

ISSUE 61

# EXPLOITS

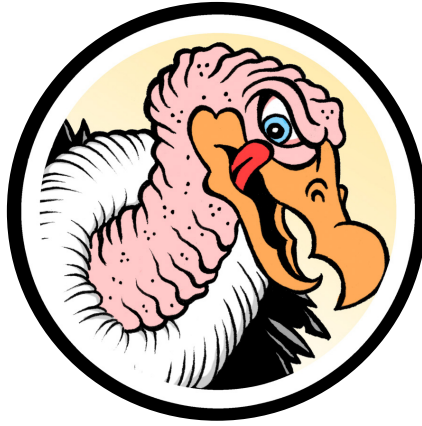
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Amanda Hudgins on  
**FORMULA 1: DRIVE  
TO SURVIVE**

**PLAYING OLD GAMES • The 1975**  
**• MAD MAX (2015) • STRANGE WORLD •**  
**SILVER on the TREE**



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## **EXPLOITS**

A MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO THE REASONS WE LOVE THINGS

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This machine kills fascists.

# THE PAST IS STILL AROUND: THE JOYS OF PLAYING OLD GAMES

by Elijah Gonzalez

Sometimes the pace of the modern game industry can be a little overwhelming. It's only March, but there are already an imposing number of releases this year, and all signs point to this deluge continuing. Personally, I need to catch up on the new *Fire Emblem*, the unexpected crowd-pleaser *Pizza Tower* and close to a dozen others, despite already putting an alarming amount of time into 2023's output.

Amidst a gaming landscape defined by constant press conferences and an endless rollout of new "content," it can sometimes feel difficult to engage with anything that wasn't released in the last few months. It's tempting to chase the zeitgeist, jumping from one anticipated blowout to the next while stuffing the interim with everything you missed while playing the freshest lengthy endeavor.

While I honestly still do this most of the time, in recent years, I've found great pleasure in making space for older experiences. Maybe this was born from wanting to be temporarily placed in another period besides the one we've been living through, but this habit has come with its share of boons beyond just escapism.

For example, as I explored Midgar in *Final Fantasy VII* or the Spencer Mansion in *Resident Evil (2002)*, I marveled at how both used fixed camera angles to reinforce their tone and themes. While much is made about how modern prestige games mimic film and television, these older titles used the author-crafted qualities that define most other visual mediums to great effect. The wide shots in *Final Fantasy VII* convey how small Cloud and his crew are compared to the might of their corporatist foes, while the cramped angles of *Resident Evil's* camera capture claustrophobia and the unnerving feeling of being watched.

Although I'd found joy in the medium's past many times before, strangely enough, I was still surprised by how much I got out of these experiences. I imagine I wasn't expecting as much as I got because, compared to many other forms, older videogames are constantly disparaged as categorically "worse" than their contemporary counterparts. I'm not sure if this sentiment comes from the tendency to appraise games as software products instead of as art or from never-ending hype

machines which promise the next entry will always be bigger and better than what came before, but over the years, I had also absorbed this minor bias.

Then and now, the videogame industry moves in cycles, with specific design paradigms coming into prominence until some styles of play are almost unavoidable. However, by going back, we get a refreshing break from current trends, with a snapshot of abandoned design principles coming into focus. Sometimes the friction in these older titles can be unpleasant or downright upsetting (like *Final Fantasy VII*'s casual homophobia and ableism). But frequently, these tendencies are simply different, offering insights into the form's past, a window into cultural moments and plenty of pleasant surprises. And most importantly, despite what you may have heard, old games are still a lot of fun. 🍷



# MUSIC



**THE 1975** – The 1975’s current tour – At Their Very Best – is the biggest event in pop culture and it’s because the lead singer touches himself and doesn’t like menthols. The meta show is so poignant that it feels like everything lead singer Matty Healy says is a social commentary or an inside joke. TikTok has been a catalyst for the massive success the band has had expanding their audience, moving from indie icons to the most popular band in the world.

