve has even officially endorsed some Source engine mods as commercial projects. While monetizing mods is its own weighty topic, it's a considerate step they've taken respectfully and delicately – which is how these miraculous, tireless fan creations need to be handled. Not with the mallet of legal notices and takedowns, or antagonistic patches that intentionally break compatibility with mods, but a tentative, reasonable conversation that brings the best of these wonderful efforts to the top. 🇺



# MUSIC



**LITTLE SIMZ** – There’s a gorgeous and catchy rhythm to the new EP, *Drop 7* from Simbiatu “Simbi” Ajikawo, a.k.a. Little Simz (it’s a thematic follow-up to the earlier EP, *Drop 6*). The overall tone of this latest by the London-based rapper is celebratory. There’s much for her to exult. After the success of *GREY Area*, the EP that arguably made her mainstream and got her a featured remix of the track “Venom” and a cameo in *Venom: Let There Be Carnage* (not to mention a cameo by her performing said track in the film), Little Simz didn’t slow down. Previously, she also collaborated with Gorillaz on the track “Garage Palace,” featured during the virtual band’s Demon Dayz festival and toured with them during their *The Humanz* tour (2017-2018). Simz mentions during an [Apple Music interview](#) that Damon Albarn advised her that whether collaborating or otherwise, she needs to lean into her individual self wherever she goes.

She followed up with two major works, *Sometimes I Might Be Introvert* and *NO THANK YOU*, the former in particular highlighting her enduring cultural resonance in the fractious political environment of Brexit Britain. As a related aside, she’s been enjoy-

ing a thriving career as an actress in the Netflix series *Top Boy*, which gave her the opportunity to return to her hometown in North London as part of a [behind-the-scenes special](#). North London is also where she discovered she wanted to be in the performance arts no matter what and found her unique and experimental voice. She used to attend a youth center from nine throughout her teens, first performing for her friends and family and eventually selling out the same venue in her twenties.

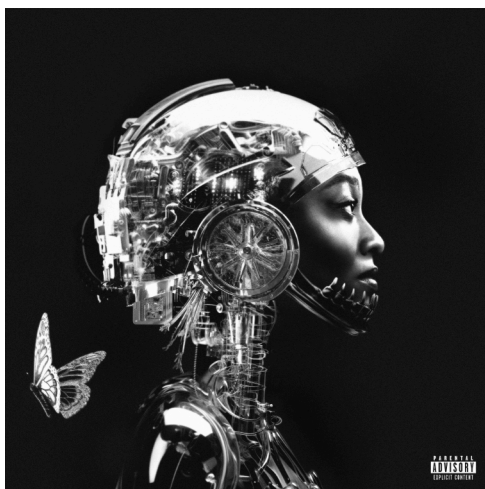
Originally, Simz wanted to be a backup dancer for Missy Elliott and cites the rap pioneer and other greats like Lauryn Hill as being the foundation for her own work. Yet in spite of her bold confidence in verse and stage presence, Simz is a very grounded and prudent independent artist. [She canceled her 11-date US tour in 2022](#) and was transparent about the fact that such a tour would leave her in an unsustainable deficit. She credits her groundedness and consistency as an artist to her family and community, who have always fiercely supported her. This has led the artist to want to give back to her audience, showing them that their dreams are possible as well.

# MUSIC

## PLAYLIST

In a short documentary about her recent European tour titled “On Stage Off Stage,” Simz states of her process about two minutes in that “when I make music, I feel it, I want share it.” In various interviews the rapper is keen to note that she’s a very “feelings-led” person. She’s a stunning example of how being introverted doesn’t mean timid. *Drop 7* has a similar vibe to electronic artist Tokimonsta’s comeback album of 2017, *Lune Rouge*, a refreshing return to basics and roots. The addictive African beat samples and the non-stop flow of Little Simz’s rhymes recall earlier tracks that got her where she is today and I’ve organized the attendant playlist with that principle in mind (with some of her more emotional bangers thrown in for good measure). *Drop 7* is unabashedly a party jam, something you can easily dance or sway to, but it’s also just as deliberate and crafted as the rest of Little Simz’s catalog.

