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EXPLOITS

A MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO THE REASONS WE LOVE THINGS

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This machine kills fascists.

AVOIDING the BATMAN PROBLEM

by Jeremy Greco

On the internet, the saying goes, “Always be Batman.” As a quote, it speaks to the internet’s love for the DC superhero, but it also highlights a huge stumbling block for many videogame series. In a game set in Gotham City, why would a player ever want to be anyone other than Batman? Of course, this extends to other games, as well. The *Halo* series has struggled with its storytelling in recent entries because there’s very little left to explore for its protagonist, Master Chief, but it’s nearly as impossible to imagine the series continuing without him. Similarly, one of the reasons *Mass Effect: Andromeda* struggled – and **something the next *Mass Effect* game will have to deal with** – is that players are heavily invested in seeing the universe through the eyes of their version of Commander Shepard and must be convinced to move beyond them.

One team has shown a path forward, however. When Ryu Ga Gotoku Studios decided to move on from the *Yakuza* series’ beloved protagonist, Kazuma Kiryu, they must have known what they were in for because they made all the right decisions in crafting their new protagonist, Kasuga Ichiban.

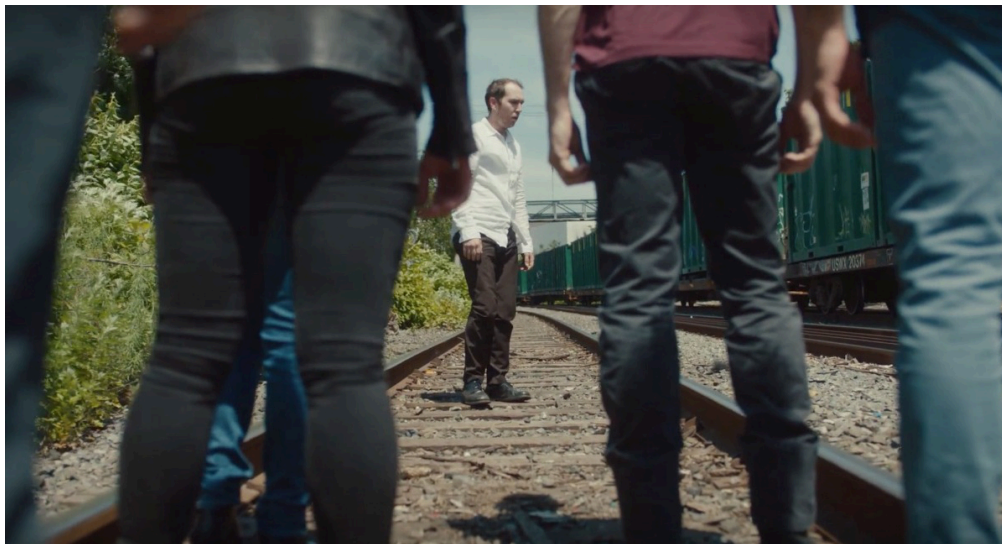
In all the ways that matter, Ichi is nothing like Kiryu. Where Kiryu is quiet and stoic, Ichi is loud and emotional. While Kiryu was known for his powerful fists that dole out punishment to any who threaten those he cared for, Ichi specializes in taking hits to protect his loved ones. Even their clothes are opposites. Kiryu wears his iconic gray suit with a maroon shirt, while Ichi wears a maroon suit with a white shirt.

In all the ways that matter, they’re exactly the same. Both like to kick back, drink with friends and maybe throw some darts. They each have a charisma that keeps people coming back to them for help, over and over again. The pair adhere so strongly to their individual – and similar, though not identical – codes of honor that they never stop offering that aid even when any rational person would have walked away from that situation and those people long ago.

Ichiban is just like Kiryu, except where he isn't. That is the key to how he so thoroughly woos an audience that might not otherwise have been ready to move on from the iconic protagonist. Ichiban's insides, his motivations and his feelings are very similar to Kiryu – this lets the player feel like they're still playing in the same place they've always played. Their exterior behaviors, however, are so very different that Ichiban never feels like the watered-down clone of his predecessor he might have instead become.

