

ISSUE 70

EXPLOITS

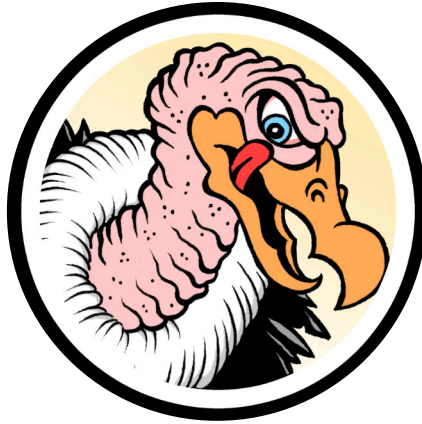
an **UNWINNABLE** publication

JANUARY 2024



David Shimomura on
FARGO

VIDEOGAME MEMORIES • SPIRITBOX
• The TUNNEL to SUMMER • DEEPHAVEN •
EL PASO, ELSEWHERE



Publisher | Stu Horvath

Vice Publisher | Sara Clemens

Editor in Chief | David Shimomura

EXPLOITS

A MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO THE REASONS WE LOVE THINGS

Feature Editor | Melissa King

Music Editor | Ed Coleman

Books Editor | Noah Springer

Movies Editor | Orrin Grey

Television Editor | Sara Clemens

Games Editor | Rob Rich

Copyright © 2024 by Unwinnable LLC

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Unwinnable LLC does not claim copyright of the screenshots and promotional imagery herein. Copyright of all screenshots within this publication are owned by their respective companies

Unwinnable
820 Chestnut Street
Kearny, NJ 07032

www.unwinnable.com

For more information, email:
info@unwinnable.com

[Subscribe](#) | [Store](#) | [Submissions](#)

This machine kills fascists.

GAMING HISTORY'S LOST MEMORY CARDS

by Phoenix Simms

Now that videogames have come into their seventh decade or so, they're old enough to look back on themselves. The best game design and media coverage are informed by past mistakes and triumphs of its varied and experimental expressions. Having a past also allows for the potential of referencing, remixing or commenting on game development over time. Some of my favorite series, like *Darksiders* for example, unabashedly feature nods towards classic mechanics of several games, the most notable being *Portal*.

But games are also old enough to forget about themselves. Despite how many titles have been released in recent years discussing the nature of memory and how remembrance is crucial to cultural progress, this medium is fixated on the present moment. This occurs in both the preservation of games and in the design thinking for current bestsellers in both indie and AAA industries. The teeming Soulslike market or how circular The Discourse™ in online communities has become are both exemplary of this state of affairs.

You're probably already aware of how hard it is to preserve early game history, both with regards to media and attendant cultural texts as well. In his feature for [GamesIndustry.Biz](#), Keumars Afifi-Sabet characterizes this situation in games preservation as stakeholders abandoning whole ecosystems of gaming. I find this to be an eloquent way to understand exactly what's being lost when games lose the ability to reflect. They lose diversity in design, identity and much more besides.

Quoting Afifi-Sabet's interview with Phil Salvador, the Video Game History Foundation's library director, it's noted that "less than 3% of games released before 1985 are still in print." This has, of course, a staggering effect on how new game designers and critics are able to understand the way games' "rules and vocabulary" have evolved over time.

I wholeheartedly agree with another of Afifi-Sabet's interviewees, Christopher Mitchell, a game industry veteran and head of creative technologies at Vancouver

Film School, who states: “[t]he concept everyone must accept is that games already are a pillar of human thought.” Games have been around long enough to become a part of our everyday vernacular, how we structure a lot of our systems in late capitalism (gamification of shopping and learning, anyone?) and how we perceive and enact our agency. Similar to other giants of human expression like music, books, movies and television, games are a medium we experience collectively even when we are playing on our own.

I want to elaborate on Mitchell’s statement by saying that whether you are in the games industry, adjacent or a hobbyist player, we need to think about how challenges to game preservation affect our collective mediated memory. By collective mediated memory, I’m referring to researcher Yingyi Han’s definition, borrowed by mediated memory studies Professor José Van Dijck, which refers to how our conceptualization of memory is influenced by media and how by extension our physiological memory is influenced too. If games are a pillar of human thought, what does it mean that we can’t access 87% or more of the classics?

