



THE VIDEO GAME GENERATIONS NEWSLETTER

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the VGGN. You have many choices for where to get your gaming hot-takes, news you've already heard, unhinged rants, and short reviews that are mainly an excuse to show game screenshots. Maybe you listen to podcasts. Maybe you browse social media. Maybe you visit mainstream sites staffed by people who actually get paid to investigate, research, and write articles. Maybe you've found other newsletters. Even so, I just want you to know... VGGN is one, too. It's a newsletter, I mean; and it's about video games.

I'll start with a little Q&A, where I predict your questions and provide the answers. I'm just winging this for now. I don't know where this will go. It may go nowhere, but isn't there some saying or parable about big things starting in small ways? Maybe I just made that up.

Wherever this does – or doesn't – go, thanks for checking out Issue #1.

Introductory Q & A

Q: How often do you plan to publish a new issue of the newsletter?

A: My idea is to make this a weekly thing. Daily would be silly (I'd never play any games and would need to quit my job) and monthly seems less than ideal when it comes to talking about current events. I could see it going bi-weekly or semi-monthly, but we'll see.

Q: Is this going to get political? I hate all that woke DEI garbage.

A: Yeah, you're probably in the wrong place then. Part of my motivation for doing this is because there's so much entitled stupidity out there. There's only so much I can say in response to idiotic anti-woke commenters on social media, so why not give myself my own platform to do it? It could get ugly. We'll see.

Q: Oh, so you're one of *those* people; those insufferable dorks who drone on about "empathy" and "equality."

A: That's not a question, but I don't know. Maybe?

Q: Then... just who are you?

A: My name's Mike. Nice to meet you. I'm a 53-year-old guy living in Kansas who enjoys video games. By day, I'm a senior developer and pseudo-manager for a multinational software company (not in the video game industry, sadly).

I have three kids; my oldest is wrapping up year two of college, and my twins will be high school seniors this fall.

Before I got busy with kids and career, my side hustle was as an indie game developer. Back then, it wasn't really called that. I've released games you've never heard of, some of which can't be played today because they were browser-based online multiplayer games (StarLock, Lunatix Online). You can still find the BBS and Text Adventure versions of Lunatix out there, and a lot of my other stuff (TRS-80/CoCo, DOS) is out there, but nothing really holds up.

The exception might be my later interactive fiction, like Distress and Tales of the Traveling Swordsman. Those were award-winning (in the interactive fiction community) and are still cool. I also wrote a hypertext-based adventure game you can play in your browser:

<https://www.sidneymerk.com/hallowmoor/hallowmoor.html>

Q: What is Video Game Generations?

A: It started as a podcast in July 2014 with my oldest (who was only 8 years old at the time) and ran for nearly 3 years (150 episodes, then a few solo episodes after). It was "generations" because of us being from different generations. Then I just posted mini-reviews on Twitter (before it was "X" – sigh) and now BlueSky and Threads. Now, it's also a newsletter.

Q & A - Continued

Q: Why make it a PDF? Why not just be strictly online, like a website?

A: Funny story. It's because I had a dream last week where I was publishing a print magazine, and I was in a panic because the latest issue was overdue. I woke up and couldn't sleep afterwards; not because it was scary, but because I started thinking, what if I actually *did* make my own magazine? The idea for a newsletter evolved from there. I thought it would be interesting to follow a sort of print-like format and make it something that could be easily downloaded.



Q: Wait, does that mean you plan to charge for this at some point?

A: Not necessarily. I mean, I guess if it got super popular, and I was writing stuff that was incredibly cool and original, and I built a big fan base like some of the gaming influencers and personalities out there have, then *maybe* a Patreon or something. I don't have any such plans or delusions at present.

Q: Is this all just a one-man show?

Well, this issue is. I'd like to grow it, though. I'd like to include contributed content, maybe do interviews, get exclusives, put in feedback from readers and so forth. It's tough when it's just a hobby. "Hey, person smarter and better at writing, how about spending some time on an article I can't pay you for?"

A newsletter is certainly easier and less awkward than doing a solo podcast. I know that from experience.

Nintendo Switch 2 Thoughts

I don't think I've ever been less excited about the launch of a new console than I am with Nintendo Switch 2. I'm sure I'll get one at some point, but a couple things in particular kind of doused my interest before pre-orders even went live.

Surprisingly, it's not because of the cost of the console itself. That's a one-time investment (usually) and \$450 isn't beyond reason. My first hang-up is with game prices jumping a whopping 33%, from \$60 to \$80 (yes, I know TotK was \$70, and I bought it).

And sure, maybe it's not *all* games, and sure, other publishers/platforms will follow suit (our economy is kind of hosed), but I tend to buy a *lot* of games. It adds up quickly or means fewer purchases; neither ideal.

The bigger reason, though, is Game Key Cards. Publishers have dabbled in similar concepts, particularly WB with Hogwarts Legacy and Ubisoft with Star Wars Outlaws, Avatar, and Assassin's Creed Shadows, where the disc is just a small kernel to authorize a download of the full game.

The biggest counterpoint to this I hear is often from a point of misinformation. Gamers tend to think discs and cartridges haven't contained the full game for the last couple console generations. That's *partially* true, but only in the sense that nearly every game gets one or more post-release patches, which often fix issues, balance gameplay, introduce new features, or in some cases alleviate game-breaking bugs.

