THE VIDEO GAME GENERATIONS NEWSLETTER

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Issue #16 – August 23, 2025

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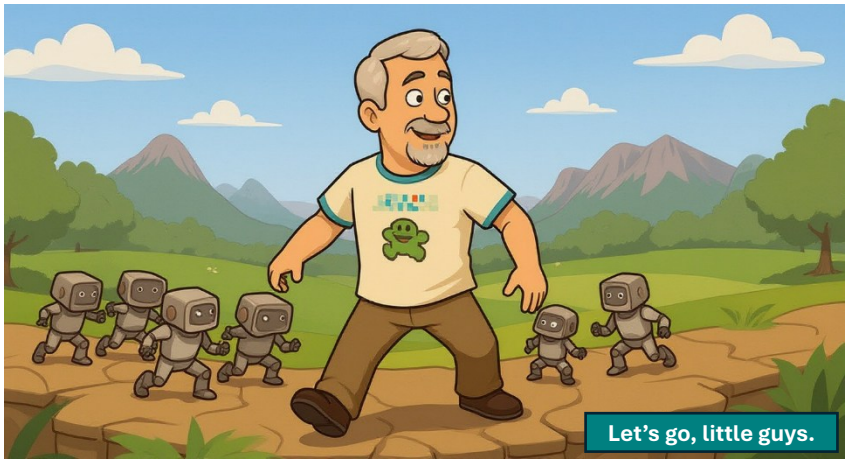
Loading Screen

Who's your favorite sidekick or companion in a video game? This week, I'm ranking the "little guys" from among the games I've played.



Several self-imposed restrictions help me get it down to a manageable list of thirty sidekicks. Kids (humans) end up in their own top ten list after the main feature. As usual, I've also included several mini-reviews for games that fit this week's theme, taken from my prior social media posts.

First up, though: news you've likely already heard. I wanted to recap my favorite announcements from Gamescom Opening Night Live this week, but I just ran out of time. Anyway, enough introductory rambling. Let's get on with the main rambling now.

Recent Events

PlayStation Raises Console Prices

In an unsurprising move, yet one that felt less inevitable after several months of silence on the topic, Sony has raised the price of PS5 consoles in North America by $50 across the board. We're living in bizarre times, ya'll.

Hardware usually gets *less* expensive as a console generation advances, yet exactly the opposite is happening. We all know who to blame for it, and I'm about to lose all patience with people who continue to support that clown and make excuses for his bigotry and stupidity. Sorry; a bit of a tangent there.

I took the plunge and bought a PS5 Pro earlier this year (and a disc drive after I found one in stock without a ridiculous reseller markup), when the first hints of price hikes on all sorts of electronics began to seem likely.

I may be due for another rant about the future of this hobby soon. Games won't go away, certainly, but who's going to be excited about the next generation of consoles if we can expect bigger specs to drive prices up from what they have already become in this gen?

I'm getting old enough now, and it's already impossible for me to play every game I own even if I live another 50 years (spoiler: with my heart condition, I won't), that maybe I just don't even need a PS6 or Xbox Series Q or the next Nintendo "We Doubled Down on Game Key Cards" Switch.

The problem with price increases is that they're rarely temporary. Sure, it's due to "a challenging economic environment" today (Sony's words), but it'll be "consumers are used to it, so let's keep it going" tomorrow.

Source:
https://blog.playstation.com/2025/08/20/playstation-5-price-changes-in-the-u-s/

Cloud Chamber Joins the Layoff Club

The studio making the next *Bioshock* game has reportedly fired around 80 of their staff, while also hiring Rod Fergusson (who just recently left Blizzard after leading up the team behind *Diablo IV*, which he did after leaving The Coalition and the *Gears of War* franchise).

I keep saying it, but there's something deeply wrong with game development as a career in the past couple of years. Studios no longer get a second chance; often, not even a *first* chance if the people holding the purse strings get cold feet about an upcoming project.

It seems like the industry is collapsing around us or is poised to morph into something other than what it's been up until now.

Source:
https://www.theverge.com/news/762933/bioshock-cloud-chamber-take-two-2k-layoffs

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Hollow Knight: Silksong - Yes, It's Real

Of course it's real, but it's been a bit of a joke among video game reporters and podcasters for quite a while. After a few teases (including one at Gamescom Opening Night Live), Team Cherry announced in a new trailer that it's set to release on September 4th this year. That's under two weeks from now.

As much as I loved *Hollow Knight* (it might be the best Metroidvania ever made), the sequel just hasn't had me tingling with anticipation. I don't know why. I'll certainly get it, but unless my son insists (he hasn't even played the first one yet, but wants to), maybe not at launch. It looks fantastic, though. Maybe I won't wait.

Source:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XGeJwsUP9c

Little Guys – Sidekicks and Companions

I keep a list of possible feature topics. It's ever-growing but often filled with top-level ideas that I'm not ready to use for one reason or another. Sometimes it's because there are a few more games I want to play first (ex: at least one *Police Quest* before I write about police in video games). Other times, I just don't have a good angle, or a good idea of what I want to write *about*, beyond just the general theme or idea.

Such has been the case with "little guy" companions and sidekicks in video games. I added the idea to my list not long ago, on August 8th, after listening to a tangent discussion about it on the *Kinda Funny Games Daily* podcast. I tried reaching out to both hosts from that episode on Threads, but I don't think they have time to reply to random messages from people not already in their inner circle. Either that, or they didn't see it.

To start, I came up with as many "little guy" sidekicks as I could, sticking to just the games I've played. Then, I had to think about whether they're *really* a "little" guy or girl or robot or alien or whatever the case may be. Any companion smaller than the main character was fair game for the first pass. That meant I needed to cut Yoshi (appearing in *Super Mario World*, for instance) because he's *at least* as big as Mario. And no, Mimir is not a "little guy".

