

**ISSUE 35**

# **EXPLOITS**

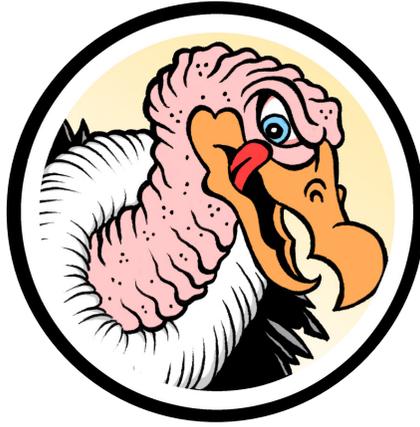
FEBRUARY 2021

**an UNWINNABLE publication**

**Autumn Wright on  
TURTLES ALL  
the WAY DOWN**

***The ANUBIS GATES***

**• FARGO • JAZZ POP and JAZZ FUSION •  
SEIJUN SUZUKI • STARDEW VALLEY**



*Editor in Chief* | Stu Horvath

## **EXPLOITS**

A MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO THE REASONS WE LOVE THINGS

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This machine kills fascists.

# RECOURSE:

## The ANTHROPOCENE REVIEWED and *TURTLES ALL the WAY DOWN*

by Autumn Wright

“You don’t choose what’s in the picture, but you decide on the frame.”

– *Turtles All the Way Down*

**T**he *Anthropocene Reviewed* is a podcast written and narrated by John Green, the man who, depending on your age, you may recall as the older brother on *Vlogbrothers* (the Green brothers’ epistolary YouTube channel that cultivated a fandom-adjacent community dubbed Nerdfighteria) or the author of the book-turned-movie *The Fault in Our Stars* (the YA novel about star crossed lovers with cancer). I read *TFIOS* (pronounced tif-e-ose) in my ninth-grade English class. Only as the book got more popular did I recognize the author of my homework as, incredibly, the older Green brother.

The premise of his podcast is bathetic: Green “reviews” an object, art, emotion or another phenomenon of the Anthropocene and rates each on a five-star scale. The rating always comes last, and it is always a pithy moment until it suddenly, severely, isn’t. The star rating returns us from the high of Green’s prose, which takes the form of memoir. Or, his words: *extremely in-depth Yelp reviews*. Further, each episode is structured as two reviews, almost always ten minutes long, that are unrelated except for their location in the current epoch. These pairings draw out often comedic juxtapositions, epitomized most cogently by *episode six*: “Lascaux Paintings and the Taco Bell Breakfast Menu.” And the juxtaposition is itself commentary. Only in the Anthropocene could *all this* come to be equated so reductively. It’s indicative of Green’s and our experience with the hegemonic mode of reality in the Anthropocene, with capitalism’s system of equivalence, with “the contemporary human paradox of being at once far too powerful and not powerful enough.”

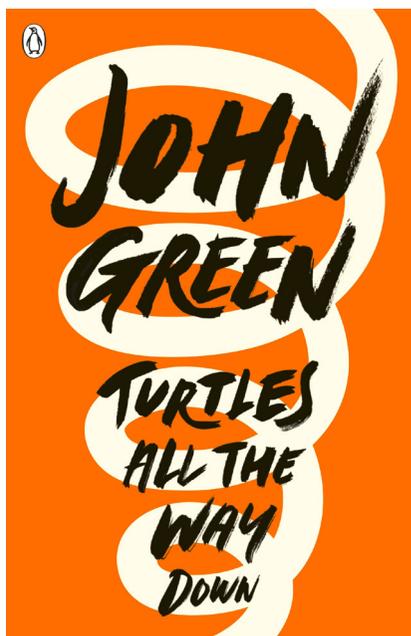
Green’s writing remained with me through high school as it remains with me now. I used *Crash Course* to study, watched more of his vlogs and my senior year-book quote was pulled from his *TED talk*. Then, in my second year at university, Green released another novel, *Turtles All the Way Down*. One day in October, I went to a suburb away from campus with my soon to be ex and my soon to be

partner to watch the brothers speak. We weren't the oldest people there, but it felt like we were the oldest fans as we sat in the mezzanine of a high school auditorium singing a recursive melody that sounded **something like "Auld Lang Syne."** Green wrote about the origins of the podcast from his experiences on this tour on the show's **self-titled episode**. And, upon revisiting the book with time and age, it now feels like a literary device in the middle of my story.