– PHOENIX SIMMS



- “Mood Swings,” by Little Simz
- “Fever,” by Little Simz
- “Torch,” by Little Simz
- “SOS,” by Little Simz
- “I Ain’t Feelin’ It,” by Little Simz
- “Power,” by Little Simz
- “Far Away,” by Little Simz
- “Garage Palace (feat. Little Simz),” by Gorillaz, Little Simz
- “Venom,” by Little Simz
- “Wounds,” by Little Simz, Chronixx
- “might bang, might not,” by Little Simz
- “one life, might live,” by Little Simz
- “Introvert,” by Little Simz
- “Woman,” by Little Simz, Cleo Sol
- “Rollin Stone,” by Little Simz
- “Point and Kill,” by Little Simz, Obongjayar
- “Fear No Man,” by Little Simz
- “Gorilla,” by Little Simz
- “Devour,” by Little Simz, Jakwob
- “Gratitude,” by Little Simz, The Hics
- “Venom – Remix / from Venom: Let There Be Carnage,” by Little Simz

[LISTEN ON SPOTIFY](#)

# BOOKS

## **REAL MEN DON'T DO THERAPY –**

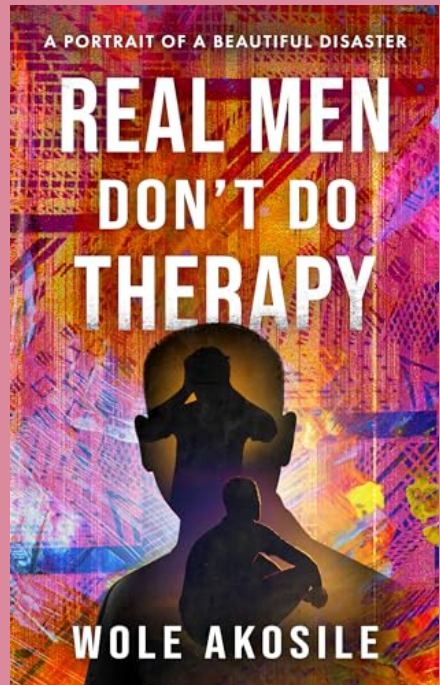
*“This man,” Femi thought, “is a coconut!”*

*Real Men Don't Do Therapy*, by Wole Akolsile, is an exploration of power, identity, and how we might respond. It brings together two very conflicting narratives: that of the individual, as seen in psychotherapy, and the power dynamics that exist both around and between us. Each character adds a new voice or perspective to the narratives surrounding identity, what this means and how they shape opportunities. There's Femi, who works in a furniture store because of his immigrant identity despite having a qualification in computer programming; Bluey, who was alienated for protecting his mother; and Dr. Agoro, who defied the law in his outrage against child abuse. This is a book filled with vulnerable characters, each exploring their own struggles. There are strong women and sensitive men – women who won't commit and men who want to. Every element of this story breaks down myths of what it means to be a man, a woman, or an immigrant, and the debates go well beyond surface political concerns.

With the guidance of Dr. Agoro, Femi navigates his immigrant, racial and masculine identity while also finding space to live out his potential. Dr. Agoro, however, is staggered by the power imbalances he observes within intimate relationships. He struggles while watching the impacts of sexual exploitation from multiple angles, eventually succumbing to his own anger and rage. Agoro thought Femi might be paranoid, seeing race everywhere as he did, and it was certainly impacting Femi's life. After all, he had broken up with a woman he loved over a fight about racism, colonialism and oppression.

With its unique perspectives, struggles and injustices, the book widens the debate between individuals, social strictures and how they intertwine. *Real Men Don't Do Therapy* is a profound story that is written with incredible skill, filled with subtlety and irony, and it becomes more intriguing with each read.