Next, I decided to cut companions that I don't even remember but had originally included by doing some initial research. These are games I played, but I wouldn't have remembered there was a companion at all without the reminder.

This meant cutting Dinki-Di (apparently a dog you get in the *Mad Max* game) and Sein (a little sprite that accompanies you and helps in *Ori and the Blind Forest*).

Next – and this was tough – I decided that including human children wasn't really in the spirit of the topic. I couldn't eliminate them *entirely*, though, so one does make it into the main feature, and I'll wrap up with a top 10 list of kid sidekicks/companions afterwards.

Narrowing down the list even further became difficult after that. Next to go were characters that only show up on-demand or in specific situations. These cuts included Senu and Ikaros, the eagle companions from *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey* and *Assassin's Creed: Origins* respectively, robotic dog Rush from some of the *Mega Man* games, the Cheshire Cat from *Alice: Madness Returns*, and ClapTrap from *Borderlands*. I didn't cut *every* companion that might fit this definition, but I'll point that out when I get there.

Additional cuts were made to joke sidekicks or non-autonomous and non-sentient ones, like the Companion Cube from *Portal* and the drones in *Watch Dogs 2*. I also cut Hoji, a spirit that accompanies Lo Wang in *Shadow Warrior*, because he sometimes appears in full-sized form, not just a floating mask.

Everything else is fair game, so long as (1) they accompany the main character for at least a good portion of the game, (2) they're smaller than the main character, (3) a reasonable person might call them a sidekick to the main character, and (4) I've played their game.

In addition to ranking them, I'm putting them into six tiers: F, D, C, B, A and S, which of course goes from worst to best. My criteria are little more than my gut feelings. Are they important to the story? Do they help much? Are they iconic and memorable? Are they annoying or endearing? How much do they align with the "little guy sidekick" theme?

The F Tier

I already regret having an F tier, but I wanted to split up my list of 30 into equal-sized sets. I guess I could have put 6 characters into each of 5 tiers instead of 6 tiers of 5 characters, but I really wanted to express my disdain for this first one. The others, I don't feel strongly about at all. They just happen to rank lower for me than the rest. That's how counting works.

#30: Turing

2064: Read Only Memories

It isn't often that I actively and strongly dislike a game yet still play through to the end. For that matter, it isn't often that I strongly dislike a game at all, but something about this one just pushed all my buttons. Turing, you must be one of the most insufferable and annoying characters in any video game ever.

In my social media capsule review, I said:

> "Cyberpunk visual novel disguised as pixel/retro point-and-click adventure. Insufferable characters, except Lexi and maybe Tomcat. Clunky controls. Broken save/continue requires manual save/load. Frustrating endgame. Kinda hated it."

#29: Boots

Dora the Explorer – Barnyard Buddies

Sorry, Boots. As monkey sidekicks go, I can think of at least one other I'd rather take along on an adventure.

To your credit, you actually talk and seem intelligent beyond your young age, and I had fun playing your game with my oldest daughter when she was only 2 ½.

#28: CHAR-les

Atomic Heart

You let me down, CHAR-les. I won't go into details about why, since this is one of my favorite games ever and I want more people to play it, so I'm avoiding spoilers, but still.

Initially introduced as an AI built into a glove obtained and worn by the main character, he's there through almost the entire game as a guide and companion.

Image found at an *Atomic Heart* Wiki here.

#27: Co-Star Luma (Helper Star)

Super Mario Galaxy 2

It's definitely a cute "little guy" type of sidekick, and quite helpful when your co-op partner is five years old but wants to play too.

Image found at a *Mario* Wiki here.

#26: Ghost (Dinklebot)

Destiny

I played through the original *Destiny* at launch, and the demo that preceded it. I don't remember much about the original "Ghost" other than Peter Dinklage's phoned-in lines.

The D Tier

We're in "most people probably don't even know these characters" territory in the D tier. These are all cool companions (more or less), but they rank lower for their limited notoriety.

#25: 808

Hi-Fi Rush

Welcome to the list, 808. This robotic cat, a creation of the NPC Peppermint, helps the main character Chai through his rhythmic battles by keeping the beat and by serving as a communicator for his growing group of friends back at their hideout.

#24: Crouton

South of Midnight

Hazel's weird, stitched-together childhood doll comes to life "by magic" to aid her in her journey to rescue her mother against a backdrop of deep south mythology and stop-motion animation.

Crouton is doubly helpful in that you can set him loose and control him to enter small gaps to collect things and open new paths or launch him in battle to possess enemies and make them fight on your side for a short while.

#23: Drippy

Ni No Kuni

I didn't intentionally list two dolls that come to life by magic in a row, but here we are. Drippy, though, was only in doll form by a curse, until the main character Oliver's tears restore him. He then leads Oliver on an epic adventure into another world, Studio Ghibli style.

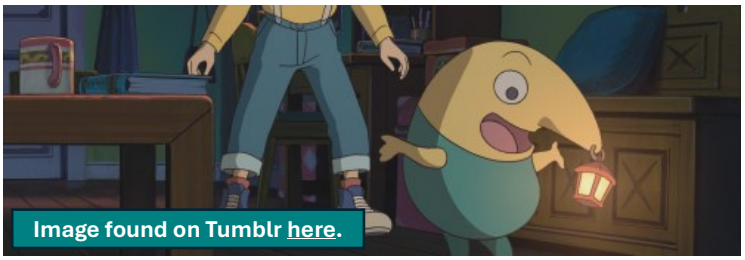


Image found on Tumblr here.