A recurring motif of Greens' writing on Vlogbrothers and The Anthropocene Reviewed has been hope. He even says on the vlog announcing the podcast's upcoming release as a **book**:

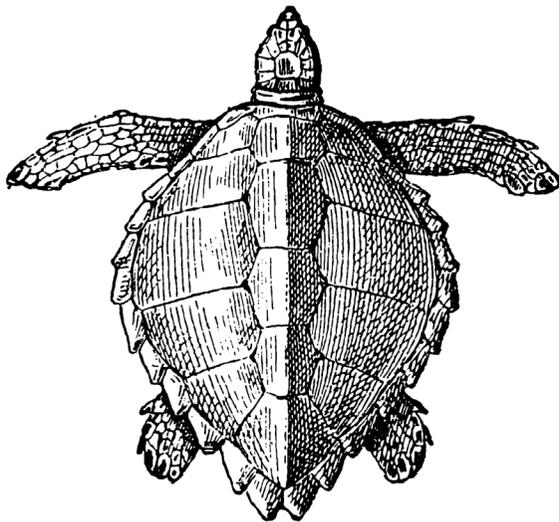
"it's about, like, hope and whether or not it is justified." I think that may be why I have been so drawn to his work. Since I first read TFIOS, I grew up, I experienced all of highschool, decided on a future, moved away from home, inevitably changed my studies and career paths, came out, fell in love. Fucked it up, how many times? But, like Green's novels, mine is not a love story.

I listened to The Anthropocene Reviewed in the position of *Turtles All the Way Down*'s protagonist, Aza. When I saw Green in that high school auditorium, I had only just started taking SSRIs, still well away from the hormones that would finally make me feel something more than less-bad. I felt – I was – trapped by my thoughts, betrayed by my body that had a death drive. Like Aza's OCD, I knew already my ideation would never be tamed, and I was only starting to grapple with the weight of that prophecy. So, I turned to Green like she does the Pettibon spiral in Davis' home. My memories of the podcast are parked outside my apartment late at night, worn down by the classes I was weeks behind in and listening to "**Googling Strangers**" even though I wanted to go upstairs and collapse in bed. Or pausing "**Gray Aliens**" as I parked at a strip mall during the summer semester, meeting a professor that a year ago I called from the hospital because I felt I had no one else to talk to. On the interstate somewhere in central Florida, between the place that finally felt like home and the place that finally wasn't, listening to "**Auld Lang Syne**," singing that verse that I first sang between two people so important to my story and so far away from me now that my past with them doesn't even feel like mine anymore.



And when I look back to that episode of the podcast, a memoir of Green's career in writing and the influence of his first editor who made up the tune, I hear the lullaby Aza's mom sings, the same recursive melody I sang in the amphitheater in Winter Park. I find a **video** he made four years ago now about the song. It's from November, a few weeks after I saw him. But in the video that I must have watched then and only found again by writing this, he, incredibly, answers the question as if it is not the pressing question of our time, of *my* time. "Hope," he says, "is the correct response to the arc of history." It feels unfair when I hear it, and frustratingly recursive. He starts from the answer I have sought these past four years, and he continues to ask as if he does not know.

But maybe that is the verb of hope, the thing with feathers on it. We cannot grasp her, and so we keep looking, keep going, keep singing, keep being. We keep asking. He keeps writing, and I keep reading. Eventually, I will start writing too. Not my own story, but this one. It doesn't end here, but that's okay. You don't choose what's in the picture, but you decide on the frame. 🐢



# MUSIC



**JAZZ POP, JAZZ FUSION** – A fun fact about me (and a thing that used to either bore or intrigue men in bars, back when I was a strapping, comphet-added twink) is that I’m a conservatory-educated jazz musician, as well as a former music teacher. I majored on acoustic and electric bass, but I haven’t been able to play on a (heavy scare quotes) “*professional level*” for several years due to a connective tissue injury in my wrist. Because of this, I transitioned from gay alcoholic “Deacon Blues”-wannabe to sleuthy transsexual freelance journalist; a career track which will no doubt end with me slumming it as a private dick in the dystopian streets of future San Francisco until I’m shot in the back and left for dead by a dame I thought I could trust.