The crazy thing is that it is not the band’s socials that are gaining traction, but fans posting their own footage of the band’s shows. Healy is like the pied piper receiving billions of social media interactions through his autotune gospel and it’s easy to be swept up in the fervor he inspires. Seeing him with my own eyes eat a sausage roll from the Greggs in Manchester Victoria, which was hurled at him on stage seconds before, was a quasi-religious experience. Quasi-religious is absolutely something Matty will say in the next two weeks.

Have The 1975 cracked the code for the modern music industry? Will people move on from them as quickly as other TikTok trends? Other bands have been huge on Tiktok and

then disappeared, whilst some artists seem to have hit the algorithmic goldmine and been open about creating music with the aim of going viral. Healy believes “this band is an extension of a personality . . . and people like seeing themselves and relating to people.”

I truly believe The 1975 will not be a flash in the pan. If so, the band’s enduring popularity will be attributable to one key aspect of their postmodern music: It’s actually good. And relatable. The difference between artists with sustained success and those that fizzle out is whether there is any substance behind the catchy dance tunes that are used in 15-second viral videos.

Healy loves a political statement. He is a patron of Humanists UK and when his support for the group was announced he was quoted as saying, “the one responsibility I believe that I have . . . is to stand up against ideas that promote inequality . . . The empowerment of women maps directly onto the growth of secularism and the reduction of power of religion. And that’s what I’m about.”

Indie music, to me, has always been about outrage and expression of inequality. Healy is utilizing his enlarged platform by curating



# MUSIC

an expressionistic performance show which is “TikTokAble.”

By reaching an almost infinitely large audience, the band can promote the things they believe whilst “kids are living their lives soundtracked to The 1975.” Tiktok is a platform which has made politics cool at a time when kids are increasingly aware of the issues around them and feel the urge to do something about it. If 15 – 21-year-olds were left in charge of the UK, Matty Healy would be the prime minister.

Successful artists know what works and what doesn't. The 1975 have done things the right way, building a cult following by making really cool music with a political message behind it. Writing tunes you can blare through your Alexa and then constantly hum at your work desk, whilst also making you think about women's rights or climate change, is a recipe for success in today's musical landscape. The Tiktokification of The 1975 is in full swing and I am here for it.

– ROMAN BERESFORD

## PLAYLIST

“Part Of The Band,” by The 1975

“Flowers,” by Miley Cyrus

“Victoria's Secret,” by Jax

“No Romeo,” by Dylan

“Oh Caroline,” by The 1975

“Green Green Grass - Sped-Up,” by George Ezra

“As It Was,” by Harry Styles

“The Sound,” by The 1975

“I'm In Love With You,” by The 1975

“Unholy (feat. Kim Petras),” by Sam Smith, Kim Petras

“Sunroof,” by Nicky Youre, dazy

“death bed (feat. beabadoobee & blink-182),” by Powfu, beabadoobee, blink-182

“Even Flow,” by Pearl Jam

“Beggin’,” by Maneskin

“Made You Look,” by Meghan Trainor

“Betty (Get Money),” Yung Gravy

“Can't Help Falling in Love,” by Elvis Presley

“good 4 u,” by Olivia Rodrigo

“I Ain't Worried,” by OneRepublic

“Robbers,” by The 1975

[LISTEN ON SPOTIFY](#)



# BOOKS

**SILVER on the TREE** – I remember reading Susan Cooper’s cult classic series, *The Dark is Rising*, in my early teen years and loving the shit out of it. I was swept into an eerie place and time that felt tangible, almost like I could smell the sea in Cornwall or hear the ghosts echo from the mountains in Wales. I had kind of forgotten about it in the intervening years, but decided to revisit it recently, and while still great, I left it remembering why I had forgotten it.