#22: Riki and Tora

Xenoblade Chronicles 1 and 2

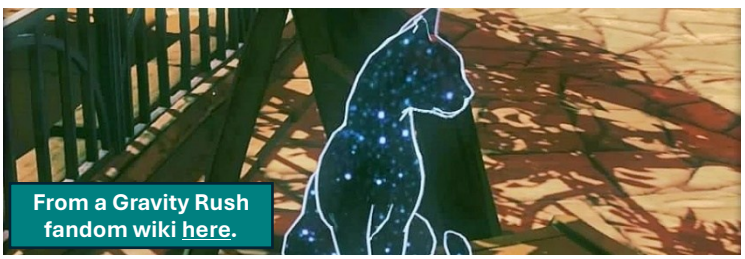
Sure, I'm cheating a bit with the inclusion of two characters from two games as one entry. Riki and Tora are Nopons, a race of fuzzy little guys and girls that make an appearance in every Xenoblade game. Some people find them annoying. I think they're pretty cool.

The images of Riki (left) found here and Tora (right) found here.

#21: Dusty

Gravity Rush 1 and 2

A black cat that looks like it was fashioned out of outer space itself accompanies Kat on her adventures and provides the gravity-shifting power that makes those games memorable.



From a Gravity Rush fandom wiki here.

The C Tier

In the C tier, you're bound to recognize at least one or two of these little companions.

#20: Dogmeat

Fallout (series)

Although Fawkes was my favored companion in *Fallout 3* (incidentally, my favorite game of all time), Dogmeat was always good to have around too, because he can find things. Also, he doesn't prevent you from having another more traditional traveling companion too.

A screenshot of Dogmeat found at deviantart.com here.

#19: The Rot

Kena: Bridge of Spirits

These little guys are far too cute to have such an unappealing name. As Kena collects more and more of them, they follow along on the journey. They help in a variety of ways, and you can even dress them up in little hats.

On another note, what is Ember Lab doing since the release of this game? Even though my mini-review (included later) comes across as a bit lukewarm on the game, I appreciate it more in retrospect and would have liked to see a sequel or a new game from this studio.

#18: Laylee

Yooka-Laylee (series)

Sure, two games don't really make it a series, but a guy can hope. I liked the first game way more than most people. The second one was better received, although the last level was nightmarishly difficult. Technically, Laylee (the purple bat) serves as ½ of the playable character (much the way Kazooie does in *Banjo-Kazooie*, which I shamefully have never played), but I'm counting her for this list.

#17: Kenny

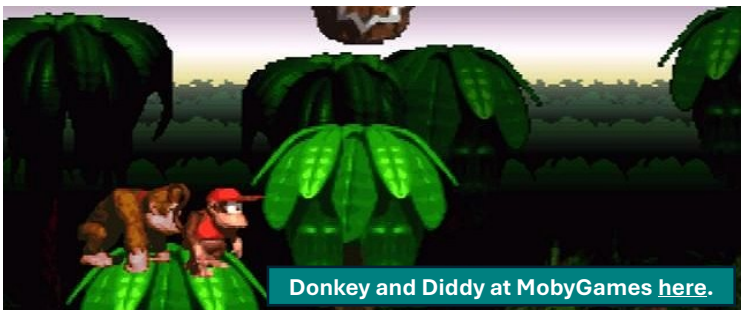
High On Life

You're probably thinking "wait, that's really a stretch" but hear me out. Kenny's a gun, but he's alive; an alien race called Gatlians. He's not the *only* gun sidekick you get, but he's the most prominent and the one you find first.

#16: Diddy Kong

Donkey Kong Country (series)

He's playable, and he even stars as the lead in the second game, but I still think of Diddy as a sidekick and companion to Donkey Kong.



Donkey and Diddy at MobyGames here.

The B Tier

The B tier begins the second half of this list and ends with a couple of companions that should be even more recognizable. This is where it starts to become difficult to rank these little guys, but hey, I did my best.

#15: The Boy

Clash: Artifacts of Chaos

If Atreus from *God of War* came to mind when reading the title, I apologize. There isn't another name for the little bird kid that serves as a ward and companion to Pseudo, the main character of this game. Obscure though this character may be, the game is great and the importance of The Boy to the plot prevents me from ranking him any lower than this.

#14: Dicey

Lost in Random

One of the most unusual sidekicks on this list has to be Dicey, a sentient dice cube that speaks gibberish that the main character is somehow able to understand.

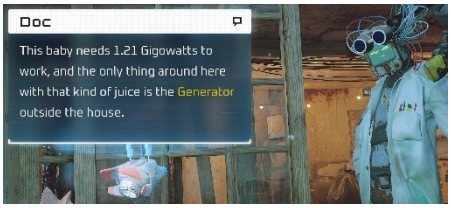
This little guy makes combat possible, by powering up Even's ability to use cards, which themselves are important in combat.

There's a sequel to *Lost in Random* called *The Eternal Die*, but it's supposedly roguelike, and that isn't a genre or format I tend to enjoy.

#13: B-12

Stray

In a world of robots, you play as a stray cat who finds a little drone. They go on a journey together, with B-12 serving as a guide.



#12: Cappy

Super Mario Odyssey

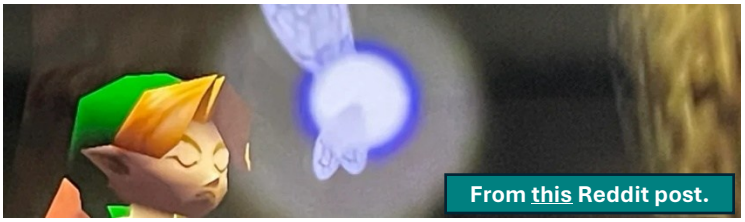
For his usefulness, Cappy (named with a double meaning; he's a "cap" but can also "capture" enemies) should probably rank higher. He's integral to the entire gameplay experience in *Super Mario Odyssey* and serves as Mario's companion for its entirety.

An honorable mention goes to Fludd in *Super Mario Sunshine*, and I don't care what popular opinion says. I thought it was a good game.

#11: Navi

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time

Navi has iconic companion status, if nothing else. Her "hey, listen" may be a meme at this point, but it always meant she had something important to say. Well, it meant she had *something* to say. You're a good friend, Navi.