In general, jazz is an art form I spent most of my adolescence and young adulthood obsessed with. This to the point that my dysphoric pre-transition self mainly regarded bodies for their ability to hold and play horns, guitars and keys (something I now see as a deeply ableist framework). Instead of instruments being anthropomorphic, humans seemed to be built for their instruments. My wrist injury seemed to confirm something I’d

always suspected: that I was basically a poorly constructed accessory to a Supro Huntington II and a telecaster.

Throughout my transition, jazz has really fallen out of my personal identity – I can’t physically play upright bass anymore and I’m limited to short-scale electrics. My playing and practice now mainly consists of Ichika Nito licks that get stuck in my head from the chill music I throw on while I’m working. I also like that I’ve largely retained my habit of mentally keeping tabs on the types of guitars my Twitter mutuals have (in case I ever need to call one of them to play on a gig, I guess). Outwardly, though, my prior dedication as a jazzgirl has one very embarrassing tell:

I still listen to *a lot* of jazz fusion and 1970s jazz pop.

One of my roommates has characterized this to me as “listening to extremely long Kanye samples,” and he’s not wrong. My first exposure to this type of music was hearing it chipmunked in *Graduation*, but, nevertheless, I continue to wedge tracks from *The Royal Scam* into playlists with Death Grips and Rina Sawayama. I don’t pore over and analyze these albums anymore, and I’ve always considered

# MUSIC

them inferior to the more Black<sup>1</sup>, less commercialized sounds of Motown/PIR and 1960s acoustic hard bop. Even so, I still find them fascinating in the sense of their being quaint kitsch objects; little musical tchotchkes possessed by a sort of satiny, idiomatic elegance which seems pale and passé when modern artists try to reproduce it.

This is largely because (on the records, at least) much of this music was actually performed and at least co-arranged by Black jazz and R&B legends like Wayne Shorter (saxophonist for the second Miles Davis Quintet) and Bernard Purdie (drummer for James Brown's *Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud*). These tracks are cut by people who laid out the original feel and texture of modern jazz and funk; their style shrunk down to miniature as a backdrop for white boys playing at desperation.

"The Caves of Altamira," by Steely Dan, is probably my favorite example of this; despite its hokey-sounding lyrics. It has one of the catchiest hooks I've ever heard ("*Before the fall, when they wrote it on the wall / When there wasn't even Hollywood...*") and a Bernard Purdie-led backed groove that's so utterly pleasing it's shown up in some of my nicer dreams. It also has a dense, almost Fela Kuti and Egypt 80-esque horn arrangement, one that returns in the final bars and restates

the hook to an absolutely excessive degree of perfection.

This scene did also produce some feats of musicianship that continue to blow my fucking face off every time I listen to them. Larry Carlton's soloing in Steely Dan's "Kid Charlemagne" is an absolute masterclass in constrained rhythm and voice-leading (backed by another sublime Purdie groove, this time joined by Chuck Rainey on bass). The title track from Gino Vanelli's *Brother to Brother* is what I read as a blisteringly homoerotic 7-minute ode to brotherly love, punctuated by falsetto and delivered with the panache and naïve sexual charisma of a retro anime opening. Around the halfway mark, preceded by great fanfare, Carlos Rios launches into a brief but insanely brilliant bebop-tinged guitar solo, with 70s guitar hero noodling placed next to recognizable Charlie Parker licks.

At one point, Joni Mitchell even got in on it, with her albums *Hejira*, *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*, and *Mingus* (the latter co-written and arranged by Charles Mingus, the seminal hard bop bassist and composer, and prominently featuring Wayne Shorter on saxophones).

Although this scene has left a tail of influence into the present, the music itself isn't as interesting as the original context for its idioms.

– MOLLY BLOCH

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1. By this, I literally mean that it was typical in the 70s for an act to have a white leader and a white songwriter backed by a rotating lineup of mainly Black and brown session musicians, i.e., Steely Dan famously consisted of white songwriters Walter Becker and Don Fagan and frequent (white) arranger Larry Carlton writing tunes and arrangements for Black industry legends such as Wayne Shorter and Bernard Purdie, who dwarf Becker, Fagan and Carlton in terms of actual talent and influence. This was in stark contrast to the 60s R&B and hard bop scenes, where jazz acts generally had Black control of their music from the top down, and were almost always billed under the name of a Black bandleader. It shouldn't be buried that this era of pop jazz represents a significant appropriation and whitewashing of the jazz idiom.

