

Game Narrative Review

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Month/Year you submitted this review: December 2023

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Game Title: *Sky: Children of Light*
Platform: Mobile, PC, Nintendo Switch
Genre: MMORPG/Adventure Game
Release Date: July 18th, 2019
Developer: thatgamecompany
Publisher: thatgamecompany
Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Jennie Kong

Overview

Sky: Children of Light, professes itself to be an emotional narrative journey. This journey follows the player, Sky Children, on their quest through the weightless world of *Sky* upwards to the stars.

*“At last, you return to this world. Remember, Child –
All are **given breath by starlight**.
The first of us lived in joy that we would one day **return to the stars**.*

*Together we **built a Kingdom** in the clouds.
We **connected the seven realms** with the power of **starlight**.
But then the **Sky went dark**, and our Kingdom **shattered**.
Many of us are still **trapped** in these realms.*

*Please, Child... Bring your **light** to our fallen spirits.
A long time has passed. Now, I call to you.
Go, Child. The **Kingdom of Sky** awaits your **light**.”*

Sky is a story told through little dialogue. These opening lines to the player describe the trajectory of the overarching plot. The player explores each area within the world, finding and shepherding lost Spirits, as they uncover the history of the world. They learn about the darkness that took over, and the Elder Spirits that have fallen from their constellations. The player flies through the landscape learning about the Elder Spirits that ruled over each land. They help restore their light to each zone, earning in

turn a boon to help them progress closer to the main temple. Here in the heart of the temple, or the heart of the storm, the player must rally towards the core of the light. They pass by other fallen Sky Children before they themselves are incapable of continuing onwards. Players are reincarnated and brought up to the constellations that they helped restore, where they are then reborn again, stronger, and begin the cycle anew.

Characters

- **Sky Children/Children of Light** – This is the player avatar. These are customizable characters that have been given life at the start of the game. They notably have a special ability to fly and wield a candle to create light/fire. They carry with them a flame and an internal light, which they use to help Elder Spirits and others they encounter on their journey. Sky Children have a base appearance of a humanoid figure, with two glowing yellow eyes, a yellow mask, white hair, beige clothes, and an orange cape. They are unspeaking, only able to communicate with emotes and calls. Sky Children are generous and are seeking to help combat the darkness in the land, while following the ever-present light in the land.
- **Isle Elder** – The Elder Spirit for the first level of the game within a desert tundra. They are tall, larger-than-life figure, with a long white beard, a staff, and a broken mask. This mask is fixed by the player when the Isle Elder Spirit takes the fire offering that the player leaves for them. The Isle Elder Spirit is rejuvenated by the light, and their constellation is restored. Their constellation takes the form of a staff.

The Isle Elder Spirit has no distinct needs but serves as the keeper and protector for the first temple before the clouds. The cutscene exchange with the player places this Elder as old, wise, with a kind demeanor. The careful way in which the Elder picks up and accepts the light from the player is gentle and caring and showcases a wizened personality.

- **Prairie Elder** – The Elder Spirit and guardian of the second level in a green Prairie landscape. This Elder presides over an open Prairie, inside of a temple surrounded by broken pottery. This Elder is large, with white tufts protruding from both sides of their head. Once the player prays at their altar, the Prairie Elder can be seen rousing from slumber, a jar tucked to their side. Upon accepting the player's offer of fire, the Elder's robes and jar are rejuvenated with light. Springing forth from the jar, a single yellow glowing butterfly emerges, and the Elder's constellation (a jar shape) is hung in the sky once more.

The Prairie Elder is presented carefree and lethargic. Asleep on duty, the Elder does not appear to react quickly to the presence of the player, nor to the light. The gift itself, while welcome, does not hold as much reverence or desperation as some of the other Elder's display when accepting their gift of light.

- **Forest Elder** – The Elder Spirit of the third level, situated within a rainy forest. The Forest Elder is tall like the others and has a slender frame with long braided white hair. Their introduction has them seated, distraught, on an anvil, with crumbled stone pieces in their arms. The Forest Elder snatches the fire that the player brings to them, and hastily reconstructs with a large hammer an octahedral shape that rises into the sky. With their constellation restored, its shape is an anvil and hammer.

The Forest Elder is both stern and hardworking, and driven by their task of creation. They seem to behave with more desperation towards the source of the light, and are quick to dismiss the player, spending less time engaging with the Sky Children and more determined to fix their broken relic.

- **Valley Elders** – The Valley Elders are a pair of Elders that are twins, both have similar slim and small statures, and are blue and orange, with one having spiky hair while the other has a bob. The shrine for these two Elders is in a coliseum at the base of a snowy Valley. The pair of Elders wield a radiant paddle, and perform in tandem, putting on an enthusiastic show of acrobatics. The two Elders fight over the flame that the player bestows on them, playing a sort of keep-away game before punting the fire outside of the coliseum entirely. Their restored constellation are two paddles that form an ‘X’ shape.