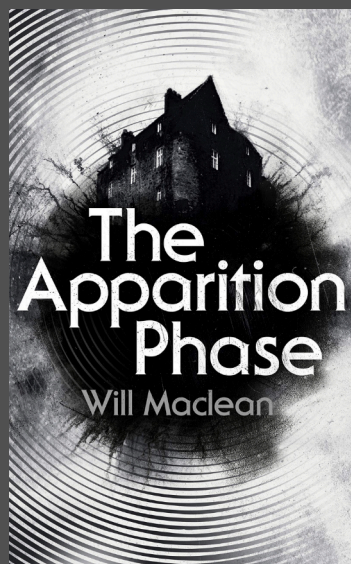
– NICCI ATTFIELD



# BOOKS

**The APPARITION PHASE** – I read Orrin's essay last month and immediately bought *A Theory of Haunting*. Read it in a single sitting; it's great for every reason Mr. Grey laid out, and more. It reminded me, structurally, of another novel I'd recently read: Will Maclean's *The Apparition Phase*, though the particulars are a bit different. The teen protagonist, Tim, is smart, kind of shitty and haunted by a traumatic event in his recent past. Of morbid pre-occupation, he gets involved in a ghost hunt that seems suss in several ways. Until it isn't. I'm a longtime consumer of horror, jaded as all get out, so when I say that the climax gave me literal chills down my spine, maybe take note.

– STU HORVATH

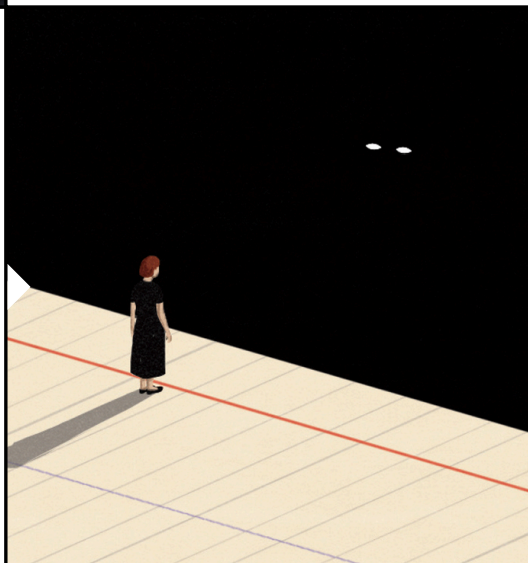


**The DISMEMBERED** – Jonathan Janz writes the kind of story people write when they say they're writing gothic horror, except that Jonathan Janz means it. Bloody and horrific, body horror and romance, *The Dismembered* is grotesque and impossible to put down.

– AMANDA HUDGINS

**IN THE MARGINS** – I haven't read Elena Ferrante's wildly popular Neapolitan Novels, nor do I plan to anytime soon. But I love this series of four transcribed lectures about what works of literature and early writing lessons have influenced her current writer's statement the most. There's discussions of developing women's writing, the pros and cons of using dialectical language, how writers throughout time have had to work within and break out of their eras' writing conventions and more. Check it out if you want something short yet impactful to read. Especially if you feel you're in a writing slump.

– PHOENIX SIMMS





# MOVIES



**TRUCKER'S WOMAN** – As was the style at the time, this classic truxploitation flick opens with cutting-edge technology as an eight-track tape is pressed into its receptacle. The hottest country music blares as a massive 18-wheeler careens down a steep grade. No deeply graveled ramps await the runaway brakeless behemoth, which crashes spectacularly. The next scene is a funeral for the driver (Jim Kelly) whose son (Mike Kelly) has dropped out of college to step up and claim his father's position at the trucking terminal while he investigates the cause of Jim's tragic accident.