# MUSIC

JONI MITCHELL



MINGUS

## PLAYLIST

“The Dry Cleaner From Des Moines,” by Joni Mitchell

“Brother To Brother,” by Gino Vannelli

“The Caves Of Altamira,” by Steely Dan

“Kid Charlemagne,” by Steely Dan

“Murder On the Dance Floor,” by Sophie Ellis-Bextor

“You Get What You Give,” by New Radicals

“Brother to Brother,” by Gino Vannelli

“Red Clay,” by Freddie Hubbard

“The Intrepid Fox,” by Freddie Hubbard

“Say It Loud - I’m Black And I’m Proud,” by James Brown

**LISTEN ON SPOTIFY**





**The ANUBIS GATES** – Somewhere in Tim Powers' time travel novel *The Anubis Gates* is a moment of realization. A moment where the reader looks and realizes *egad! That person has been this other person the whole time!*

In this way, *The Anubis Gates* is a novel about determinism. After traveling back in time, English professor Brendan Doyle uses his knowledge of the past to ward himself against the dangers he'll face. Especially once he realizes that an enigmatic historical figure has been him all along. He knows where to go and who he'll see because he's done it all before. Sort of.

Doyle does not mean to go to the past and be stuck there. He does not mean to become a part of the history that lies in his own future. Except that he has always done so. He will do it. He has already done it.

The Doyle we meet in the opening of the novel is a marvel of milquetoast. Insignificant except within his narrow area of study. Certainly not heroic. Definitely not athletic. However, the wheels of time are turning around Brendan Doyle and as the novel goes on, he

slowly becomes the person he was meant to be, the person he already was.

For as much as *The Anubis Gates* is about powerful magicians attempting to bring about the ruin of the British Empire, it's about one small man's evolution. Not into a hero, but into a person he admires, someone he would like to be.

This kind of looping determinism spreads out in all directions from Doyle. Without his intervention, without his causal loop, no character could be where they are. They cannot have made the choices they made at the moments they made them. Doyle already knows how the story ends. Until he doesn't.

It's strange to think of Doyle's journey as a character arc. By the first page of the novel, he's technically already completed it. Yet, he still must grow into that person, at least this time around, in order for the infinite succession of Doyle's to discover that they, all along, were the person they wanted to be. Through a little work, a little trickery, and a few happy accidents, Doyle always becomes who he was meant to be.

– DAVID SHIMOMURA

# BOOKS



**WILD SEED** – I read *Patternmaster* back in college and remember liking it, but I hadn't returned to Butler's work until this fall, when I received a copy of *Mind of My Mind*, the second book in the Patternist series. I'm no philistine, so I decided rather than just jump into the middle of a series I hadn't thought about in 15 years, I thought I should probably start from the beginning. So, instead, I turned to *Wild Seed*, the genesis story of Doro and Anwanyu, two immortals who meet in Africa in the middle of the 17th century. As I read about their relationship and philosophical disagreements, I began to slowly remember details from *Patternmaster* that I had forgotten, and despite the millennia of difference between the two books' chronology and the decade between reading them, I began to draw connections. I breezed through *Wild Seed* in about a day-and-a-half, and am now knee deep in *Mind of My Mind*, and I'm not stopping any time soon, but I might just have to re-spoil *Patternmaster* for myself in the process. That's a risk I'm willing to take.

– NOAH SPRINGER



## The HISTORY of ROCK 'N' ROLL in TEN SONGS

– Blake Hester would have you believe that classic rock has caught up to the current millennium, but Greil Marcus is still connecting the dots across the previous one. He's got plenty of yarn, both on the corkboard and in the word count, and a lot of it is lists. But his work invites the reader to share rather than shame them. It's educational without resorting to pedantry. Marcus doesn't debase himself with effusiveness, but rather traces the lifetimes of songs through the artists that perform them, peaking in the first half through Buddy Holly and the Beatles though, of course, I was more interested in Joy Division's "Transmission." Marcus is weaving spells here, sometimes lost in the murk but always bobbing back up for a breath, caught in the magic of it all.

– LEVI RUBECK



**The EMPRESS of SALT and FORTUNE** – The frame story is an oral history of a unknown empire, a woman telling the story of loves lost, empires falling and everything in between. It's fantastic. A short read, it's compelling and sets the stage for the equally fantastic *When the Tiger Came Down the Mountain* which follows.