With Ichiban, RGG Studios managed to craft a superb successor. Someone who does the same things for similar reasons but in his own, entirely unique way. Thus, they forged the key to solving the so-called "Batman Problem." Find the core motivations of your character and then design one who is motivated to do the same things but in a different way or for different reasons. Obviously, this is something that is simple to describe but very difficult to do. Only time will tell if other series will be able to follow the path blazed here by RGG studios. 🍷





"MAN OF WAR" – In the Western cinematic tradition, James Bond is perhaps the longest-running, most enduring figure. Born in 1953 on the pages of Ian Fleming's novel *Casino Royale*, Bond, James Bond's popularity meant that he'd quickly feature in movies and, perhaps most iconic feature of those movies is the big, bombastic opening credits song.

The opening theme isn't something taken lightly. Some of the biggest names in music have done them. Tom Jones, Paul McCartney, Louis Armstrong and Gladys Knight have all been there. But one year before Tina Turner would perform "GoldenEye" by Bono and The Edge, something unusual happened. Radiohead recorded their own Bond song with no movie to back up.

It was 1994. *The Bends* was actively being recorded. No James Bond movie had been released since 1989, the longest period since the character's film debut in 1962. The band wrote "Man of War," a bombastic, morose upending of their sound, constantly threatening "the worms will come for you." A Bond song without a Bond movie.

The next year they'd play the song regularly on The Bends tour with no studio recording. Five days after the premiere of 1995's *GoldenEye*, Thom York would admit "Man of War" was an "homage to Bond themes" only to enter obscurity, perhaps only ever played live again once, in 2002.

That is, until MGM came calling. In 2013 *Spectre* was in pre-production. Adele had just won the Oscar for "Skyfall." Radiohead were asked for a Bond theme and answered with "Man of War." Its moment had arrived. Except it was not to be. It was too grim and only a song written for a specific film could be nominated for an Oscar. MGM would have to settle for "Spectre," another deeply melancholic Radiohead tune. MGM rejected this too.

The song wouldn't go quietly this time. The anniversary reissue *OK Computer OKNOTOK* finally included the song, almost entirely unheard for 15 years. Nowadays "Man of War" is easy to find. So is "Spectre." "Man of War" even got a music video! But for nearly two decades it existed entirely as a back catalog ghost.