On Mike's way to the station, a blonde in a red convertible rolls alongside. He honks at her, she flirts back, and smiles as she races past. He spots her vehicle at a nearby restaurant and stops to chat. Her name is Karen. He gets in a fist fight with other patrons of the eatery and they part ways before the authorities arrive. He later discovers Karen's distinctive car in the parking lot of a Ramada Inn and knocks on her door. She answers in a bath towel. (Assault *and* leaving the scene? Steeped in *allure*.) Of course,

their chance meeting is eagerly and consensually consummated.

Back at the truck depot, humor of times past shines as Ben Turner (Doodles Weaver, Sigourney's uncle) performs a comedic bit of linguistic spoonerism and briefly plays a guitar I thought he was going to swing at someone. Ben's endearing character is instrumental in assisting the investigation of his best friend's untimely death.

Mike attempts to create a new trucking terminal that operates independently of the shady establishment he and his new friends work for. The current owner disapproves of this and loads Mike's semi with stolen cargo. Mike is sent to an inspection station where police discover the loot. A deal is struck with Mike. He must pin these criminals as they commit crimes.

This sexed-up Mary Sue of a fist-fighting, woman-loving, college drop-out turned detective trucker continues to deliver loads of action, car chases and afternoon trysts with married waitresses until the credits roll.

One inflammatory term is spoken by an upset police officer.

– LEAH BOND

# MOVIES

## **The BITTER TEARS of PETRA VON KANT** –

Kind of wild how much this film works when it is truly just a group of women in glam outfits arguing in a one-bed flat! And yet every moment in this liminal space is entrancing and layered work from powerhouse performers and creatives. Also, once again, a Fassbinder film threatens to make me replace my entire wardrobe.

– OLUWATAYO ADEWOLE



**POOR THINGS** – I know this was categorized as a comedy, but I didn't realize it was going to have so many jokes. I think I laughed out loud more at this movie than most anything I've seen in the last two years.

– NOAH SPRINGER

**The CONGRESS** – Ari Folman's 2013 genre-bending, *Black Mirror*-esque film about how Hollywood is being transformed by digitization is deeply haunting. In light of what's currently going on with regards to the devaluation of human labor in many industries and the loopholes that AI experts continue to exploit artists with, this movie was prescient. It's hyperbolic, yes, and is based loosely on Stanislaw Lem's "The Futurological Congress," but you know what timeless sci-fi themes are capable of predicting . . . sometimes our reality truly is stranger.

– PHOENIX SIMMS



**OUTLAND** – Often (accurately) described as “*High Noon* in space,” *Outland* is a fantastic depiction of blue collar life in space on par with *Alien*. Features great miniatures and a surprising number of heads exploding, too.

– STU HORVATH

# TELEVISION



**INVINCIBLE** – One thing I love about adaptations is seeing what creative choices are made in the process of translating something over into a new medium. Aside from taking characters from a book and putting them into motion on a screen, do you keep things as one-to-one as possible, or do you choose to shift some stuff around to make things “better”? *Invincible*’s adaptation process is relatively straightforward; the cast of cape-wearers and the universe they live in is pretty much the same one we were first introduced to back in the early 2000s. However, the magical thing about the show isn’t how it’s been a rather tasteful and intelligent update of a now 20-year-old comic book series; no, it’s that this is a piece of superhero media that’s fully, keenly aware of the larger genre it’s a part of. *Invincible* isn’t just a show that takes it upon itself to fully realize the potential of the source material, but to outright exceed it. This isn’t just one of the best animated superhero shows ever made, this feels like something that has a

solid chance to be a defining piece of superhero media.

It’d be easy enough if this was just a show about a teenager learning his powers and what role he plays in the universe, yet *Invincible* goes every extra mile to sand off many pre-existing rough edges originally present in the comic, most noticeably how abrasive or one-note so many of its characters were. It’s still absolutely bloody and brutal when it wants to be, sure, but this show truly shines when its newfound heart comes into play, when characters open up and *talk* to others about what they’re going through. The superhero trying to avoid becoming his father, a government agent realizing that he’s been caught up in the comic book trope of continuous death and resurrection, the immortal who discovers empathy and shame; *Invincible* is filled with personal struggles that make superheroes feel fresh again for the first time in ages, making these gods among us feel painfully, wonderfully human.