The A Tier

We're in the top 10 now. If my earlier picks weren't controversial enough, hold your hats.

#10: Morgana

Persona 5

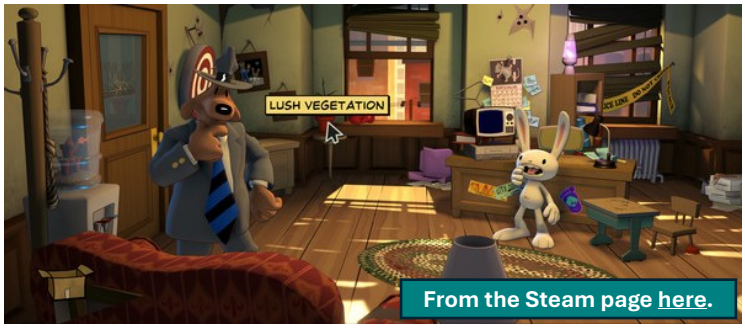
Mascot, companion, and guide; Morgana is an important member of *Persona 5*'s Phantom Thieves. Is he a human boy turned into a cat, or just a magical talking cat? I'm not telling.

#9: Max

Sam & Max (series)

These characters pre-date the *Sam & Max* trilogy from TellTale games, but I became acquainted with this little foul-mouthed wisecracking maniac (an anthropomorphic rabbit-like detective) in *Sam & Max Save The World*, the game's first TellTale season.

I never played the later seasons, but I want to. Max makes the top 10 because he's iconic (at least in adventure game circles), he's a little guy, and he's most certainly a sidekick.



#8: Lou

Death Stranding 1 and 2

The narrative path this BB (Bridge Baby) takes from *DS1* to the end of *DS2* is remarkable. It may seem that a baby in a bottle is more of a burden to Sam Porter Bridges than a boon, but Sam doesn't see it that way. Without Lou (in the first game, in particular), he wouldn't be able to easily detect the presence of BTs. This is my one exception to the "no humans" rule.

#7: Pikachu

Pokémon Yellow

Until now, I've included companions only from the games I've played. This is a cheat, because I never played the game most known for having Pikachu as a companion, but I did play *Pokémon Pearl*, and I did watch the first movie, and I can't just *not* include Pikachu.

#6: Nix

Star Wars: Outlaws

This little guy is ever-present in Kay Vess's adventures as an outlaw. Although the game didn't hit for everybody (I loved it, and I'll include my *Outlaws* mini-review in a future issue), you can't fault Nix for anything. Just look at this little guy! Just look at him! Any self-respecting outlaw in the Star Wars universe would be happy to have this faithful little merqaal as a companion and sidekick.

The S Tier

My top five little guy companions make up the final set, the S tier. How well did my list match up to your own favorite little companions in video games? If the answer is "not very much" then I won't be at all surprised.

#5: Wheatley

Portal 2

At the risk of spoiling a game you should have played by now, Wheatley isn't with Chell the whole way through, but he leaves a lasting impression in those first few hours.

Stephen Merchant's performance as this neurotic little AI core is perfect. This might not be a typical sidekick, but he's high on my list.

From a Portal wiki here.

#4: BD-1

Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order and *Survivor*

Cal Kestis finds this little droid on the planet Bogano early in the first game. From that point on, the two are inseparable. He's a friend and a helpful companion in Cal's travels.

#3: The Blob

A Boy and His Blob

This little alien blob is one of the most useful and versatile sidekicks I've included, aside from maybe Cappy. Feed him different flavors of jellybeans, and he'll become a ladder, a trampoline, an anvil, a bridge, a rocket, or even a hole (somehow), among other things.

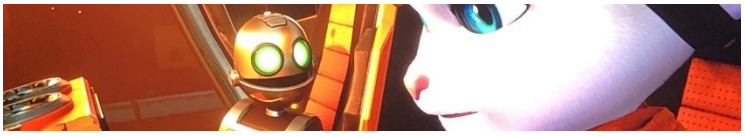
From here.

From here.

#2: Clank

Ratchet & Clank (series)

I nearly put Ratchet's robotic sidekick Clank at #1, since his series has more recent entries and (in theory) is still relevant and ongoing.



#1: Daxter

Jak and Daxter (series)

Daxter wasn't always a half-weasel, half-otter "otsel" but he fell into a pit of Dark Eco in the first game's opening cutscene.

From that point on, he remains Jak's little wisecracking sidekick, but he looks like this.

Top 10 Kid Companions

Even though I decided to consider human children off-topic as "little guy sidekicks" (with one notable exception), this feature wouldn't be complete without at least giving them their own list. I'm probably missing some obvious examples, but these come from the games I've played myself.

Let's look first at a few kids I *didn't* include.

I excluded Elizabeth from *Bioshock Infinite*, because she's not really a little kid. Yorda from *Ico* is probably a teenager, but most likely older than the protagonist himself, so she's excluded.

Ashley in *Resident Evil 4* is a young adult, so no. Maya in the *Ace Attorney* series is an older teen and later an adult. In *Borderlands 2*, Tiny Tina isn't really a sidekick.

Baby Mario in *Yoshi's Island* doesn't really fit with the rest of the list. Haruka in *Yakuza 1* was a possible choice, but she doesn't really accompany or help Kiryu in the game. Lastly, I very nearly included Alice (the little girl that Kara saves in *Detroit: Become Human*) until I remembered an important (spoiler) plot point.

#10: Gwen Paddock

Lost Horizon 2

The cover art for this game might be trying to invoke a Joel and Ellie vibe. It's a point-and-click adventure where Gwen accompanies her father Fenton on a globetrotting journey, but I was a bit let down (by pretty much all aspects of the game) when I played it.