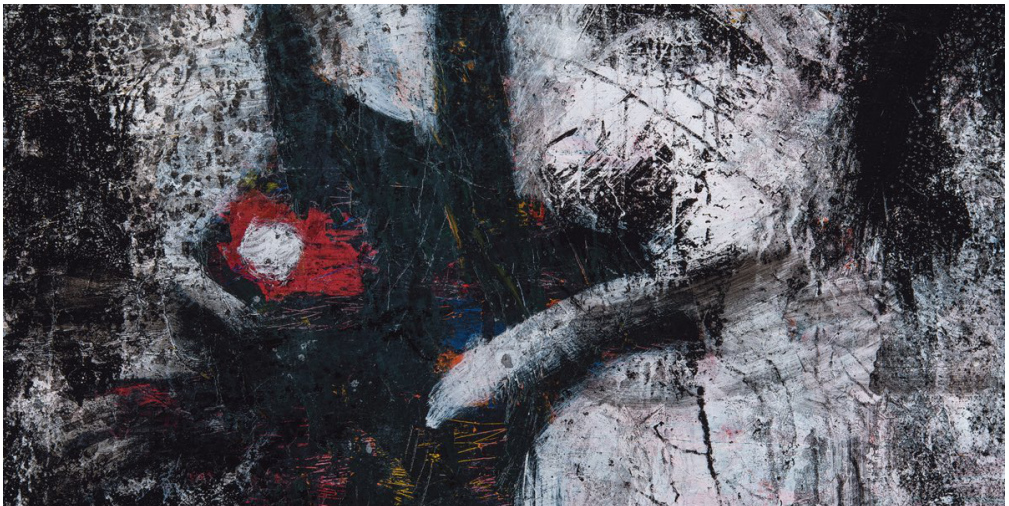
– DAVID SHIMOMURA

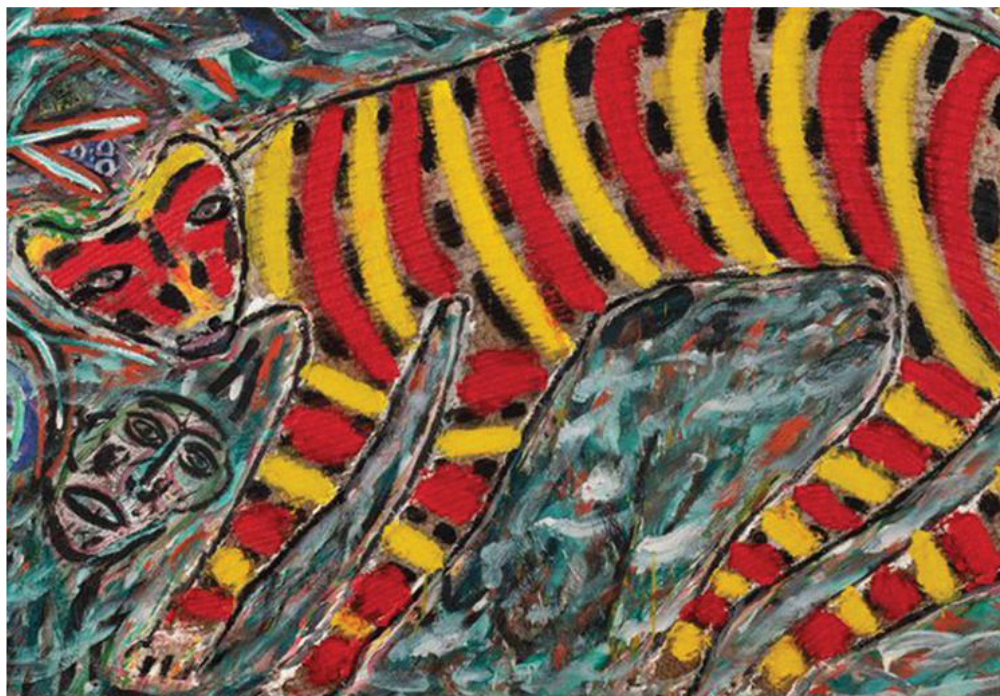
MUSIC

PLAYLIST

- "Man of War," by Radiohead
- "The James Bond Theme (From "Dr. No"),
by John Barry
- "From Russia with Love," by Matt Monro
- "Goldfinger," by Shirley Bassey
- "Thunderball," by Tom Jones
- "You Only Live Twice," by Nancy Sinatra
- "On Her Majesty's Secret Service," by John
Barry
- "We Have All The Time In The World," by
Louis Armstrong
- "Diamonds Are Forever," by Shirley Bassey
- "Live And Let Die," by Paul McCartney &
Wings
- "The Man with the Golden Gun," by Lulu
- "Nobody Does It Better," by Carly Simon
- "Moonraker," by Shirley Bassey
- "For Your Eyes Only," by Sheena Easton
- "All Time High," by Rita Coolidge
- "A View to a Kill," by Duran Duran
- "The Living Daylights," by a-ha
- "License To Kill," by Gladys Knight
- "Goldeneye," by Tina Turner
- "Tomorrow Never Dies," by Sheryl Crow
- "The World Is Not Enough," by Garbage
- "Die Another Day," by Madonna
- "You Know My Name," by Chris Cornell
- "Another Way to Die," by Jack White and
Alicia Keys
- "Skyfall," by Adele
- "Writing's On The Wall," by Sam Smith
- "No Time To Die," by Billie Eilish
- "Spectre," by Radiohead

[LISTEN ON SPOTIFY](#)





TIGER WORK – *Tiger Work* by Ben Okri has stories and poems about climate change, each taking different angles or perspectives on the ecological crisis. Okri's selection explores a range of different emotions, from tenderness and connection, to denial, fear, anger, love and isolation in order to understand our changing relationship with the earth and sea levels. From stories that draw on the images of a lecture hall to scenes of the rain forests and memories of ayahuasca, this humane book connects people with the climate around them.

In my favorite poem, Okri describes how the stories and fears about climate change have not moved him as much as his love of earth has. It is the beauty and wonder, and the connection to life which motivates him to make a difference. Wonder is also shared when he talks about the miracles and intelligence of a three-year-old child, who fascinates her parents by pretending that change makers and so-

cial justice leaders were visiting her preschool class, along with the rising sea. We have been educated by those who taught human rights, the child seems to say, but now the tides are educating us too, showing us that the earth too needs care. Let's move from social awareness to eco-social awareness.