Unlike previous Elders, these two display a playful, competitive attitude towards each other, and towards the player. They are both blasé towards the flame, where previous Elders show reverence.

- **Wasteland Elder** – This Elder Spirit is in a Wasteland of an old forgotten battlefield of darkness. The Elder is broad and tall, emanating strength, with a big mask and a white mohawk. The Elder wields a shield and spear, that are represented in their restored constellation. The Wasteland Elder shows prowess and fights, but it is in a weakened state until the player gently offers and places the flame in the Elder’s spear. Light restored, the Wasteland Elder can fight with renewed energy and vigor, their robes and spear aglow.

The Wasteland Elder is a bastion against the darkness that threatens the base of the temple and the Vault. They are a protector and take pride in their abilities and strength.

- **Vault Elder** – The Vault Elder is a slender figure with a white scarved head, and a tall mask with a scar over one eye. They reside at the very top of the Vault, just before the final level sequence at the summit. The Vault Elder is found seated quietly in the center of grand statues and beckons the player closer with their flame. The player places the flame within the prism that the Elder holds, and the prism rises into the night sky – and it illuminates every constellation the player

has unlocked into complete tableaux. At the end, all the Elder Spirits appear, and bow before the player – this restores the Vault Elder’s constellation, a prism shape, but not before revealing a crown tableau in the dark sky.

The Vault Elder is the most reserved of the Elder’s that the player meets and is the leader of the Elder Spirits. This Elder does not appear surprised by the player’s presence and encourages them to place the flame within the prism. The Vault Elder is reverent and holds the light as a cherished element.

- **Krill** – These are the main enemy in the world, and they are large black krill-shaped monsters, with a glowing blue/red eye in the center of their head. These monsters are personifications of the darkness in the land, and only serve to continually hunt down and kill any sources of light (Sky Children or other Light beings) that they come across. They are single-minded in their pursuit and hunger for Light.
- **Crabs** – Small enemies that appear like stone-like crabs. They tend to group in packs and will charge any Sky Children that come to close, knocking them over. They operate in a frenzy and can be combatted and flipped over (even picked up). They are weak to Sky Children’s voice but are single-minded in their hunt to knock down Sky Children.
- **Spirits** – These are blue citizens of the world, they are found within each area, and are echoes of a past life. The player can aid and follow these Spirits through their memories. The Spirits will serve to both guide the player through a given level, but also tell important pieces of the overarching story of the world the player finds themselves in. These Spirits are benevolent and kind and teach the Sky Children new emotes that serve to help them on their journey. They are weary and afraid of darkness and appear to worship the Light.

Breakdown

The Journey of Life – Birth to Death, and Selfless Sacrifice

“Free lost Spirits and follow the bell to the temple.”

-Opening text to the Isle of Dawn

The opening quotes of each level serve to help guide the experience of the player and lead them forward on their quest. The journey of *Sky* begins at the Isle of Dawn with a bell tolling in the background. Where players are brought into existence by the light. They awaken at a shoreline, with a cave beckoning them forward. Newly born as a Sky Child, players take their first stumbling step forwards into a cave, where murals of light appear on the walls as they traverse its depths.

After witnessing the starlight murals on the walls of the cave, the player heads towards the tunnel that opens the world up before them in rolling sand dunes with a temple nestled in the clouds above. This moment, of moving from the darkness of the cave into the light, signifies the official “birth” of the player. They are quite literally emerging from a womb of sorts, into the sand dunes that catch their landing for the first flight. There are no dangers present in the Isle of Dawn. This idea of gentle safety and guidance is further evoked through colour and sound, with the soft pink and blue tones of the world echoing an emotion of warmth. The environment is as gentle as the player expects, as they are left to wander.

Amidst the sand dunes, players earn and collect their first winged light. The source of the Sky Child’s flying power, winged lights which can be found in the form of Children of Light that are static yellow glowing children hidden throughout the entire world. Once the player has learned from enough Spirits, they can pass through a barrier and ascend to the clouds, towards the first temple. In the temple they meet the Isle Elder, who acts as a parent, an elderly guide who opens the way forward for the player. This is symbolic of moving from their toddler years, into the next stage of life. Now with two feet underneath them, or, more accurately, their wings underneath them, players get to move towards the Daylight Prairie.

“Ring the bell towers and reveal your path.”

-Opening text to the Daylight Prairie

The bell towers within the temples act as guiding beacons throughout the world. Serving as concrete anchors to follow for pathing, but also as summons to the player, mimicking the same call that the Sky Children themselves have. *Sky* is a story told through the level design, the Spirits, its environment, and through player-to-player interaction. If the Isle of Dawn was the dawn of the players' life, the Daylight Prairie is their childhood. Here, players have a chance to stretch their newfound wings, through a playful flight sequence, where clouds and birds carry them onwards towards the next leg of their quest. There is no fear of falling, no fear of failure. This flight is joyous, and is an experience where the players can explore, have fun, and make mistakes without fear of repercussions of failure.

