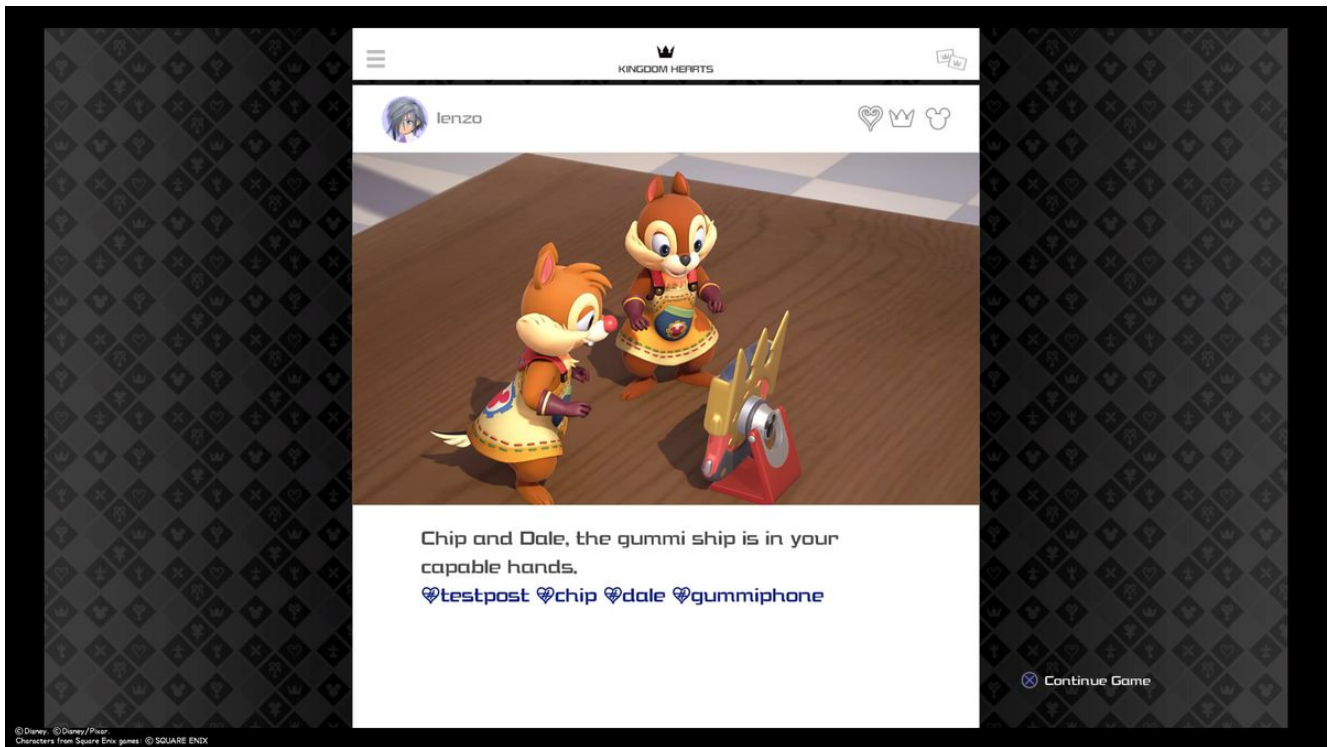


Kingdom Hearts III's smartphone turns its heroes into modern millennials

Kingdom Hearts is a series about good vs. evil and the power of friendship, wrapped up in convoluted storylines and nonsensical titles. Its hero, Sora, is a teenager who travels worlds with Disney characters while yelling about the light and dark that live in our hearts. Outside of a few classic story beats, there's not much in this fantasy world you'd call relatable. In *Kingdom Hearts III*, however, Square Enix has gifted its hero with the ultimate mainstream accessory: a smartphone.

It's been more than a decade since the release of *Kingdom Hearts II*, and since then in-game features have grown to mirror modern life. Photo modes have popped up in the most unlikely of places, whether players are making memories with their anime leather boys, giving Kratos an improbable smile, or capturing the perfect web-slinging selfie. In *Kingdom Hearts III*, Sora is given a "Gummiphone" – created, of course, by Chip and Dale – with the explanation of keeping in touch with friends. I promptly used it to snap selfies every three minutes.

The Gummiphone™ looks like a Blackberry if the company designed for Fisher-Price. Its screen is as wide as it is squat. It is cased in a pseudo-crown that is very spikey and wholly impractical. I love it. Sora mostly uses it to FaceTime his friends – goodbye messages in a bottle, hello privacy concerns! – complete various photo missions, or play games. If you point it at one of your companions, they'll pose. Once Donald Duck earnestly exclaimed, "You want to take a photo of me?" and no sentiment has ever touched my heart more.



Of course no smartphone would be complete without access to some social platform, and *Kingdom Hearts* doesn't disappoint. The game's loading screens introduce a pseudo-Instagram, complete with heart-shaped hashtags. "Never thought I'd find my way back to these shores again. it's almost like someone wanted me to come here..." muses one moody character. The post is tagged with phrases like #realmofdarkness and #searching. Others focus on friendship or glamour shots you'd expect from your real-life feed.

It's tempting to fall down a rabbit hole here. How does a phone work in the realm of darkness? Why would you reveal that you're in such a dangerous location? What's that data plan cost? It's a fruitless effort. It makes about as much sense as any other part of *Kingdom Hearts*, so why shouldn't Sora and his best friend Riku swap likes about their key-shaped swordbats? Our actual timeline includes stories where kids eat TidePods and wear blindfolds while driving.

Kingdom Hearts' heroes aren't ready to run off and join the influencer crowd just yet, but seeing even the strangest of games embrace social tech norms is endearing. It strips away the negativity of social media and transforms the experience

into something pure. You don't snap photos of your fictional friends for likes. You do it because yes, you genuinely want a selfie with Donald Duck.

<https://www.theverge.com/tldr/2019/2/3/18205139/kingdom-hearts-3-smartphone-modern-millennials-gummiphone-instagram>