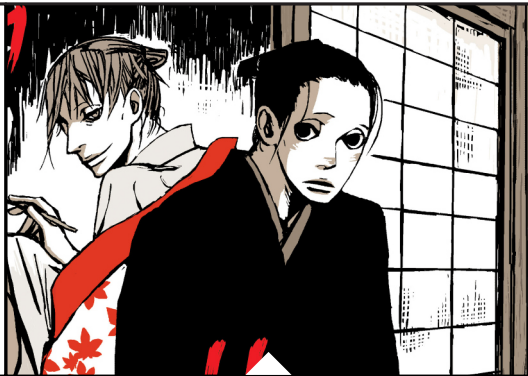
This is a beautiful book filled with tenderness and humility, something so beneficial in a world where human beings are often shamed and vilified in many climate change narratives. Okri reminds us that we are part water, part magic, and that we, too, hold nourishment as we move towards each other. The earth, the water, are a part of us, and through the climate crisis fills us with fear, it is also leading us home to a deeper and more magical part of what it means to be human. Can we find a more soulful and connected way through?

– NICCI ATTFIELD

BOOKS

SHE is a HAUNTING – A young woman travels to Vietnam to stay with her estranged father for the summer in exchange for her tuition and discovers that the house they're updating has supernatural appetites. Twisted, a lush and lurid feast, this book is a fantastic quick read about family, expectations and secrets – both generational and personal.

– AMANDA HUDGINS



HOUSE of FIVE LEAVES, VOL.1 – This Natsume Ono series is an oldie but goodie for me. I first watched the anime wayyy back when Funimation's YouTube channel used to air shows you could watch for a limited time for free. The manga and the anime are almost 1-to-1 in terms of how close the adaption was. Which is to say, the story and art are just as engaging – a tale of a timid yet determined ronin finding his way in Edo and falling in with a group of kidnapers. It's strangely cozy (overused term recently, but it fits the bill for me).

– PHOENIX SIMMS

THURSBITCH – Named after a remote valley in Cheshire (which translates, sort of, as “Valley of the Demon”), this is a difficult but rewarding read by Alan Garner. It's a story of two eras, the 1730s and the modern day, but also of the one very strange place that binds the characters of each period together in ways that are hard to comprehend. There are mysteries and mystical happening. Garner has a talent for instilling his prose with a sense of imminence, that something *important* is about to happen. And it does! I don't think I've ever been quite so bowled over by a book's climax before.

– STU HORVATH



MOVIES



MADMAN – Released in January of 1982, *Madman* doesn't technically have much to recommend it – or, at least, it doesn't have much to recommend it in place of more well-known horror movies. It's a camp-set slasher à la *Friday the 13th*, but with an even smaller budget. Its killer is a hulking brute from the woods, but he's really just kind of a big guy in a farmer outfit. And it features a Carpenteresque electronic score, but by the guy who composed the *Reading Rainbow* theme song.

And yet, *Madman* is somehow more than the sum of its low-budget parts. It's schlock that transcends by virtue of its specificity. More than almost any other camp-set slasher, *Madman* has a true sense of the daily rhythms of camp life along with the ineffable feel of the end of summer and the ascendance of fall. The counselors have actual campers to care for. The camp has a kindly, older manager who they answer to and rely upon. The music and the campfire sequence actually creates the proper chill in the air to weaponize the feeling

of fall. There's just something tactile about the experience. None of the individual pieces mean too much, but in aggregate they create the sense of a real place and a specific time.

It's that feel that pulls *Madman* from the realm of the mere copycat into that of the uniquely enjoyable. And it's clear why from the opening frames. The credits play over a cutout bramble of trees with a blood red background, one that's more apropos to a homemade shadow puppet play than a big budget movie. But the visuals and a synth rendition of the genuinely unsettling "Song of Madman Marz," which is sung around a campfire in the film's opening scene, immediately nail the autumnal atmosphere that enlivens *Madman*. Transmuting the slasher genre into more of a hangout piece with occasional explosions of violence, it's cozy fall horror in its purest form and stunningly effective for a film with seemingly minor ambitions.