I think moving forward, we’re going to see even more games premised around themes of memory and who controls it. I believe it’s important for all of us to continue to enrich our understanding of a medium that’s proven to be both a cultural lens and model for the digital age. Just as we are aware that collective memory is both a physiologically and culturally constructed entity, so should we comprehend the preservation of games as something requiring interdisciplinary effort. Because they’re media that affect our collective mediated memory. 🕒



MUSIC



SPIRITBOX – Spiritbox is a band that joins the ranks of acts like Lorna Shore, Sleep Token and Jinjer who are breaking down the barriers between fans of more accepted genres of music and metal. Yes, to get more precise, Spiritbox is classified as progressive or alternative metal. But the edges of its vocalizations and instrumentation are just as sharp as Lorna Shore, which is the deep end of those above mentioned. No coincidence then that Will Ramos, who has a very active social media presence and often uses his YouTube platform to cover his favorite songs covered Spiritbox’s “Holy Roller” as well as Sleep Token’s “Chokehold” and “Hypnosis”. He also duetted the “Holy Roller” with frontwoman Courtney Laplante at one of their concerts last year.

Spiritbox, from Victoria, British Columbia, has been around since 2017. They became more renowned after the success of their first full-length album *Eternal Blue*, which featured “Holy Roller,” another powerhouse single in “Sun Killer,” and a feature by Sam Carter of Architects on the relentless industrial rock track “Yellowjacket.” **Their meteoric rise has been hard for them to process**, especially for Laplante and her husband, Michael Stringer, who’s also the guitarist for the band. The couple

was previously part of an American metalcore act humorously called Iwrestledabearonce and together with Spiritbox’s bassist, Bill Crook, had all juggled day jobs until *Eternal Blue* was streamed into the stratosphere.

Their 2023 EP, *The Fear of Fear*, is that rare beast – a follow up that isn’t eclipsed by the giant shadow cast by the band’s previous offerings. The band’s signature elegant, yet piercing existentialist themes are carried through in a way that feels distinctly 21st century in its preoccupations. Spiritbox’s lyrics are often like riddles, with striking motifs that are evocative enough to let listeners piece together the fragmentary meanings for themselves. *The Fear of Fear* is no exception and also presents a stunning visual album featuring crimson keys, mirrored realities and selves, oceans of tangled wire and kaleidoscopic perspectives. All the songs also feed into each other, creating a sonic loop that’s fitting for an album about being trapped within fear.

The EP starts off lead-heavy with “Cellar Door,” establishing a techno-Gothic sense of an individual ensnared within their psyche and ends on a somber yet nostalgic note with “Ultraviolet.” The existentialism por-

MUSIC

PLAYLIST

trayed throughout is that of being constrained by the frames we choose for the reflections of ourselves, digitally and in the flesh, and how much time is stolen and distorted by cycles of fear.

But like a mirror, we focus on different details with each look, and I feel that Spiritbox's EP smartly looks forward as well as back at their trajectory so far. This month's playlist was created with that principle in mind.

— PHOENIX SIMMS



"Cellar Door," by Spiritbox

"Jaded," by Spiritbox

"Too Close/Too Late," by Spiritbox

"Angel Eyes," by Spiritbox

"The Void," by Spiritbox

"Ultraviolet," by Spiritbox

"Holy Roller," by Spiritbox

"Sun Killer," by Spiritbox

"Yellow Jacket," by Spiritbox (feat. Sam Carter)

"Silk In the Strings," by Spiritbox

"The Summit," by Spiritbox

"Circle With Me," by Spiritbox

"Constance," by Spiritbox

"Sew Me Up," by Spiritbox

"Rotoscope," by Spiritbox

"Blessed Be," by Spiritbox

"Rule of Nines," by Spiritbox

"Electric Cross," by Spiritbox

"Belcarra," by Spiritbox

"The Mara Effect, Pt.1," by Spiritbox

"10:16," by Spiritbox

"The Mara Effect, Pt.2," by Spiritbox

"The Mara Effect, Pt.3," by Spiritbox

LISTEN ON SPOTIFY



DEEPHAVEN – I’ll admit, I first picked up *Deephaven* entirely on the strength of author/illustrator Ethan M. Aldridge’s old-fashioned pen-and-ink drawings. I had seen several preview images on what was then Twitter, and I was sufficiently intrigued to check out what they were from.