– AMANDA HUDGINS

# MOVIES



**SEIJUN SUZUKI** – If you asked someone to speculate on the lineage of Sega’s now infamous *Yakuza* series, I imagine most would point at Kinji Fukasaku’s similarly notorious *Battles Without Honour and Humanity* films. Based on the memoirs of a real-life Yakuza, they tackle the rise and fall of the various families in Hiroshima prefecture. They focus on the way post-war fallout in Japan allowed for strong communities of criminals to be fostered under the negligent watch of American occupying forces.

The original series of films ran for five installments over two years, and told a knotty story of the various families, and the frequent futility of the endless brawls between various Yakuza. They became a cornerstone of Japanese cinema’s obsession with modern Yakuza stories. So far, so Kazuma Kiryu – but Fukasaku’s films lack the irreverent, goofy streak that perhaps best typifies them. Seijun Suzuki may well be the link that bridges these potentially disparate tones.

*Branded to Kill* is his best known film, which saw him blacklisted from the film industry for 10 years. Its protagonist, Goro Hanada, is a hitman with a love of rice bordering on eroticism. His kills are bizarre, including a gunshot through a drainage pipe (later homaged in *Ghost Dog*). The violence in the film has a cartoonish feel, with butterflies foiling hits and clothing deflecting bullets. Suzuki’s absurdism feels alive and well in *Yakuza*’s cast of proficient himbos, but he often went much further.

*Tokyo Drifter* ends in one of the most stylish shootouts ever put to film, a farcical display of violence and kineticism that brings to mind the manga panel framed battles of *Killer7*. When Japanese media features a tonal knee-jerk, it’s often accepted as the norm, but it once wasn’t. Trailblazers like Suzuki punched through the Yakuza template with a singular image of absurdity, and allowed us the chance to experience the frequently daft shenanigans of the Kamurocho Yakuza.

– LUKE SHAW

# MOVIES

**MUPPETS MOST WANTED** – It was inevitable that the charm and love of the Muppets would decay as their creator passed away (rest in peace, Jim) and they were subsumed by the fearful body that is Disney. But I wish I could believe it wasn't so.

– WAVERLY



**GODZILLA: KING OF THE MONSTERS** – *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* is fantastic.

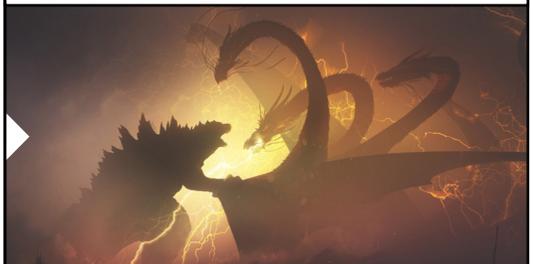
It's an objectively terrible movie with ridiculous events and foolish characters doing pointless things and it's more melodramatic than a high school fanfic. It's also the best homage to the classic Toho films we've ever gotten, and it's very apparent that the people who made it loved the old (and let's be honest, mostly bad) Toho movies.

The references hit often and they hit hard, but the inherent goofiness is perfect in its own bizarre way. Sure none of this makes it a *good* movie, but a movie (especially a Godzilla movie) doesn't have to be good to be excellent.

– ROB RICH

**SHIN GODZILLA** – Godzilla has always been socio political commentary, **even accidentally**. The Ishiro Honda original aired anxiety about technology, nuclear energy and using that power to annihilate its own creations. The elemental Frankenstein. After Japan grew comfortable with the nuclear grid, Godzilla became more Paul Bunyan than King Kong. Gareth Edwards' 2014 *Godzilla* movie evoked imagery from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, though not to any coherent purpose. *Neon Genesis Evangelion* creator Hideki Anno's treatment dug deeper to the core of Japan's inability to handle disasters, turning a monster movie into more of a *Dr. Strangelove*-ian satire. Career bureaucrats shuffle chamber to chamber, deferring down chains of expertise and command, before awaiting a decision from occupying American naval forces, even at the expense of their own annihilation. All the while a Godzilla, looking googlier-eyed than ever, commits its most haunting atrocities to Tokyo in a single nuclear breath.

– ZACK KOTZER



# TELEVISION



**FARGO** – A period piece is generally defined by its aesthetic and atmosphere, with costumes and music tracks characterizing an era, and appropriate narrative tropes invoked to bring a sense of familiarity. FX’s *Fargo* from writer Noah Hawley has depicted four different periods in American history, but even amid the trappings of a period piece, this true crime anthology is not about what happens in a certain year – it’s about what came before, and what is approaching.