The first three books in the series feel incredibly grounded. In *Over Sea, Under Stone* (by far the least fantastical book of the series) we find our three young protagonists (Jane, Barney and Simon) in a quest for the Grail, buried centuries ago under the rock cliffs in Cornwall. Their Uncle Merry helps them from afar, but it is ultimately up to them to outwit the inexplicably sinister Mr. Hastings and his yacht-sailing gang of weirdos. *The Dark is Rising* feels similarly grounded when young Will Stanton finds out he is part of an ancient order, the Light. During the worst snowstorm ever encountered in England. Will must stave off the Dark Rider with his wits and bravery and enter his role as one of the Old Ones. In *Greenwitch*, we find ourselves back in Cornwall where our original three heroes meet up with young Will to finish a side quest that seemed to no longer matter at the end of the first book, but ends up being of most import.

But then, in *The Grey King*, things start going astray a bit. I think Cooper starts losing the thread by introducing yet another cast of important characters who have never been mentioned, specifically Bran Davies, the albino Pendragon. While Bran is a well-developed character, the addition of a critical character so late in the story makes me wonder

what the point of the first three books even was. Why have we spent so much time dealing with Jane, Simon and Barney when King Arthur’s son was a four-hour drive away?

But the real difficulty comes in the fifth book when we finally get to see the ultimate showdown between Dark and the Light in *Silver on the Tree*. In the end, do any of our heroes that we met throughout the previous four books make the saving feat? No. It’s John Rowlands, Bran’s neighbor. By this point, we have spent a little time with John, but frankly, considering we have been diving into the stories of so many other characters other than him, to leave the final conflict between the Light and Dark in his hands feels anticlimactic. I understand the value of having normal men, innocent men decide the fate of the world, but it also feels like I spent the last few books learning about people who ultimately didn’t matter that much. Not to draw the comparison too closely, but it would be like having a muggle introduced in *The Half-Blood Prince* defeat Voldemort.

However, if you haven’t picked up *The Dark is Rising* before, please don’t let this piece dissuade you. It truly is an excellent piece of YA fantasy that beautifully blends Anglo-Saxon folklore with modern fantasy while avoiding sounding like a Tolkien rip-off. Just, maybe remember to not hold your breath that Barney will save the day at the last minute.

– NOAH SPRINGER



# BOOKS



## **A PLACE INSIDE of ME: A POEM to HEAL the HEART**

– Zetta Elliott’s beautiful visual poem illustrated by Noa Denmon, has a lot of people mad. They can stay mad and do some desperately needed self-reflection. Dedicated towards African-American children struggling to reconcile their emotions as their communities are impacted by police violence, this book is essential and celebrates Black joy as much as it honors grief. Cycling through the seasons, the young protagonist of the book moves through the different stages of grief and learns to keep his love for himself and his community alive.

– PHOENIX SIMMS

**BATAVIA’S GRAVEYARD** – Nautical disaster books are horror books for weenies; history is full of madmen and fools, ready to destroy themselves and everyone around them. *Batavia’s Graveyard* is one such historical disaster, and this book breaks it all down in excruciating detail.

– AMANDA HUDGINS



## **DEAD WAKE: THE LAST CROSSING OF THE LUSITANIA**

– I’ve recently fallen into a pattern of listening to audiobooks on nautical disasters. Frequently they’re stories of exploration and failure – quite a lot of cannibalism, actually. The case of the *Lusitania*, one of the most famous sunken ships of wartime, is a bit different. The *Lusitania* is often listed as one of the catalysts for WWII – would the US have gotten involved without her icy death? *Dead Wake* does a really good job of conceptualizing and contextualizing a historical footnote, horrors and all.

– AMANDA HUDGINS





# MOVIES



**STRANGE WORLD** – *Strange World* is a very unique solarpunk/retro-futurist offering from Disney. It isn't a musical, although they do have a couple funny musical interludes that riff off campy retro adventure shows and pulp comics. Its themes are openly about the anthropocene era and our intergenerational struggles to find an alternative to capitalist-colonialist mindsets. That all sounds very weighty for a PG animated film, but somehow *Strange World* manages to pull it off.