It makes sense, after all. *Deephaven* looks like something that is extremely my jam. A big, dark house full of secrets. A shaggy monster prowling the halls. People lighting their way around with candles. I’m in heaven.

The actual narrative of *Deephaven* lives up to that promise, too. The eponymous house is every bit as big and dark and twisty as could be asked for, sighing and muttering to itself as it settles and dreams. The monster, when it arrives, is described with such visceral intensity that it is obvious how much the author loves writing about it. And the story itself is a mash-up of boarding school yarn and children’s gothic, with a few modern twists, including a memorable non-binary (and possibly neurodivergent) protagonist named Guinevere “Nev” Tallow who,

among other things, reminds us how easy it is to get used to the first-person “they” if you’re not a huge whiny baby.

Around the usual trappings of the boarding school story, including power-tripping prefects, obdurate adults with impenetrable motives and fast friendships, there is a surprisingly dark gothic heartbeat. That the monster becomes sympathetic in short order actually makes everything much more terrible, and even happy endings come with high prices.

“Of course it’s dangerous,” one of the characters says, when describing the magic that the students have discovered. “It’s messy and strange and brutal. Did you expect it to be pretty? Pretty is for hair and clothes, Guinevere. This is magic. Magic is wonderful, yes, and powerful, but never pretty.”

Deephaven, on the other hand, is often pretty, but it is also messy and strange and brutal; a welcome combination, in a book like this.

– ORRIN GREY

BOOKS

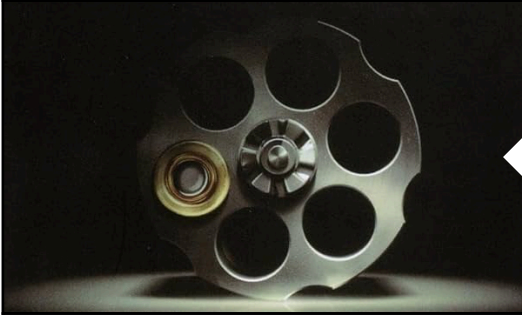
The GIRL From the OTHER SIDE: SIÚIL, A RÚN – Although I've only read two volumes of this work, Nagabe manages to construct a weird and interesting world with deep lore that hits those fairy tale uncanny elements so well. Gorgeously illustrated, this is an easy recommendation.

– AMANDA HUDGINS



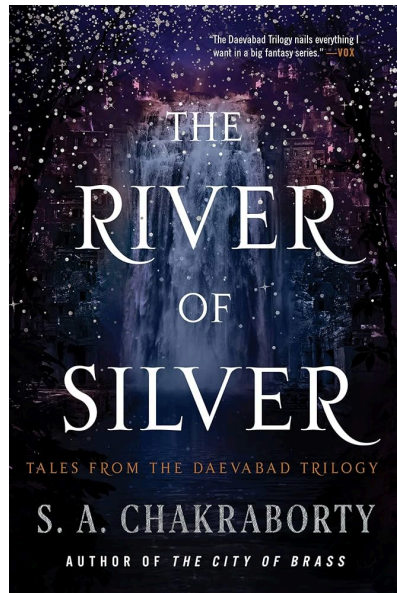
REBUS – I've been working my way through Ian Rankin's 24 novels dedicated to the Edinburgh cop. I've finished seven and it's odd being so invested in seeing an unlikable character win through in the end while also kind of rooting for him to crash into a wall at the same time.

– STU HORVATH



RIVER of SILVER – S.A. Chakraborty is one of the best fantasy writers in the business today and her Daevabad trilogy was the first series in decades to give me what the kids lovingly call a "book hangover" these days (they're right, it has all the markers of such a state). So when I found out that she was going to be officially publishing several short stories taking place between the major scenes of the trilogy and often featuring side characters, I was buzzed. Fortunately, this collection has the same charms as the trilogy and its only downside is that halfway through the collection the premise of featuring more side characters is set aside. If you want a nice mix of epic political drama, beautifully diverse and well-researched mythology and history as well as some romance, check this one out. However, I'd recommend reading it after the trilogy, as it expands upon a lot of major scenes and is spoilertastic (for those who care).