– LOGAN LUDWIG

MOVIES

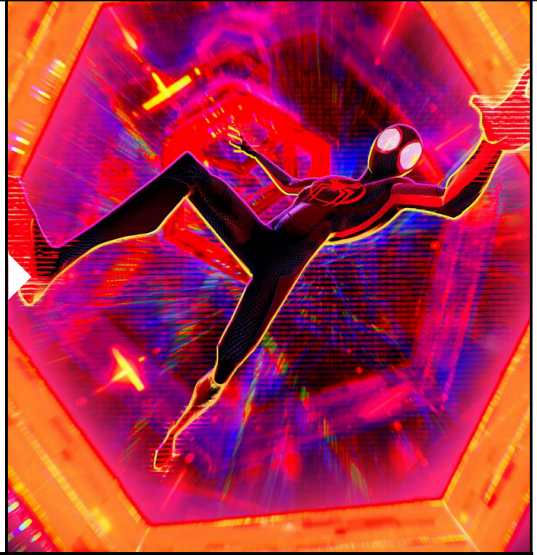
SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS the SPIDER-VERSE

– Dynamic and explosive, the Spider-verse films continue to deliver the kind of action and heart that live action films can't hope to match.

– AMANDA HUDGINS

Actually went to see the new Spider-verse movie in a theater and still haven't quite gotten over how I couldn't believe my eyes for the entire 2+ hour run time. Just, absolutely stunning visuals, unlike anything I've ever seen in animation before. Shame it came at the cost of an exploited animation staff.

– STU HORVATH



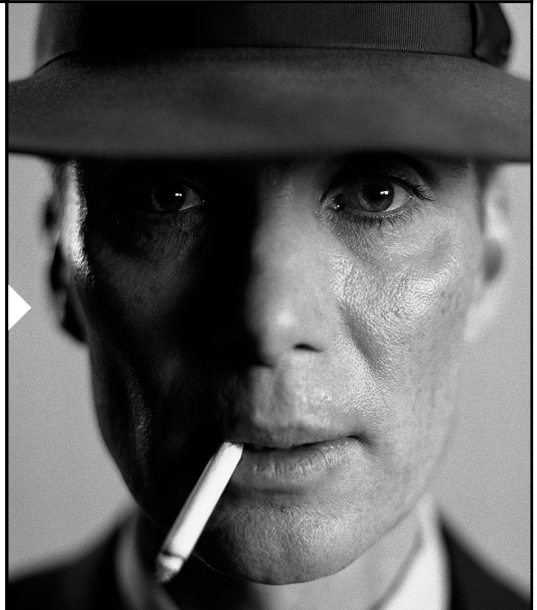
MEN – Alex Garland's folk/eco-horror film was apparently inspired by *Attack on Titan*. It won't make sense until you get to the climax, but whew, is it ever a trip. Watch this if you like symbols within symbols and explorations of gender relations and archetypes. CWs for suicide, domestic abuse and misogyny, though.

– PHOENIX SIMMS

OPPENHEIMER – He am become death, death, death, death, death / destroyer of worlds, worlds, worlds, worlds, worlds.

– SOME GUY, PROBABLY
WHISPERING AT AN
INAPPROPRIATE
MOMENT DURING THE
FILM. NOT TO BE
CONFUSED WITH THE
GUY WHO SAT NEXT TO
STU HORVATH IN THE
THEATER AND WHISPERED

THE REAL LINE ALONG WITH MURPHY
AS IF HE WERE A SUPERHERO AT THE START
OF A LONG-AWAITED CINEMATIC UNIVERSE.



TELEVISION



STRANGE NEW WORLDS – *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* is a visual spectacle: The crew is gorgeous, the USS Enterprise is immaculately rendered and its aliens effortlessly evoke that sci-fi feeling essential to the franchise. Now in its second season, the modern-day prequel follows an immaculately coiffed Captain Christopher Pike (Anson Mount) and his crew. So why, halfway through the ten-episode season, does every episode feel like a slog? The answer's a simple one: the script is second to all that splendor.

“Ad Astra per Aspera,” which evokes *The Next Generation*’s “Measure of a Man” courtroom drama, falls flat with arguments that feel like a film school freshman’s take on *Law & Order*.