#9: Natalia Korda

Resident Evil Revelations 2

This ten-year-old girl with super-powers is Barry Burton's sidekick in his half of *Resident Evil Revelations 2*. I remember enjoying the game when I played it, but I'll be honest. I didn't remember the characters or plot of this game at all until I started researching it.

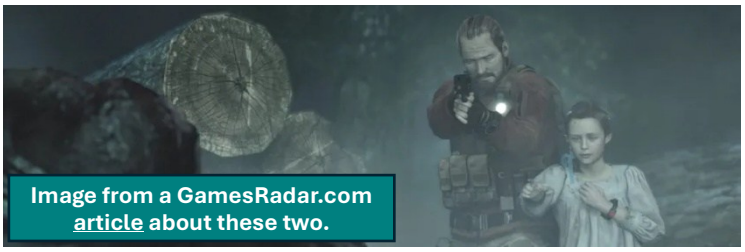


Image from a GamesRadar.com article about these two.

#8: Hugo de Rune

A Plague Tale Innocence and *Requiem*

Some gamers *really* don't like this kid.

Sure, he's pretty helpless through much of the first game, and his big sister Amicia (the main playable character) is constantly in danger because of him but come on, guys. He's just a little boy. Sure, he's a little boy with the power to command rats in a 14th-century France that's *plagued* by them, on the run from the Inquisition, but none of that is his fault.

#7: Patricia Woods

Deadly Premonition 2

York's second outing gives him this ten-year-old precocious tag-along. She manages to force him into signing an "official" agreement to protect her and make her his little deputy.

#6: Daniel Diaz

Life is Strange 2

In another "on the run" situation, you play as Sean Diaz, on the run with his little brother Daniel, who discovers he has the power of telekinesis. It's a five-part narrative adventure with choices and plenty of consequences.

#5: Cooke and Mack

Lost Odyssey

First off, this turn-based JRPG is absolutely fantastic. It's a look at what *Final Fantasy 13* might have been in an alternate reality. If you have the means to play it, you should.

Second, I found it unusual and interesting that two of your party members are kids; siblings Cooke and Mack. You don't often see that, unless it's a game where they're *all* kids.

#4: Luke Triton

Professor Layton (series)

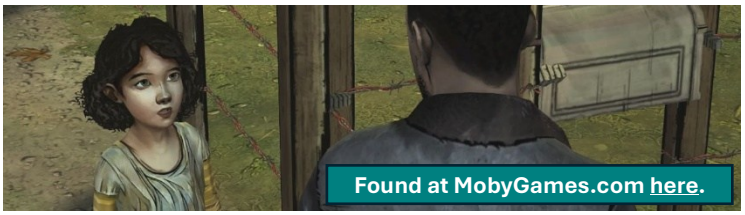
He's Layton's little puzzle-solving helper.

Image found here.

#3: Clementine

TellTale's The Walking Dead - Season 1

It's the first season (the only one I played) where Clem is taken under protagonist Lee Everett's protection. I don't know if it's fair to call her a companion or sidekick, but she's certainly important to Lee's journey and it's her own story that continues the series.



Found at MobyGames.com here.

#2: Ellie Williams

The Last of Us

Shocking nobody, probably, Ellie is near the top of this list. As this is my second favorite game of all time, I was very tempted to put her at the top spot. She's no longer just Joel's companion in the second game, sure, but her role as a sidekick in the first game is iconic.

Ellie, Joel, and Tess from here.

#1: Atreus

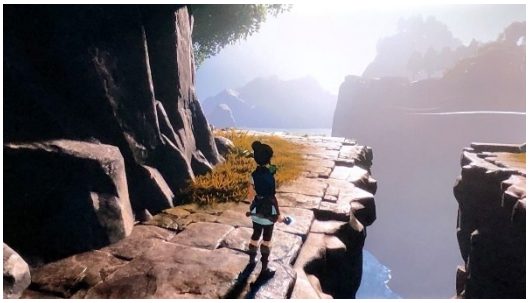
God of War (2018) and *God of War: Ragnarök*

The ultimate kid companion is, of course Atreus in the *God of War* 2018 reboot. Okay, technically not a "reboot" maybe, but it might as well be for its drastic departure from the style and tone of the earlier games.

Will Atreus replace Kratos in the next game?

Kratos and son (Atreus, AKA "Boy") - GOW 2018's Steam page.

Mini-Review: Kena - Bridge of Spirits



It's a charming third-person action adventure with a Pixar-ish art style and a *Zelda*-ish world of enemies and puzzles.

The combat gets increasingly complex as new abilities are added (bow, bombs, dash, and "rot" abilities) and during more intense encounters, my fingers just wouldn't cooperate. Granted, I remapped attacks from R1/R2 to Square/Triangle thinking it'd be more my style, but that made some combo actions tricky.

Normal mode would be Hard in another game, with boss battles pushing my abilities to the breaking point, but it felt rewarding until the last boss. It's a situation where I knew *what* to do; just, my reflexes wouldn't get me there. Ultimately, I did Easy mode, which was way *too* easy, so (shrug).

I really liked *Kena*, but somehow never crossed over into loving it.

Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 11/28/2021.

Mini-Review: Hi-Fi Rush

It's as good as everybody says it is, although it was only when the licensed song in chapter 11 kicked in that everything clicked and I really started loving it; and now I know why it reminded me so much of some long-lost song from The Smashing Pumpkins.

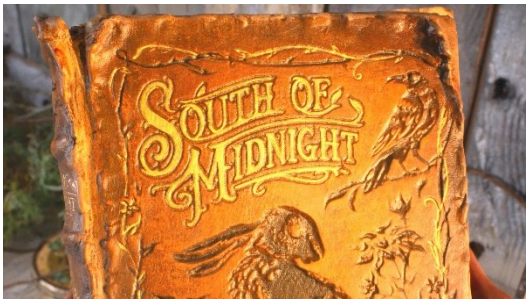
Then a Nine Inch Nails track (not a favorite, but still) and my ten or so hours playing *Hi-Fi Rush* were over. There's a big post-game to it and I'd love to play more, but there's just so much else out now and in the next few weeks.