What makes *Strange World* worth watching is that it's an anti-Disney formula film, outside of the family drama. Seriously, when's the last time you watched a Disney movie where the mom not only isn't fridged (on-screen or off) for character development but even has her own character arc? Not to mention this unconventional offering doesn't explain away or mask obvious LGBTQIA+ representation, either. We're not going to talk about the predictable alt-right tantrums concerning that representation, by the way, other than to say that the review-bombing online was frustratingly inevitable.

In some regards, I believe this Jules Verne-esque adventure was a box office failure because it falls between expected categories

for animated family films. Critics seem to want the team behind *Strange World* to "pick-and-choose-their battles," so to speak, which is ironic since much of the plot revolves around father-and-son debates about how the family legacy of exploring the unknown should be defined.

What I personally love about this film is that it's defiant about choosing a middle road. There's a strong message of symbiosis threaded throughout both the plot concerning the Clade family and the one about saving Avalonia's energy source. Said energy source is modeled off of the pop-sci topics of tree and mycelium networks and there's also a major twist that mirrors the inner journeys of the different generations of the Clade family that I found quite poignant.

Some viewers feel that the family drama was the weakest link in the plot of the film. I suppose I'm in the minority here, because I personally found it refreshing that there was an effective subplot about miscommunication. Watch this one if you want more animated fare like *The Sea Beast*; something that's gorgeously designed while still offering a story full of timely themes.

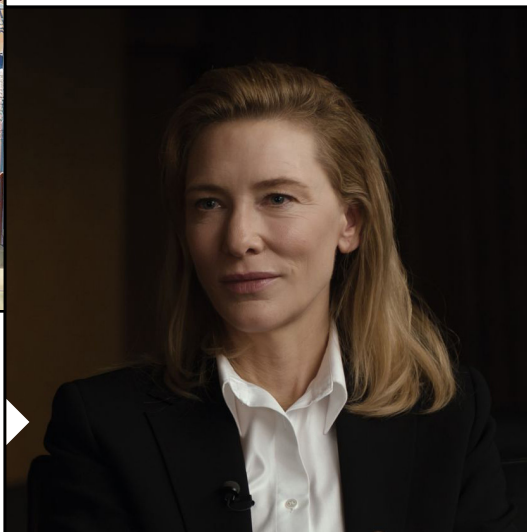
– PHOENIX SIMMS

# MOVIES



**YOUR NAME** – Finally caught up on my backlog of Makoto Shinkai movies! *Your Name* was an interesting experiment in time looping, empathy and gender roles. The basic plot is that Mitsuha, a girl from the rural periphery, finds that sometimes she swaps bodies with a Tokyo boy named Taki. As these switches become more frequent the two set up a system for communicating with each other. I don't want to give away much more, but there's also some poignant commentary on soul mates as well as the intersection of personal and cultural memory.

– PHOENIX SIMMS



**TÁR** – What if that meme of Sue Sylvester saying “I am going to create an environment that is so toxic” was Cate Blanchet on the podium of the Berliner Philharmonie?

– AUTUMN WRIGHT



**JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2** – A classic comedy for the ages.

– NOAH SPRINGER

**JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 4** – Sleek and neon, like a blade lit in streetlight glow, the *John Wick* movies are at this point basically *Death Wish* with less racism and more suits.

– AMANDA HUDGINS



# TELEVISION



**FORMULA 1: DRIVE TO SURVIVE** – I don't care about Formula 1. One of my favorite shows is the Netflix F1 series *Drive to Survive*.

I grew up with family deep into indycar racing – grown men who would probably cry if you brought up Dale Earnhardt, who happily watch a stock car race around a lap 500 times. That's what the 500 stands for, by the way. Racecar driving in general seems like an excuse to get drunk in public and get real nationalistic, and yet I have been sucked into the world of Formula 1 racing through *Drive to Survive*.