– PHOENIX SIMMS



MOVIES



The TUNNEL to SUMMER – The worst things about *The Tunnel to Summer, the Exit of Goodbyes* aren't director Tomohisa Taguchi's or studio CLAPs fault. Its story, inherited from Mei Hachimoku's light novel of the same name, is an excess of seikaikei tropes. **Critics** and **academics** (and **myself**) have written about the "world type" genre, characterized by its juxtaposition of apocalyptic crisis with school romance. Its protagonist (always a boy) is disempowered from confronting the crises around him while his love interest, some take on a school girl with a mech or magical powers, fights to save the world and resolve his conflicts while he never has to grow, develop or do anything besides wallow about how awful the world around him is.

While the film is a coming-of-age drama where all its conflict is psychological, it still invokes all these tropes. Protagonist Kaoru is a highschooler in a small town living with a shitty father and grieving for his dead little sister. Then he encounters a new classmate, Anzu, in a manic pixie dream girl-ass meet cute. We find out later, Anzu left her family and lives on her own as a high school student to pursue her dream of becoming a mangaka like her grandfather.

They're both pulled to a tunnel in the woods near where they met. A twist on the fairy tale of **Urashima Tarō**, the tunnel seems to promise them their dead family . . . or something. Together they spend after school and weekends investigating the tunnel and learning its magical

rules – namely that time passes much faster inside. Venturing far enough to find what they seek would mean losing decades to the real world.

So, after making an elaborate plan to both run away into the tunnel together, Anzu gets an offer from an editor and Kaoru decides she should pursue her dream in the real world while he fucks off into the tunnel without her.

Anzu grows up, gets published, makes a career, and (as mangaka do) becomes jaded and burnt out. She faces the world and grows up, but she still carries around her old flip phone waiting for a text from Kaoru inside the tunnel. Meanwhile, Kaoru spends a few hours in the tunnel, meets an illusion of his sister who bestows upon him the most basic morals of the story, and he decides to return. When Kaoru emerges, he's still a teenager, but all the wiser because his dead sister told him how to feel.

Narrative contrivances bring the two back to the tunnel after Anzu has aged *eight years*. Like every woman I know, she's still in love with her high school crush *who is literally a child now*, and they kiss. That's the happy ending. Beyond how mind bogglingly devoted this plot is to the idea of true love or how it forgets the bitter ending of the fisherman's fable, it's all the more infuriating to watch because he *literally does not grow up!* The age difference should emphasize Kaoru's flaws, but instead this is considered resolution somehow. Stop kissing children!!!

– AUTUMN WRIGHT

MOVIES

THEY LIVE – Takeaways from my six-year-old son after I, a bad parent, allowed him to watch *They Live* (rated R for violence and so, so much cursing). 1. The famous fist fight is too long and “a little violent for me, Dad.” 2. The sunglasses should’ve showed everything in color rather than in black and white (being six, my son is a cinematic Philistine). 3. No matter who the apparent villain is in a movie or TV show, now he believes that ultimately “the Government is the real villain.”

– STU HORVATH



LADYBUG & CAT NOIR: The MOVIE – This is super wholesome. Also, for those who enjoyed the TV series yet craved resolution for some of the plot lines, skip the series and watch the movie. I watched in the original French and highly enjoyed it. It’s a simple tale inspired by the romance and coming-of-age antics of mahou shoujo classics like *Sailor Moon* and the action-packed sequences of shonen classics like *Dragon Ball Z* with a Disney musical twist. Caveat for those who are irked by musicals, this one is *super* musical. But the catharsis is well-earned.

– PHOENIX SIMMS

HEAT (The REST of IT) – God damn what a powerhouse. I can’t remember what I wrote earlier but I triple down on it. I never understood why Kilmer was such a beloved actor, probably because I mostly saw him as the assholes he played, but that last scene with his wife the also incredible Ashley Judd. That last turn at the end, he was telling us all along, can’t have any attachments you aren’t willing to drop in 30 seconds. Not that it worked out in the end. Hope the library has the sequel.