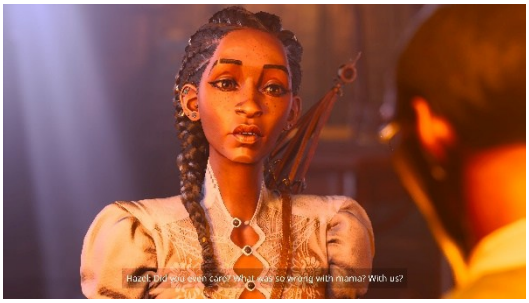
It's pretty surprising to come out of the studio that made *The Evil Within* and *Ghostwire Tokyo*. It's a Saturday morning cartoon of a third-person action platformer where rhythm and timing help you take on enemies and bosses; easy to learn, hard to master, but not too difficult on Normal.

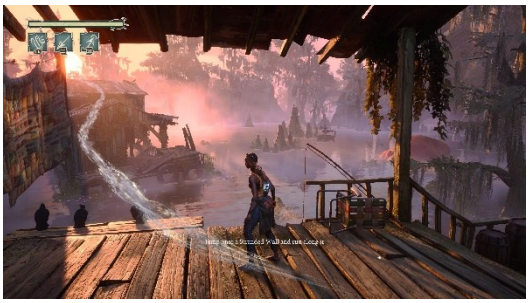
Great game.

Played on Xbox Series X with GamePass. Posted: 04/22/2023.

Mini-Review: South of Midnight







To their credit, Compulsion Games never makes the same game twice. The studio who made the PS4 launch title *Contrast* and the alternate history dystopian *We Happy Few* is now owned by Microsoft.

Their latest game is set in the American deep south in modern day, but it draws on myths and legends (presumably invented for the game) to give it a more historical, larger-than-life feel. As Hazel Flood, players gain the powers of a Weaver which help in traversal and combat. It's similar in gameplay to *Psychonauts 2* and *Ratchet & Clank*, or other third-person platforming action-adventure games.

Combat encounters are restricted to what's basically arenas you enter. I never vibed with the combat, but everything else, very much so. Beautiful environments, wonderful art style.

Played on Xbox Series X with GamePass. Posted: 08/03/2025.

Mini-Review: The Impossible Lair

Full title: *Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair*

A beautiful-looking 2.5D platformer that's fun and fair, up until the last level, with collectibles a-plenty and an overworld of shortcuts and puzzles. I liked it a lot, but in contrast, I *loved* the first *Yooka-Laylee*.

The first game offered N64-inspired full 3D motion and gameplay, which resonated more with me. *Impossible Lair* is still really good, with creative levels and some great music (particularly 2-2 Factory Fright Flooded and 14-1 Hazard Hanger).

The final boss level though… Sheesh. I made it about 40% after several lengthy attempts.

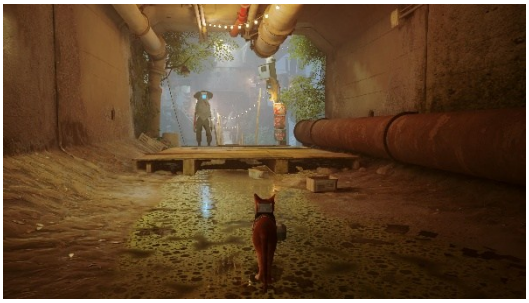
I get the concept: practice, repeat, learn, get better, finally triumph. I'm so far away from it though, even with all else unlocked, that I may give up. It's a chore. It's way too frustrating, but recommended for what comes before.

Addendum:

After several hours' practice and 50+ failed attempts, I finally beat the last level. I got to where I could get 50% on 6 to 8 lives. Was down to 0 shortly into the last boss fight, then lost Laylee halfway into the final stretch. Somehow, though, I made it!

Played on console: PS4.
Originally posted: 12/22/2019.

Mini-Review: Stray



Despite a PSN trophy that wants you to speed-run it in under two hours, the best way to enjoy *Stray* is to take your time. The game's post-apocalyptic world is full of interesting sights and robotic citizens. There are a few dangers along the way, but your adventure as an ordinary stray cat (given human intelligence only because you as the player are controlling him/her) is a journey worth taking.

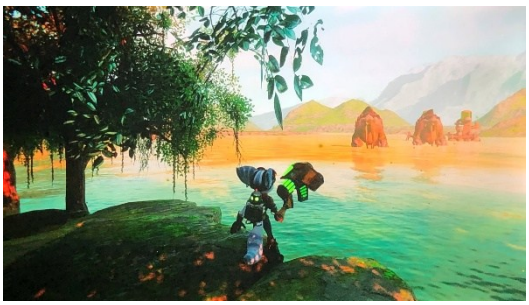
There are a few optional activities that yield trophies or collectibles. These involve exploring off the main path, helping the robots you meet, and solving a few simple puzzles.

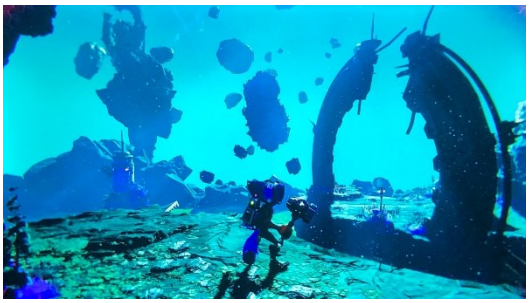
What's happening now and what happened in the distant past to bring about this bleak future form an engaging story that unfolds as your little drone companion regains all his memories.