“Charades” hinges on what amounts to a completely preventable shuttle accident that erases Spock’s Vulcan DNA, requiring Nurse Chapel return to the scene of the accident to interact with a race of ancient aliens responsible. Incredulously, Chapel is woefully incompetent at explaining their medical conundrum. The um’s, ah’s, pauses, and, in the end, embarrassment at admitting feelings for a fellow crew member are more than disappointing: they’re a glaring example of noticeably lazy writing permeating *Strange New Worlds*.

The show’s preachiness is more *West Wing* than *Star Trek*, and assumes its viewers are only

pretending to pay attention while they scroll on their phone, waiting for the moral of the story to be spelled out in a crew member’s soliloquy of a personal log before the credits roll.

In short order I became my own tailor, an Elim Garak of a sort for each episode, “fixing” them with a stitch or two of altered dialogue. Why does Spock steal the flagship vessel to travel into enemy territory as it undergoes repairs based on one crewman’s dubious distress call? How does said human crewman drink a Klingon under the table without some Starfleet ingenuity (or at least a hangover)? Why can’t Chapel explain the conundrum plaguing her crush without stammering over her words like a teenage schoolgirl?

I am by no means saying previous renditions of *Star Trek* were without fault. Yet since *The Next Generation*, they all had a sense of coherence, a tenuous grasp on plausibility. The holes were not so noticeable.

As *Strange New Worlds* approaches its season finale, its stories have, thankfully, become more interesting and complex. But glossy shots and great hair that can only take it so far. And as it winds down, I can only hope the third season does not boldly go where the previous season has gone before.

– PATRICK LUCAS AUSTIN

TELEVISION

OBI-WAN KENOBI – I don't actually think *Obi-Wan Kenobi* is particularly bad. The problem is just that it pales in comparison to *Andor*, so I could never take the show seriously, even during those moments of humanity and pathos. As we say in archaeology, context is everything.

– JUSTIN REEVE



BATTLEBOTS – This season of *BattleBots* has been the best in recent memory. Aside from a singular team that brought down the energy every time they were on screen, this season was populated by interesting bots, a few rule changes that really made a difference and some fantastic, exuberant editing. The climactic battles in the finale were well-deserved, destructive and just plain fun.

– AMANDA HUDGINS

FINAL SPACE – Hear me out. The first season of this show is very rough (especially regarding the showrunner's voice acting for Gary Goodspeed). But if you can clear that season and found enough to be intrigued by, you're in for a treat. Especially if you're a space opera fan. It's a shame it got canceled for a damn tax write-off (*cough*burn corporations*cough*) but at least the story will be finished in graphic novel format. If you can put up with the sometimes very immature humor there's some genuinely solid storytelling about grief, love, found family and legacy in here.

– PHOENIX SIMMS



GAMES



BIOSHOCK INFINITE – Yeah . . . we're here because of [that top 100 games list](#) GQ published a few months back. *Bioshock Infinite* is one of the best games of all time? Really?

Look, I get it. The first *Bioshock* was a landmark title, and both hopes and hype were through the roof for its "true" follow up (I see you, *Bioshock 2* apologists). *Infinite* came out in 2013 when the Xbox 360 and PS3 were just about to be replaced by their successors; this was supposed to be a swansong title for the seventh console generation. But other games from that year included *The Last of Us* and *Grand Theft Auto 5*. Which are still talked about and continue to shape the landscape, while *Infinite* has gone by the wayside for very good reasons.

As shooters go, this game is . . . fine. Its enemy and weapon variety keeps encounters feeling mostly fresh throughout your one-man war on the city in the sky and, to its credit, I still wish more games let you dual-wield guns and hand-held sci-fi abilities like this one did. But the level design can't hold a candle to something like *Halo* or an Arkane game, the gunplay isn't visceral or head-bang-

ing like 2016's *DOOM* and *Infinite* completely loses the fantastic claustrophobia and need for strategy of the previous *Bioshock* games. No more trying to avoid enemy ambushes and planning out attacks on roaming big daddies; instead, every fight along your path is pre-terminated and unavoidable. With competent gameplay that never truly shines, this game's story has to pull more of the weight, and . . . hoooy boy.