Despite its claim of being “a true story,” there is a silent understanding that this is not explicitly factual. There is still “truth,” however – *Fargo* is not solely about small-town criminal buffoonery and insidiousness, but rather the attitude that leads to American carnage. Each season showcases a different stage of America in a state of in-betweenness. It is cyclical in nature, each season featuring characters who inadvertently create Rube Goldberg machines of violence and incompetence, blinded by their ambition, hubris or disillusionment. As the show hits periods before and after flashpoints such as the Great Recession and the Vietnam War, there is always plenty of thematic meat to chew on.

Season 4, featuring an absolutely stuffed cast led by Chris Rock, promises to go into the heart of what being “American” means, with the 1950-set piece pitting Italian immigrants against Black Americans, the former reeling from World War II and the latter fleeing the Jim Crow South. What begins as an epic and determined narrative becomes bogged down with an overabundance of subplots and characters, full of monologuing but short of actual lessons to be learned.

Instead of contemplating how we arrived at this point as a people, using characters and events to personify American strife and allowing viewers to connect the dots, the fourth cycle of *Fargo* turns into a preachy classroom lecture that becomes lost in grand-standing ideas while failing to produce a message.

But perhaps, in the end, a moral is impossible to produce. The United States currently lives in a period of intense discord, and it’s a time to reflect on the harm the country has done to others and its own inhabitants. As *Fargo* demonstrates in its own folk-tale story-book way, America is going through eternal growing pains. The real story may be what happens after.

– CHRIS COMPENDIO

# TELEVISION

**YURI!!! on ICE** – 2021 has been stressful. Yes it hasn't been going that long, but nonetheless: stressful. The best course of action was obviously to treat this stress by watching *Yuri!!! on Ice*, the anime about how even if you suffer from extreme imposter syndrome and crippling self doubt you are in fact talented and sexy and desirable to your idols.

– AMANDA HUDGINS



## **ADVENTURE TIME: DISTANT LANDS - "OBSIDIAN"**

– The arc of Marceline and Bonnie's rekindled flame is the long arc of *AT*. Constricted by the conservatism of its network and championed by the writers of a cohort that changed what was possible on screen, *Bubblin'* made for one of the greatest slow burns of sapphic drama. One with resentment, and flirting, and friendship. One that concluded in a single kiss. In "Obsidian" there is a history to their relationship, a history to both women but also to the forces that shaped their lives on screen and off. It is something remarkably queer then, that they love each other. Even though *AT* was never about them alone, even though they weren't always meant to be together, here they are. Front and center. Kissing.

– AUTUMN WRIGHT

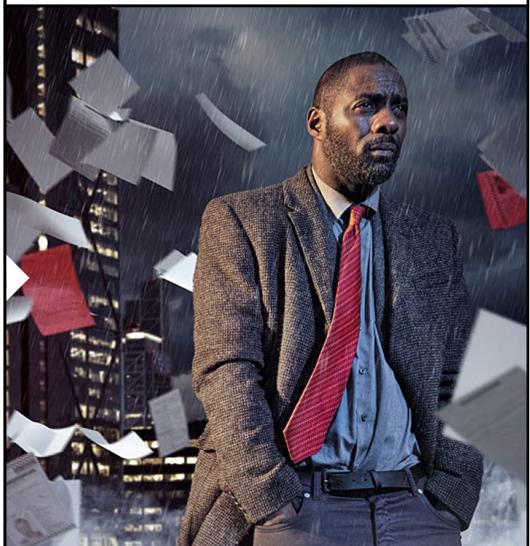


**LUTHER** – *Luther* has long been a favorite of mine. It's the story of the troubled Detective Chief Inspector John Luther, played by the brilliant Idris Elba. DCI Luther only works on the most heinous crimes in London, both the ones he solves and the ones he causes. You see, John Luther is a bad dude. Sometimes to solve crimes, he makes crimes. Bad crimes.

Over the course of five seasons, *Luther* is a show not about a loose cannon cop on the edge, it's about a loose cannon cop well beyond the edge. *Luther* isn't corrupt, he's just a jerk with no boundaries when it comes to stopping bad people from doing bad things.