*Drive to Survive* follows a Netflix documentary staple established by things like *7 Days Out* – giving the viewer an intense deep dive into the behind-the-scenes moments of major events. *DTS* is focused on the F1 World Championship, a series of races in glitzy locales around the world. F1 is a rich person's sport – the cars are multi-million-dollar machines with corporations behind them, some of the drivers are billionaire fail-

sons whose fathers bought them legacy car makers so they'd have a team to race under. Despite the sheer quantity of money and privilege at play, the strength of the show is that it finds the humanizing elements here – the kid who's racing in his father's shadow, the team principal who has to do IKEA adjacent ads so his team will be able to race, the himbos who just wanna go faster than anyone else ever has before.

There's a criticism of *DTS*, that it just brings fluffy drama to the serious world of F1, and it's probably well deserved. The series is a clear and calculated move to bring in younger and more diverse viewers to this old man's sport; F1 needs money like their cars need new tires. As crystal clear as that move is, it's also effective – five years ago, I never would have had feelings about Formula 1. Thanks to *Drive to Survive*, I now know way too much about boys who just wanna go fast and the disgruntled old men who are helping them do that.

– AMANDA HUDGINS



# TELEVISION



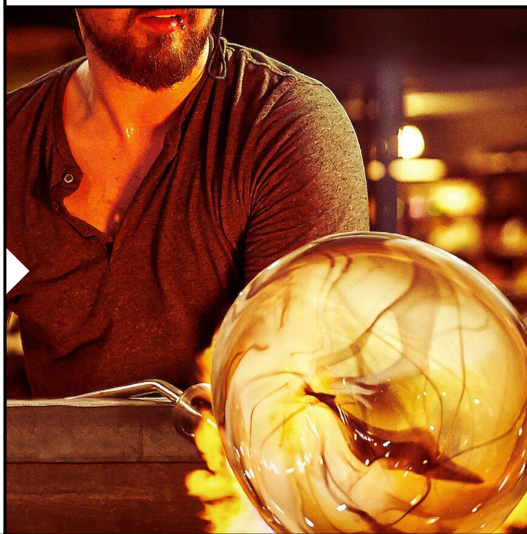
**BLOWN AWAY** – It's standard competitive reality TV fare in formatting, but I've been enjoying how *Blown Away* is mostly drama-free and focused on the challenges niche artists face today. There's also a lot of satisfying sensory moments in the show as they deep-dive the specific techniques the glass blowers use during the competition. The first two seasons, however, deserve a content warning. There were some awkward moments with some of the contestants talking about gender themes in their art pieces in rather backward and essentialist ways. I recommend staying away from the first season in particular if this is triggering for you. I accidentally started with the more progressive third season. Watching this series in reverse I can tell they must've received and implemented feedback from the seasons prior.

– PHOENIX SIMMS



**TELEVISION** – I don't know if you know this but: television is pretty great these days. I am just getting back into it after a long break and had the pleasure of watching *Andor*, *Reservation Dogs* and *Severance* in quick succession. *Yellowjackets* is up next. Who knew there was this amount of good TV just laying around for anyone to watch? Not me! I mean, I don't know if any of this is as good as *Magnum P.I.* or one of the really well done *Columbo* episodes, but still, I had no idea. Television! Who'd a think that would be an entertainment medium to look out for.

– STU HORVATH



**CHERRY MAGIC! THIRTY YEARS of VIRGINITY CAN MAKE YOU a WIZARD?!** – There is an internet legend that is part of early online incel nomenclature: if you don't have sex by the time you're thirty, you become a "wizard." That someone took that concept and made one of the sweetest BL shows I've ever seen, wherein our celibate 30 year old finds love through telepathy, is frankly amazing and worth checking out.