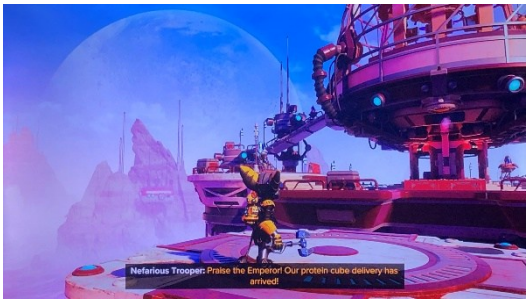
I thoroughly enjoyed my time as the *Stray*.

Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 09/24/2022.

Mini-Review: Ratchet & Clank – Rift Apart







My *Ratchet & Clank* history is limited mainly to the 2016 reboot, and now *Rift Apart*. I remember really enjoying that one, but this seems like it's on a whole different level.

It's fantastic. Part of that is certainly thanks to next-gen power and features like the haptics of the controller and the stunning environments in visual fidelity mode.

The gameplay is great. It's a 3D platformer, but not in the sense that it wants you to master lengthy tricky sections.

It's more a third person action/shooter with platforming. Weapon variety, great characters, a fun story, five difficulty settings, a fun and fairly easy platinum, colorful worlds, over-the-top action... maybe this reads like an ad, but I loved it.

I'm still no fan of Sony's next-gen up-charge, but at least this time it wasn't money wasted.

Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 06/14/2021.

Mini-Review: Lost Odyssey

The creator of *Final Fantasy* founded Mistwalker and released *Lost Odyssey* in 2008 as an Xbox exclusive (following *Blue Dragon*, which I've not yet played).

If somebody told me this *was* a *Final Fantasy*, I'd easily believe it. You don't get Chocobos, but there are Moogle-like frog guys. There's even a ship captain Sid... ahem, I mean Sed.

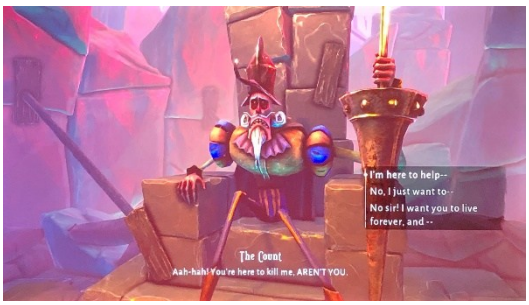
It's *Final Fantasy* in its presentation, story, turn-based menu-driven combat and sounds. Even the music and flourishes are like an alternate-reality *FF*.

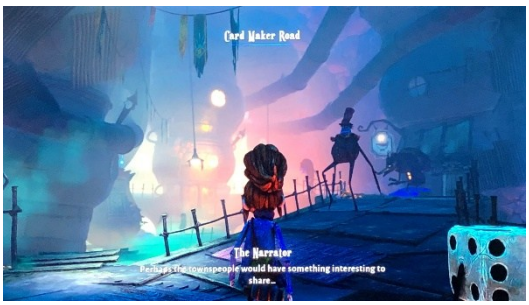
But how is it as a game?

It's great. There's a lot to like in the magic/ability upgrade system. There are well-written text mini-stories set in Kaim's thousand-year-long life. It all holds up incredibly well and it's one of the best Xbox 360 games I'd never played. Well worth it.

Xbox 360 game played on Xbox Series X. Posted: 05/31/2022.

Mini-Review: Lost in Random





Before I started this game, I didn't realize it was a third-person action adventure, or that it was from the developers of *Stick It to the Man* (which I never played, but my son pointed it out when he noticed the similar art style). And stylish it is.

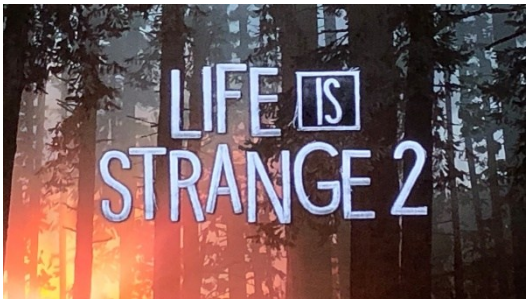
It reminded me of *Alice: Madness Returns* in presentation and the dark fairy tale fantasy-type theme.

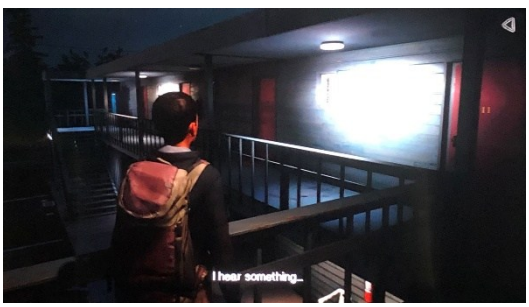
The combat system blends ranged and melee attacks with a card-draw mechanic that provides various temporary abilities. It takes some getting used to (as does the slower, less agile movement of main character Even) but it's pretty cool once I got the hang of it.

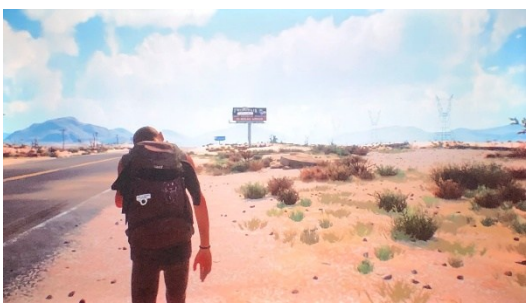
The adventure takes you through several towns and areas with a good story, some side quests and many great moments. I totally loved this game. I'd heard it was good, but wow. It's great.

Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 12/30/2021.

Mini-Review: Life is Strange 2







It's a testament to the game's memorable, well-crafted story that the events of the first four episodes felt fresh in my mind even though it was several weeks later before I played and finished the last episode.

You play as new character Sean, who must look after his younger brother Daniel, after a situation involving the younger Diaz's recently-manifested power. As with Max and Chloe's story in the first game, it's as much about their relationship and the people they meet, as much as the power itself.