Perhaps the most interesting quality of John Luther is his rage which is often expressed through outbursts and edited together in a flurry. It's a furious show, one that manages to remain watchable because of how compelling it is to watch Elba explore the depths of a character who brings ruin to all those around him. Friend and foe alike.

– DAVID SHIMOMURA



# GAMES



**STARDEW VALLEY** – When I started playing *Stardew Valley*, I was working at the kind of corporate job the main character escapes from in the beginning. I would slump over my laptop in bed after a long commute home, exploring the pixelated streams, caverns and forests of Pelican Town. It was the perfect escape from the pressures of life.

Many players feel the same; *Stardew Valley* is currently the most positively reviewed Steam game with the “relaxing” tag. But unlike other popular farming sims, the stresses of corporate work are embodied in the malignant Joja Corporation. Joja cola cans litter fishing ponds, and the Jojalmart supermarket threatens to put the local independent shop out of business. What’s more is that joining the Joja Corporation lets you pay for improvements to the town, rather than unlocking upgrades with foraged offerings to forest spirits. Although the former is an easier task, it doesn’t sit right with a lot of people – many refer to this as “depressing,” “evil”

and “literally gentrification” in one YouTube video’s comments section. Perhaps this condemnation of corporate culture is influenced by creator Eric Barone’s rejection from several nine-to-five coding jobs before he began work on *Stardew Valley*.

Most people empathize with the game’s anti-capitalist message: that fulfillment is found through building community and a connection with nature. Yet only a few can actually live it out. Although I can’t woo tiny, apple-shaped spirits with flowers or mushrooms, *Stardew Valley* still inspired me to forage in the real world. Even though the suburban town I’m in is quite different from the game’s lush woodlands, that didn’t stop me from trying. You don’t know where foragables will appear in *Stardew Valley*, so you’re forced to explore. Likewise, bounties turned up in unlikely places in real life, be it blackberries on patches of scrubby land next to a motorway, the fruits of the blue passion flower growing up a fence, or apples with bright pink

# GAMES

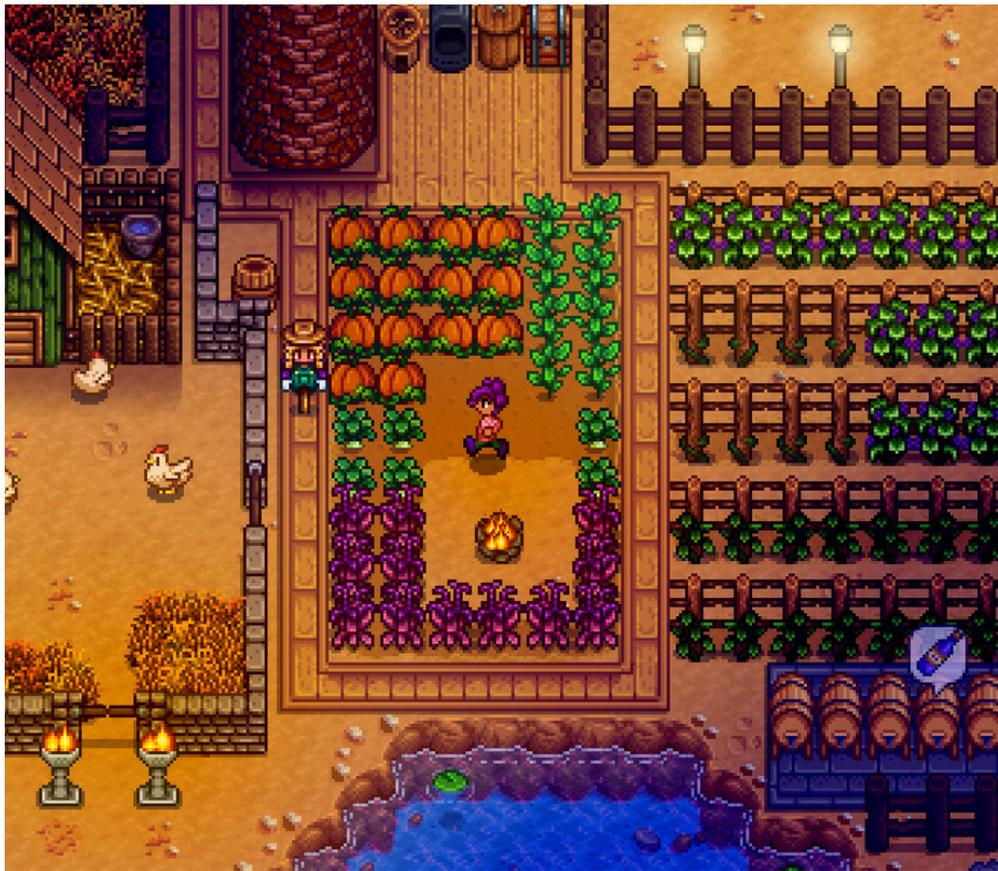
flesh falling from an unloved tree onto the pavement.