– LEVI RUBECK



TELEVISION



FARGO – The crushing Midwestern-ness of *Fargo*'s Season One is not just the overly polite, non-confrontational atmosphere of the show. It also exists in the ways that the show juxtaposes proposes a world where banality foments evil.

Bemidji, Minnesota is a non-descript Minnesota city like hundreds of others scattered across the midwestern United States. Important perhaps to locals but far, far away from the modestly metropolitan lives of even Minneapolis.

It's in the northern reaches of Minnesota that multiple murders accumulate. Not because the killers are devious and elusive predators but because doing so would require a kind of boldness not permitted here.

Chief of police Bill Oswalt will not listen to his deputy, Molly Solverson, who alone follows the clear breadcrumb trail to Lester Nygaard and Lorne Malvo. Molly is acting out of station, too forward in the heart of hotdish country. Lester is too mild mannered to be at the center of a murder plot. Lorne is too aware of the veil that Minnesota nice gives him to operate with impunity.

As such, both, initially, successfully navigate their way through the spiraling chaos

their chance meeting brings. None of this is due to ingenious planning but by increasingly and blatantly pushing at the boundaries of their society. Lester is too boring to be an obvious criminal despite how obvious it is. Lorne cannot be caught by a society dead set on avoiding gazing at him too hard.

It is that societal boundary that even forms the inciting incident in Bemidji. Lester is mercilessly bullied into breaking his nose, certainly a no-no in such a quiet town, and accidentally asks Lorne to kill his bully. Lester, Lorne points out, never told him *not* to do it. At home later, Lester then proceeds to murder his wife, who has spent the episode pointing out the boringness of their existence and his failure to provide her with more. In truth, Lester and Pearl's life is fine. This is too much for Lester, who has seen the power that can be accessed by scooching on past cordiality.

Such is the nature of evil as it crashes into a small town. And as Bemidji is a town like any other, so too is devil's work never done, don'tcha know.

– DAVID SHIMOMURA

TELEVISION



SCOTT PILGRIM TAKES OFF – Science SARU made both a Rebuilt, feminist retelling of Scott Pilgrim and one of the most explicitly gay anime to date. The show centers on Ramona's perspective as she adjusts to Toronto, dyes her hair and seeks closure, not revenge, with her not-so-evil exes. *Takes Off* understands how shitty the men of Scott Pilgrim the comic and film were, and makes that fact unavoidable to all the men who thought identifying with Scott wasn't totally missing the point. Like Shinji, if legions of nerdy men on the internet keep identifying with your fail son, you cannot advance.

– AUTUMN WRIGHT

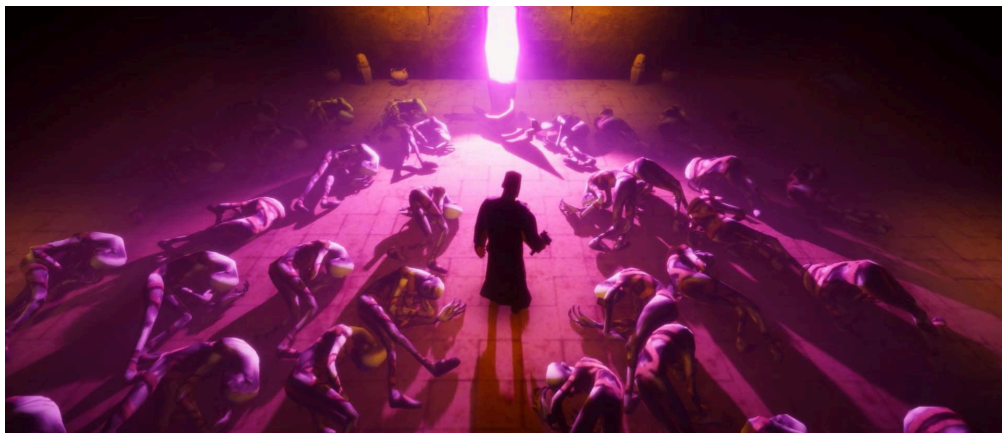
FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST: BROTHERHOOD –

At various times in my life, a messenger has arrived to tell me to watch *Fullmetal Alchemist*. I ignored these Cassandras until this month when I pushed past *that* episode and watched the rest of it. If you also waited a decade and a half to watch it, the show follows two brothers trying to get their bodies back after failing to resurrect their mom. It launched a thousand YouTube fancam tributes and it's easy to see why: the two main characters feel realistically 14 and 15, and their struggles ranging from delivering a baby to dealing with death are explored with delicateness and compassion. I'm still working on the whole thing, but I'm surprised by how good the dialogue is, how sad it is and how many times I think "I would have loved this in 2009". Sorry to everyone who told me then; but I'm enjoying it now.