– VAN DENNIS

# TELEVISION



**MANHUNT** – *Manhunt* is a surprisingly insightful show, delving into some of the deepest, darkest corners of American history, or perhaps I should say micro-history, despite the macro-scale of the topic. In any case, if you like what you see, I thoroughly recommend *1865*, a podcast in the form of a narrative audioplay which covers the early Reconstruction Period with remarkable perspective and clairvoyance.

– JUSTIN REEVE

**FALLOUT** – This show feels so attuned to *Fallout 4*'s vibes that I watched one episode, immediately re-downloaded the game, and then haven't done anything other than play it for the last week. I'll finish the show one day I suppose.

– NOAH SPRINGER



**WHO WANTS to be a SUPERHERO?** – I generally despise "reality TV" but this goofy and campy premise (hosted by Stan Lee, of course) stands out because it doesn't pull that forced interpersonal drama nonsense that so many other shows do. Some of the tests were genuinely interesting and the "twist" partway through the first season was actually kind of great? It's definitely bad, like all reality TV, but it knows it's ridiculous and has a lot of fun with that.

– ROB RICH

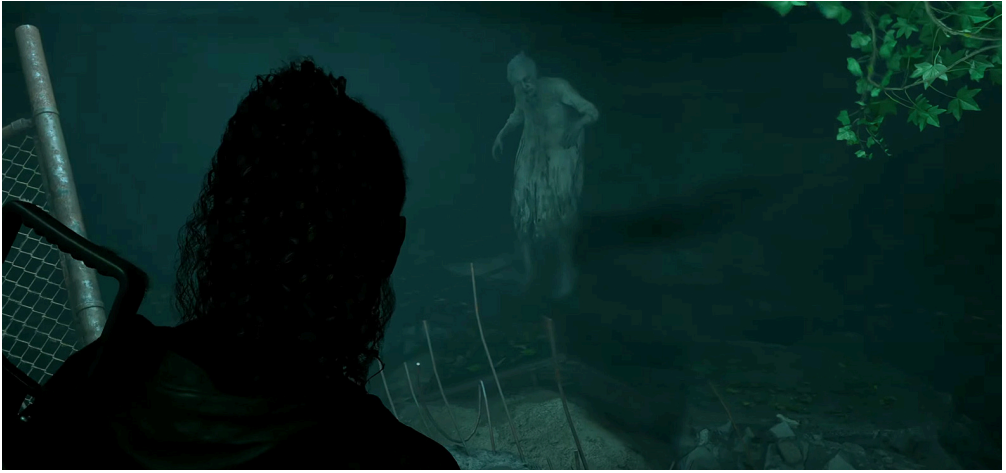


**The THREE BODY PROBLEM** – Sometimes desperately up its own ass, *The Three Body Problem* is nonetheless the kind of big TV spectacle that I honestly thought was dead.

– AMANDA HUDGINS



# GAMES



**CYNTHIA WEAVER** – The Lady of the Light; the Drowned Lady. These two epithets encapsulate Cynthia Weaver’s life, yet only scratch the surface of what the Alan Wake games have to say about her.

Long before the events of the first game, Cynthia Weaver was infatuated with Thomas Zane. Sadly, the man disappeared into the Dark Presence in a vain attempt to quell the entity that enveloped him. However, he used Weaver’s feelings as an anchor of sorts – making her toil as his servant of light for three decades in anticipation of Alan Wake’s eventual arrival. In those three decades Cynthia obsessively managed the town’s lights, gathered a large supply of ammunition and batteries and painted out the path that Alan Wake would walk. All the while, she endured jeering stares from the townsfolk along with crippling anxiety at the thought of a single light bulb not working anymore.