Spending my free time on a passion project that wasn't about making money sees a parallel in *Stardew Valley*. Cooking in the game is intentionally programmed such that you don't earn money from the meals you whip up, **but instead encourage exploration by giving you buffs like health and energy**. Spending my time on hobbies, like cooking, that weren't about monetizing side hustles felt unproductive, but *Stardew Valley* teaches the value of patience above productivity. Plants grow and trees fruit only at the right time of year. While months can whiz by sickeningly fast without feeling like I'm making much progress in the

real world, I was happy to patiently reap the benefits of that harvest season in *Stardew Valley*, while looking forward to the next.

*Stardew Valley* may have started me on foraging and cooking, but it wasn't my gateway to appreciating nature away from screens. Instead, I see foraging, both in the game and real life, as celebrating the joys of creation and exploration, whether that's making preserves in your kitchen, or designing the perfect pixelated garden. I eventually quit my job with the long commute, and am now spending time on things that I enjoy, rather than always striving for productivity – a soulless metric of corporate culture.

– RICH GIPTAR



# GAMES



**CRUSADER KINGS 3** – I can think of some games where you assume the role of a king or queen. I can also think of some games where you assume the role of a state or society. I can't think of too many games where you take on the mantle of a dynasty, though. *Crusader Kings 3* succeeds at making you strategize in terms of generations, but this definitely comes at something of a cost. You might call it a moral dilemma.

The most interesting mechanic in *Crusader Kings 3* would have to be the system of congenital traits. I would argue as a historian that concepts like beauty are, in fact, culturally defined, but that's not what I find so disturbing about this. The system encourages a kind of selective breeding which comes close to eugenics. The result is that *Crusader Kings 3* could be seen as condoning this practice.

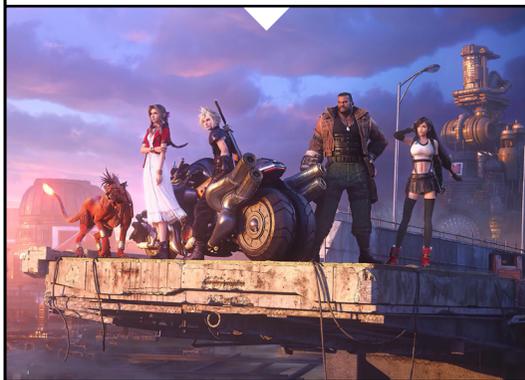
I love *Crusader Kings 3*. The game is pretty much perfect, but the system of congenital traits leaves me feeling just a little bit sick.

– JUSTIN REEVE



**FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE** – When I first played *Final Fantasy VII* on the original PlayStation in middle school, I very vividly remember wondering what the game could have been like if the entire game played like a third-person action RPG that looked like its cutscenes. Now, catching up with *Final Fantasy VII Remake*, it's stunning how close it comes to turning my pre-teen imagination into an actual experience filling my living room with the sights and sounds of Midgar. It's like recalling your youth in even better detail than how it actually happened, and along with *Resident Evil 2 Remake* and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 1 & 2*, that may be what I remember this past console generation for the most. It's not what I would have expected, but I'm not mad about it either.

– BEN SAILER



**FLOATING RUNNER: QUEST for the 7 CRYSTALS** – An arcade 3D platformer before the whole 3D platformer thing was figured out. Honestly its a total blast running through a level with the meticulous, if awkward, controls while enemies spawn in tens of hundreds to create a chaotic ballpit to jump around in. And once game over comes, I just do it all over again.

– WAVERLY

# HOROSCOPE

If you look closely, you can see that even the stars know, that all cops are bastards. Systems built on racial injustice are broken and cannot stand. They should not be allowed to persist. Throw out the bunch.

Your lucky number is 1312. 🍀