The best actually real stuff at CES 2025

Hi, friends! Welcome to *Installer* No. 66, your guide to the best and *Verge*-iest stuff in the world. (If you're new here, welcome, happy 2025, and also you can read all the old editions at the *Installer* homepage.)

This week, I've been reading about **loneliness** and **Web3 scams** and **the future of procedural TV**, watching ***Deadpool & Wolverine*** on an airplane like the director intended, rewatching ***Severance*** and ***Squid Game*** to get ready for the second seasons, eagerly awaiting the return of ***Kids Baking Championship,*** wondering if that's **real Sara Dietschy or AI Sara Dietschy**, and giving an **Apple News Plus** subscription a whirl as my go-to news source.

I also have for you a big report from CES in Las Vegas. This edition of *Installer* is a little different than most, just because we saw so many new things, and so many new things launched, and in many cases, it's hard to know whether any of it will ever hit shelves. So think of this as part *Installer,* part CES recap, part "David hopes desperately these things actually ship" list. But I tried hard to pick out the stuff I'm confident will actually end up on sale at some point soon and might be worth your money. I'm sure I'll be wrong about a few of them… but here's hoping. And if you want *all* the best stuff from CES, **check out our annual awards** — there's lots of great stuff in there.

Also, and most importantly, my heart goes out to everyone in LA and elsewhere dealing with the fires this week. I'm so sorry for everything you're dealing with, and I hope you're safe and doing okay.

(As always, the best part of *Installer* is your ideas and tips. What are you into right now? What should everyone else be playing / reading / watching / downloading / building out of Legos right now? Tell me everything: installer@theverge.com. And if you know someone else who might enjoy *Installer*, forward it to them and tell them to subscribe here.)

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It’s a strange time in the blogging / social media universe. Threads, Bluesky, X, Mastodon, and a million other platforms are growing and changing, and it’s hard to figure out where to spend your time and energy. I’ve been talking to folks for years now about how all this is supposed to work and have consistently been convinced that **Manton Reece** is on the right track. He’s the creator of Micro.blog, which is simple like Twitter but personal like a blog and has a lot of big ideas about interoperability and the fediverse.

This week, Manton launched **Micro.one**, a $1 / month platform that gives you a blog, on your own domain, that also lets you post to the fediverse. If I were looking for a new place to post, there’s a good chance I’d start there.

I asked Manton to share his homescreen with us, wanting to see if I could snoop on any *other* new things he might be working on. Here’s Manton’s homescreen, plus some info on the apps he uses and why:

The phone: iPhone 16 Pro Max. This is the first time I’ve had the biggest iPhone. I thought it would be good to try as a sort of tiny iPad. It makes reading and writing just a little

easier.

The wallpaper: My wallpaper is solid black. Boring! But it makes everything feel crisp and readable. (For the lockscreen background, I have a photo of family.)

The apps: Messages, Phone, Photos, Camera, Safari, Calm, NetNewsWire, Spotify, Google Maps, Slack, Fantastical, Libby, Overcast, Swarm, Reeder, Kindle, Hey, Epilogue, Strata, Micro.blog.

I keep a blank row of icons at the top and bottom of my homescreen, so there are fewer icons to sort through when finding an app to open. It also makes reaching the top icons easier. I keep all notification badges hidden to avoid clutter, too.

In the dock, I have **Hey** email and a few companion apps for my Micro.blog platform: **Epilogue** for keeping track of books, **Strata** for notes, and the official Micro.blog app. Also on the homescreen, I have some apps for reading, like Libby and the Kindle app, and, for some reason, two RSS readers: NetNewsWire and Reeder. I use Spotify instead of Apple Music and Fantastical instead of Apple Calendar.

I also asked Manton to share a few things he's into right now. Here's what he sent back:

- ***Wind and Truth*** *by Brandon Sanderson. I'm currently halfway through this book and love the epic scope of a story that spans multiple standalone book series. I hope to read more this year. I track what books I'm reading, and I post a short microblog post to my own site about each one.*
- **ChatGPT**. As a developer, I thought I was fine writing code on my own, and I was initially skeptical of AI. But now, the ChatGPT app for Mac is always running. Throughout the day, I'm feeding it random questions and

asking for programming help. I believe strongly in human creativity, and there are many things I don't want a robot to do for me, but as a tool, it has been really useful.

- I use **Swarm** to check into places I visit like coffee shops or new places while traveling. Foursquare has recently shut down its city guide to refocus on Swarm, but it's not clear what kind of future the app has. I occasionally import my check-ins into a separate blog so I have all the historical data.

Here's what the Installer *community is into this week. I want to know what you're into right now as well! Email installer@theverge.com or message me on Signal – @davidpierce.11 – with your recommendations for anything and everything, and we'll feature some of our favorites here every week. For even more great recommendations, check out the replies to this post on Threads and this post on Bluesky.*

"I stumbled upon **a four-part series** on YouTube by **Digging The Greats**. He does a great deep dive into using an iPod for 30 days and how it changed his life. Really great interviews and insight about algorithms, getting some life back, and using technology without the addiction. Really interesting stuff." – Owen

"Last week, I ordered a **Laifen Wave** electric toothbrush, and it's taking way too long in the mail. I want to play with my new gadget now, damn it!" – Ellie

"I've been listening to the entire discography of **Essenger**. I think that having an electronic groove during the busiest time of the year in tech makes the tech world even cooler!" – Eli

"A new extension called **Pre-AI Search**. All it does is filter to pre-2023 Google results, but it's been a bit of a lifesaver given how garbage Google image search is now. Been pretty handy for my research – Google image search has been rough

with all the AI stuff, but filtering to pre-2023 helps find actual design resources again." – Frankie

"**Flyleaf**. A beautiful read-it-later app for macOS, iPadOS, and iOS." – Ryan

"I just started listening to the wonderful ***If Books Could Kill*** podcast. *You're Wrong About* alum Michael Hobbes and lawyer Peter Shamshiri tackle the question, 'What if pop science books would have peer review?' The answer is pretty damning for the books but great fun for us listeners." – Laszlo

"Not new, but the **Baseus Nomos** 5-in-1 charging station changed my whole desk setup. The retractable cable and StandBy mode-friendly phone mount (Qi2!) make it worth it." – Hawke

"I've been bingeing ***AEW*** on Max. I was a childhood wrestling fan who got back into WWE casually at the pandemic Wrestlemania. Now that it's on Max, I've been bingeing the past two months of *AEW* shows to get acquainted with the product and better compare it to post-McMahon WWE. Overall, it's pretty good." – Brian

"Greg Iles' ***Southern Man***, a massive but riveting novel set in modern Mississippi, has been eating up all my spare time." – Darragh

"I recommend you check out **ProjectionLab**. It's a beautifully designed financial planning tool that I've been using for the past few years. This solo dev-built app makes it simple to model finances and plan for the future." – Jake

"Watching this horror series, ***From***, on Prime Video. Very different than most shows on the internet." – Daniyal