– AMANDA HUDGINS





**MAD MAX** – Max Rockatansky is a brooding, bitter man hanging onto what meager sanity he has left, running away from his past in search of the “Plains of Silence.” But Fate had something else in store for him . . .

Max’s desire for isolation stems from his insecurities. Haunted by his family’s death, Max veils his own decency and kindness behind a cruel exterior – especially towards his allies. Compassion frightens this grieving man. His obsession with the “Plains of Silence” embodies this, leading him to more pain as exemplified by Chumbucket’s betrayal, the deaths of Hope and Glory, and Max walking a dark violent path throughout it all. Much like Scabrous Scrotus.

Max does possess some positive attributes, though. Namely his dedication towards his allies even when he doubts their objectives. Like when he transported the sail barge into the Big Nothing at Pink Eye’s request, knowing that its occupants wouldn’t survive the long trek ahead. He treats other wastelanders with common courtesy, whether it’s the beggars he encounters looking for water or some scavengers willing to share some loot with him. Max is a decent man in a world that rewards hatred.

Notably, his biggest act of mercy occurs at the climax of the game where he gives Chumbucket the option to leave the Magnum Opus before sacrificing the vehicle in an attempt to defeat his enemy. A lesser man would not have done that, even at the best of times.

*Mad Max’s* depiction of these events is a refreshing rendition of this narrative. It takes a standard plot, then inserts multifaceted characters and deep subtle theming that weave a compelling story. Where every story beat, every character choice, led to a tragic ending I could not enjoy since the violence I was inflicting felt unjust. Avalanche Studios did a tremendous job here, because it would have been easy to rob Max of any agency or make him a villain with no redeeming qualities. Instead, we got a happy medium, and the results are hauntingly good.

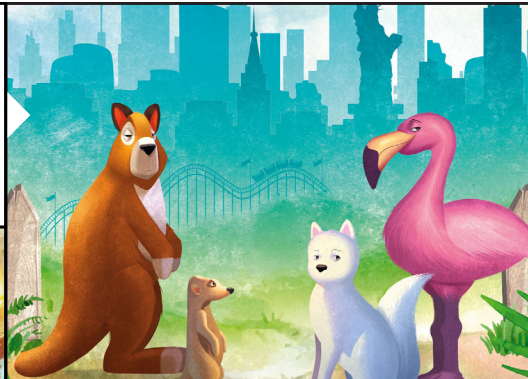
*Mad Max* might seem like just another open-world videogame, but it has helped me rethink what manhood is and my relation to it. And that’s something I’ll carry with me for the rest of my life.

– FUMO CHABALALA

# GAMES

**NEW YORK ZOO** – This might be the perfect board game. There is no wasted mechanic, the theming is precise. Lovely, easy to play, *New York Zoo* is practically perfect in every way.

– AMANDA HUDGINS



**STAR WARS: SQUADRONS** – I'm really into flight simulators, being a pilot in real life. I can't really rank the game up there with *X-Plane* or *Microsoft Flight Simulator*, but in terms of capturing the feeling of flight, I have to say that *Star Wars: Squadrons* actually does a pretty good job. In any case, I love just looking around the hangars and checking out the cockpits. I do love my buttons and dials.

– JUSTIN REEVE

**PERSONA 4 GOLDEN** – I'm legitimately thrilled to have an excuse to play through *Persona 4 Golden* again, now that it's been "remastered" for modern consoles. I've beaten the PS2 original and this Vita upgrade several times over the years, but going back to it now has made me realize that this is it. This is my favorite game ever. I can't fully explain why that is (I guess it's just a perfect storm of elements that appeal specifically to me), but even 10-15+ years on I still can't get enough of it. Or keep my eyes dry whenever "Never More" starts playing.

Just . . . be aware of the shitty ways it approaches LGBTQ+ topics, overweight characters, etc before diving in. It's . . . not great in that regard.

– ROB RICH



# HOROSCOPE

WE ARE TOO FAR  
UNDERGROUND  
TO SEE STARS. 🍷