When the events of the first game take place, Cynthia is still treated like a plot device. One for Alan to dismiss until he realizes that she holds the key to his success – and even then, he still disregards her warnings and acts selfishly, even after everything she did leading

up to his arrival, and his “departure” into the lake. Weaver would never have the chance to rest and that was all she wanted. Instead, she would still have to fight in a war that she’d physically outgrown. And this would be her downfall.

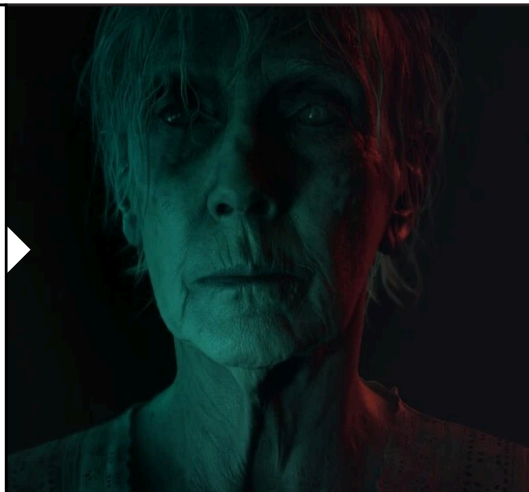
In Alan Wake 2 it’s revealed on a manuscript page that Alan manipulated Rose into stealing the Angel Lamp from Cynthia and, after that, she fell into a deep despair resulting in her death. Afterwards the Dark Presence consumed her and she became an antagonistic force. Her fate was sealed by another man who realized that once she outlived her usefulness, she should be cast away and branded as a mad, lustful witch. The embodiment of the same dark water that drowned her.

Now it would be hypocritical to cast Cynthia here as a person wholly devoid of agency. For instance, after Barbara Jagger, Zane’s lover, passed, Cynthia was somewhat relieved that she was gone since this meant that Weaver could replace her and become Zane’s “muse,” so to speak. This relishing of Jagger’s death is too sadistic a behavior to overlook. While Cynthia is a victim she is also deeply flawed, and that moment of relief shouldn’t be overlooked.

(continued from previous page)

Cynthia's death was far too cruel, though. That this woman shouldered the burden of not one but two egotistical men for most of her life, only to be written out as a minor obstacle to overcome feels grossly exploitive. Doubly so in a game where the men can have an entire musical number while Cynthia is merely a stepping stone into the next plot point. That's the real horror story in these games, and I hope that Remedy Entertainment can break out of this spiral.

— FUMO CHABALALA



**PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY TRILOGY** — I'm slowly working my way through the Xbox remaster of this classic trilogy and I'm surprised by how there's often not much logic to the court cases. I guess I've been spoiled by Uchikoshi games.

— PHOENIX SIMMS

**COMPANY OF HEROES 3** — I've been working my way through a backlog of games and I got around to the highly anticipated sequel to one of the most beloved entries in the RTS genre, *Company of Heroes 3*. This is a very good game, but somewhat disappointingly given the reputation of its developer, *CoH3* feels a lot like DLC as opposed to a full-fledged, innovative game. Relic is known for revolutionizing the genre on multiple occasions, which somehow detracts from this otherwise serviceable game.

— JUSTIN REEVE



**PSYCHONAUTS 2** — Like the original, I wasn't prepared for how its expansive world and involved characters. It's still clunky in places but it's easy to keep getting sidetracked by fascinating moments every few in-game feet.

— ROB RICH

# HOROSCOPE

YOUR OFFICE IS IN THE BASEMENT AND NO ONE COMES TO SEE YOU. YOU HEAR THE DISTANT SOUNDS OF CONVERSATION. THE DING OF AN APPROACHING ELEVATOR. YOU PACK FOR THE DAY TO GO HOME. 📦