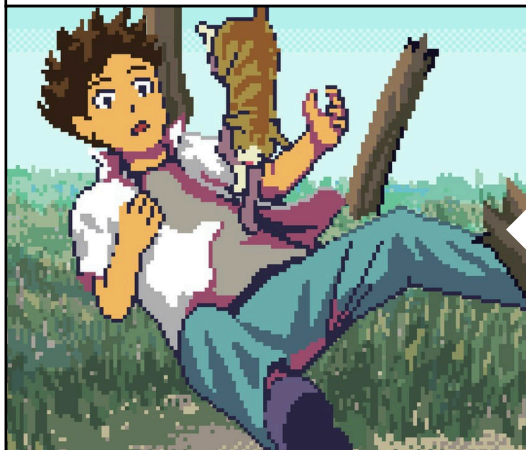
Have you ever watched 2000s *Doctor Who* where there's usually a key twist in each episode that makes the climax really land? Imagine that, but it's every other story beat. Half of the plot progression is thanks to moments that are either offscreen, occurred years beforehand or happened in an alternate timeline – resulting in an ending that's confusing and ultimately hollow. This game might've hoped to have "insightful" commentary on race and the deification of American history, but a decade later its lasting legacy is almost ironic: For something titled *Infinite*, it was nothing more than a finality for a series that started out with so much ambition and potential.

– VAN DENNIS

GAMES

CLANK! – A tabletop game that actually manages to mimic the panic of a rogue-like dungeon crawler, as you quickly try to grab treasure before the dragon comes. Frenetically paced and easy to learn.

– AMANDA HUDGINS



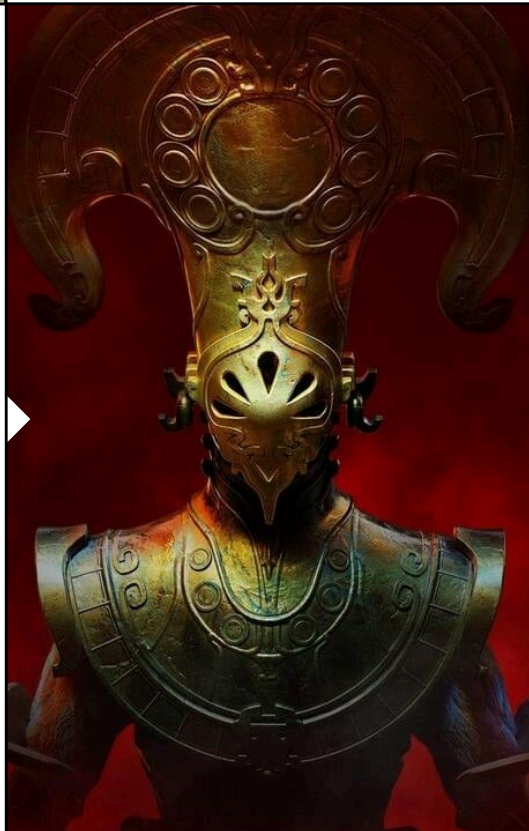
A SPACE for the UNBOUND – I tried the demo to this slice-of-life adventure game and loved the prologue. The mental health themes are handled with care and the *Persona*-esque surrealism of diving into people's mind-scapes with a magic notebook were great touches. My favorite parts, though, were the moments where you'd learn about '90s Indonesian culture. I'm looking forward to playing the rest of the game soon.

– PHOENIX SIMMS

REMNANT 2 – I've got about four hours logged in *Remnant 2*, but I love it; game of the year. That's even considering a good third of that time was spent trying to brute force a secret thingamabobber out of an area I probably shouldn't have been in because, well, because I wanted it (and I got it: take that game balance!).

Anyway, I don't remember any of the fine details of the first game or, honestly, many details at all, though I did play through the entirety of the original with Unwinnable vice publisher Sara Clemens and editor-in-chief David Shimomura. I remember the monsters were damn strange. I remember there was a certain pleasure to be had in repeatedly grinding through the various alternate dimensions and prying out their secrets. It was a heck of a good time. The sequel is shaping up to be in line with that earlier experience. Even just four hours in.

– STU HORVATH



HOROSCOPE

CATBIRD CHASED OFF THE
CROW. THAT'S GOOD CROPS
AND ADEQUATE RAINS. 🍷