The norm, though, is that a 1.0 version of the game is there on the physical media. Twenty or thirty years from now when those servers inevitably shut down, it's uncertain if we'll even be able to download and install those games at all.

I may not be around in thirty years; heck, I might not be around in ten years, having survived a heart attack at 38, necessitating a triple bypass. My kids will be, though. Even aside from that, just from my collector's mindset, having a disc or cartridge with an unpatched, less than perfect version of a game is far better than no game at all. At that point, the disc is just a silver coaster with fancy art. Sure, discs won't last forever either, but I'll take a few more decades over the uncertainty of the so-called all-digital future.

That said, we do need digital preservation for the long term, but that's another topic, and I'm getting a bit sidetracked here as it is.

All this to say, a Switch 2 Key Card is worth absolutely nothing to me, and I suspect, to other like-minded fans of physical releases. With it, you gain the ability to trade, lend, and sell your games. However, you get that same ability when the game is actually there on the cartridge. You also *lose* the convenience of your digital library and *gain* the risk of losing the cartridge or having it stolen just like any physical media.

It's only a win for the publishers and platform holders. It's certainly not in a gamer's best interest. If you want digital, buy digital. If you want physical, you don't really want a Game Key Card.

In the case of Switch 2, I've heard there's a stricter limit on file sizes. We're seeing Key Card versions of games that would easily fit, though. Some disc-based games have simply been released on two discs; that goes back many console generations. Couldn't we have two-card Switch 2 releases?

All this to say, I'm not excited about Switch 2 yet.

I recommend the website **Does It Play** at <https://www.doesitplay.org/> or <https://x.com/DoesItPlay1> for good coverage about what you're getting with a variety of physical game releases they evaluate and review.

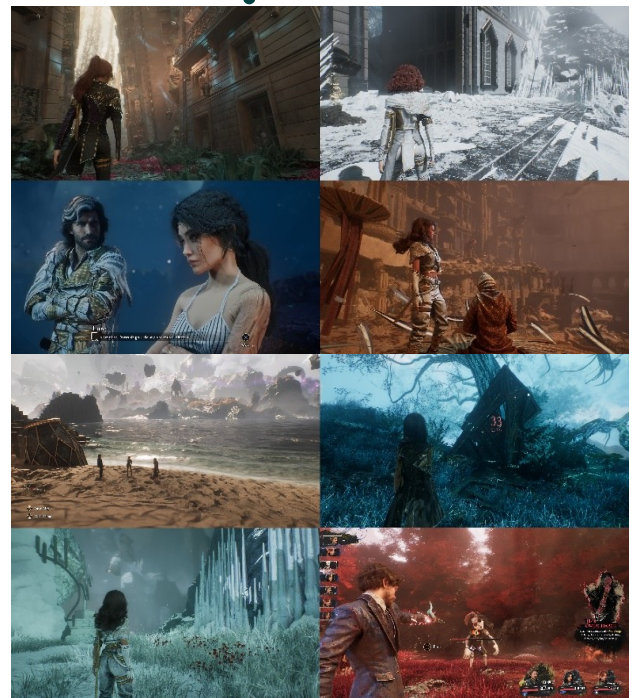
Mini-Review: Clair Obscur — Expedition 33

I can't imagine what could take the place of this as my Game of the Year for 2025. It's a turn-based RPG, but real-time dodging, parrying, and skill boosting demand quick reflexes a la Paper Mario, especially against tough bosses or at higher difficulties. If there's an opposite of generic in regards to video games, Expedition 33 is it.

Everything about it is stylish and creative; the world, the story, the flashy combat, the enemy design, the art style, the music -- especially the music, because it sets a tone and enhances everything from emotional scenes to combat to general exploration. The developers at Sandfall Interactive just get it. Maybe hyperbolic, but this has the makings of a modern classic. It may become some people's favorite game ever. I love love loved it.

Played on console: PS5 Pro.

Originally posted @vggenerations on social media, 5/5/2025.



Mini-Review: Cat's Request

If I ever get back into indie game development myself, I imagine I'd start with something like this; a side-scrolling point-and-click adventure with strange music, a Flash game-like art style and animation, and an equally weird story. It might not be about anthropomorphic animals living in the far future (or on an alien planet) with androids and AI, but I'm a big fan of these kinds of puzzle games.

This one is on the easier side, not requiring big leaps in logic to solve and not requiring you to combine chewing gum with a wet stick and a hook to make some crazy doodad you didn't even know you needed. It also tracks clues and objectives for you, has fast travel and simplifies all actions to single context-sensitive clicks (use an item, look at, or pick up).

By no means innovative, but fun!

Played on console: PS5 Pro.

Originally posted on 4/25/2025.



Credits

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The cartoon of a guy who kind of looks a little like me dreaming about making a video game magazine and the VGGN mountain logo were from generative AI using ChatGPT. Yes, I know, I know, but I'm just one guy with neither artistic talent nor a budget.

Screenshots for video game mini-reviews were captured by me in-game and are used here (as well as when originally posted on social media sites) in what I believe qualifies as "fair use".

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