There are plenty of interesting side characters, emotional moments.

Gameplay is mostly conversation choices, decisions, looking at stuff; seeing how your actions turn out. It's *almost* as good as the first game and (IMO) better than BTS. Is Dontnod setting up an eventual superhero team?

Played on console: PS4.
Originally posted: 08/15/2021.

Mini-Review: Jak and Daxter (Trilogy)

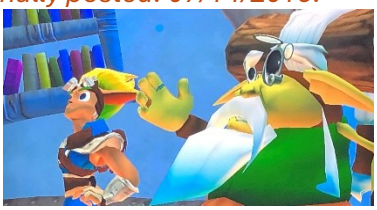
The Precursor Legacy

Naughty Dog's classic 3rd-person mascot platformer holds up pretty well in 2019, but camera control and a very finicky double-jump caused me a bit of grief. It's a not-too-difficult collect-a-thon, and I'm excited to continue the trilogy. The game has an inverted X and Y camera, but there's a patched-in fix that lets you un-invert X, thankfully. In video settings, hold d-pad UP and click R3. You can't fix the Y, but you have no control of that axis during normal gameplay anyway, so it's not too big a deal.

My only real complaint is with double-jumping. It just doesn't feel right and often doesn't register at all. I died way too much from failed double jumps that weren't my fault. But, generous checkpoints and no loss of progression helps keep it from being game-breaking.

Anyway, I enjoyed it a lot, and it's worth playing. *Jak and Daxter* is a series I never played (aside from the *Daxter* spin-off on PSP, which was pretty good), so I'm correcting that now. This was mostly by-the-book, so I'm hoping for more twists and surprises in *Jak II* and *3*.

PS2 game played on PS4. Originally posted: 07/14/2019.



Jak II

Despite improved graphics, controls, and story, it's somehow less fun than *Jak 1*. The open-world city exemplifies frustrating game design: way too many obstacles yet vehicles are necessary. The good outweighs the bad, but there's plenty of bad. It also emphasizes mission-based gameplay, driving, and gun combat, rather than open exploration.

The missions get tough, with long stretches between checkpoints. There's more variety this time, and a very engaging story, but I haven't yelled at a game this much in a long time. Ultimately, I did enjoy it, but the enjoyment was interspersed with repeated frustrating failures in platforming, racing, or combat scenarios. Optional side missions are particularly grueling. Plus, they patched a glitch for farming orbs, so I probably won't get the Platinum.

PS2 game played on PS4. Originally posted: 07/21/2019.

Jak 3

So, take *Jak II* + *Mad Max* + more polish + more fun + less frustrating + way better missions and more interesting areas + better in-mission checkpoints + tons of main mission variety, add it up, and it's *Jak 3*. I enjoyed it quite a bit.

It succeeds in ways the prior game failed, even though the structure is mostly the same. I also think I enjoyed it more because I wasn't expecting *Jak 1*, like I was when I started *Jak 2*. It's third-person action/adventure first, platformer second. It's impressive for a PS2 game. I was glad that it ended with answers to questions posed by the earlier games, which makes a satisfying conclusion to the trilogy.

Still, it's a shame the series is dead now. I'd like to see where the story might have taken us next.

But maybe *Jak X Combat Racing* is worth a try?

PS2 game played on PS4. Originally posted: 07/27/2019.

The Final Stage

I already mentioned a few companions and sidekicks I skipped, in the introduction to this week's feature topic earlier. Here are a few more, and the reasons they didn't make it.

Kazooie (in *Banjo-Kazooie*)

I simply haven't played these games. Yeah, I cheated a little by including Pikachu from a game I haven't played, and I included Laylee from *Yooka-Laylee* (the spiritual successor to *Banjo-Kazooie*), but I tried to stick with what I know. Maybe I shouldn't have. Kazooie seems like she should have been a shoo-in for this.

Cortana (in *Halo*)

She was one of the two characters I cut when I decided to trim the final list down from 32. My reason was, she often does appear "little" as Master Chief's holographic sidekick, but she's an AI modeled to be a fully grown human woman. Of all my choices, I deemed her the most off-topic for my "little guys" list.

Logic, Control, Empathy (in *Return to Grace*)

The other one I cut to get my list down to 30 comes from a game most people probably haven't ever heard of. It's a really cool first-person adventure (a walking sim with some light puzzle solving) and several of these AIs accompany the protagonist on her journey.

Toad (in the *Super Mario Bros.* series)

I probably should have included Toad. I can't think of any good reason why he doesn't fit the "little guy" category. Mainly, it was because he's not really a sidekick or companion. He's a playable character and an NPC, most often.

Aiden (in Beyond: Two Souls)

I cut this ghost/entity character, even though he's Jodie's companion for her entire life, mostly for story reasons I shouldn't spoil.

The Main Character (in *The Last Guardian*)

This was going to be more of a joke/twist one, on the premise that the boy you play as in this game is the "little guy" sidekick to Trico, the huge cat/bird creature he befriends.

Astro Bot (in the *Astro Bot* series)

He might just be the epitome of what it means to be a "little guy" in a video game, but despite the abundance of other PlayStation-themed bots and costumes, it all lacks the "sidekick" or "companion" part of this topic's premise.

Baby Metroid (in Super Metroid)

This would have been a fun choice, but the little Metroid doesn't really accompany Samus for long or serve as her sidekick.

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I had also intended to write about Gamescom Opening Night Live this week; in particular, a few of the game announcements that have me interested. It's Friday night as I write this wrap-up, though, so my self-imposed Saturday morning newsletter release deadline means it'll have to wait.

Next week, I'll make a feature out of it. Maybe I'll go for a low-effort issue and focus on a few upcoming games I'm looking forward to.

The week after next, I may either write about point-and-click adventures, or my favorite games based on a license or franchise.

End Credits

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