– EMILY PRICE



GAMES



EL PASO, ELSEWHERE – “Addiction” as an intentional theme or possible interpretation in games is nothing new, but I don’t think I’ve ever seen a game like this where addiction is unmistakably its core *identity*.

El Paso, Elsewhere wears its *Max Payne* influence on its sleeve – a protagonist with a darkly humorous self-narration, slow-motion gun play and (of course) using painkillers as health packs. Here, though, is where the addiction starts: James Savage is a recovering drug addict, and he “threw away six months and eleven days of sobriety for a chance to save the world.” He wants to do anything besides go back on the stuff, but he needs those pills to get through the layers of hell between him and his ex-girlfriend – a vampire who wants to end everything.

Vampires and bloodlust; another well-explored metaphor for addiction, but again, *El Paso* goes deep with it. Not just the addiction she had to killing people, but the addiction James had to her. A toxic relationship that felt like salvation at first, and even now he can’t deny his lingering feelings.

“When did you know that you loved Janet Drake?”

“That day at the Ferris wheel.”

“Why are you here?”

“Ferris wheel...”

Even after she took total control over his life, purposefully making him terrified of what she was, that “one good fucking day” felt like it justified the codependency. But James put in the work to get past that, quitting the drugs, quitting her, putting in the slow effort of living on his own and finding self-worth. Realizing that you have more good days than you might think and recognizing that falling off the wagon isn’t the end of the world.

“Hey, if you lose this chip... we always have more.”

Finally, there’s how the game’s structured: Bite-sized levels that continuously offer up new challenges, enemies, environments and guns. The further down you progress, the more it rewards you. One more ride down the elevator, one more pill, one more song, one more shot; it’s infectious. You keep going.

“It’s only going to get worse from here. So why do I feel so, fucking, good?”

– VAN DENNIS

GAMES



JUSTIN'S GAME CORNER

The LAST of US – Well, I finally saw what all of the fuss was about, roughly a decade late, of course. The first part, at least. Now for the second part . . .

BAYONETTA 3 – So much style, so much substance. Wonderful.

METROID DREAD – *Metroid Dread* is frustrating and over-designed with a poorly conceived control scheme. Maybe I need to git gud, but I dun wanna.

– JUSTIN REEVE

DORDOGNE – Despite the questionable, blackface-like art on one of the albums in the grandmother's bathroom in one scene (which is apparently related to *Un Je ne Sais Quoi*'s other game) and a worrying set up for a young Black thief character, this game has been lovely so far. I'm hoping the thief character doesn't turn out to be even more disappointing representation. But there are some wonderful raw moments of inter-generational commentary in this one.

– PHOENIX SIMMS



ASSASSIN'S CREED MIRAGE – Admittedly, it took a lot of word of mouth to convince me to pick up *Valhalla* and then a month or three to get past the opening scene of family destruction, which I found strangely off-putting. Once I got into the game, though, boy did it take over my brain. I played countless hours, yet never finished the DLC, and generally count it as my favorite in the series. I've heard zero word of mouth praise for *Mirage*. So maybe it's time to really knuckle down on *Ragnarok*?

– STU HORVATH

HOROSCOPE

THE CONSTELLATIONS WRAP YOU IN AN ASTRAL COCOON, DENSE, AT TIMES SMOTHERING AND ARCANE. DO NOT FEAR, FOR THIS IS ONLY THE INTERSTICES OF THE OLD YEAR AND THE NEXT - A SHIMMERING THRESHOLD WHICH WILL HELP YOU MAKE THE NECESSARY TRANSFORMATIONS BEFORE YOU CONTINUE YOUR JOURNEY. 🍷