Nestled in the clouds, the Sky Child arrives at the Prairie. With green rolling hills, colourful wildflowers, and bright inviting clouds, the Prairie is an idyllic scene. The player has the chance to explore multiple zones, practicing flight, jumps, and interacting with other players. While the Isle of Dawn was a nursery, the Daylight Prairie is a daycare of sorts, the first few years of elementary school on the playground at recess. Spirits here can teach the player how to play, wave, how to introduce themselves to others, how to interact with nature (butterflies), and how to laugh. Joy is rampant and unbridled in the Prairie. This is a time of exploration, and trial and error with no consequence.

In the final area of the Daylight Prairie, players have their first interaction with darkness. It is done in a contained and safe way, where the darkness is harmless to the player and any of their companions. The darkness most commonly takes the form of dark blue spikey flowers. Using the candle, players can burn away the darkness from the three bell towers and summon a massive manta – a light creature that flies through the clouds. Using the manta, they can ride towards the temple in the sky. Upon reaching the temple, players once again must have helped a certain number of Spirits and learned enough from them to progress inside.

“Protect your light and find the source of Ancient Power.”

-Opening text to the Hidden Forest

Sky Children find themselves making their first descent, with the opening line encouraging players to shield their inner winged light and seek out the source of the polluted rain. Moving down, they fly to the Hidden Forest. Shrouded in dark blues and dark greens, they must open the way into the ruins of the Hidden Forest, at the base of tall, towering trees. It begins to rain. The rain is the first interaction the player has with a condition that drains their winged light. They must learn to take shelter from it – hiding under awnings and warming their winged light at candles, at light platforms, even taking solace with another player can recharge their light.

Whereas the Daylight Prairie was a time where players could learn without fear of consequence, now players, in their adolescent years, are learning what darkness can do, and how the darkness in the world has affected the Spirits and the nature of the land around them. Players learn from Spirits what it’s like to be cold, to be angry, to be dismayed, to apologize, and to grieve. They witness, strife, struggle, and death. In one of the Spirits’ memories, they witness a cave-in. The Spirit and their companions becoming trapped within the rubble, and the eventual death of those companions. Reflecting their adolescent years, there is still mystic wonder abound in the Hidden Forest, but players and learning a different spectrum of emotions, and serious misfortunes that have befallen the Spirits of the land.

With the Hidden Forest Shrine lit, players encounter the Forest Elder. This Elder Spirit is one of the more notable ones, as while they treat the Sky Child respectfully, they are not warm and welcoming as the Prairie and Isle Elder were. They lack the same open warmth that past Elders had, instead taking on a more stoic approach to the player. This echoes the Hidden Forest level, and the idea that now out of childhood and into adolescence, players are no longer coddled. They find themselves in an odd space of no longer a child but feeling unsure about the new dangers of the world, and the possibilities of what is to come. With the stringent, cold Elder at the end, this feeling of unpreparedness echoes as they move forward into the next stage of life.

Once the Forest Elder constellation has been restored, players are offered a small reprieve, a glade filled with bright yellow light, green grass, and clouds that ascend them

upwards to the sky. This is incredibly reminiscent of the movement from the Isle of Dawn to the Daylight Prairie. Except this time, players are brought to the snowy mountain tops of the Valley of Triumph, brought to experience the exciting and thrilling period of young adulthood.

“Race down the ridge, and the city gates will open to honor you.”

-Opening text to the Valley of Triumph

Now adept with the skills they have acquired over the last steps of their journey, players continue to push the boundaries. Racing into young adulthood – players literally have the chance to engage in a highspeed race down the side of a snowy mountain. The thrill of being able to slip, slide, and race against other Sky Children builds a sense of freewill and competition.

The Spirits found in the Valley allow players to test the boundaries of their skills and build up confidence. After coming out of a period of uncertainty of their teenaged years, the unknown in the Valley is meant to bolster the inner confidence of the player. Now in young adulthood they have the chance to test their skills and see how they measure up against other players. This theme is carried into the multitude of races that are available to the player, where they have the option to challenge other players in a race through the Valley to the coliseum and to the shrine with the Elders. This challenge between players is both successful in bringing about a sort of competition, but also predominantly only works to build confidence for the winners, excluding the losers.

The pair of Valley Elders are playful in nature, treating the flame with lofty confidence as they play with it between themselves with little regard for the precious nature of the flame. This pair of Elders are the ones that feel the most dissonant of the Elder Spirits. The blasé nature in which they treat the flame comes across as they are toying and teasing the Sky Child, instead of acting as a mentor or guide. Considering that all the other Elder Spirits act as elders, the message here gets a little blurry, as it is a little unclear as to why the Elder Spirits of the Valley seem to care little for the flame. They quite literally hit the flame away towards the sky, which is supposed to showcase them opening the way forward for the player but comes across as almost a rejection. This unchecked confidence is supposed to help the player prepare for the challenge that lays ahead in the Golden Wasteland of adulthood.

“Beyond the barren wastes, the Vault of Knowledge awaits.”

-Opening text to the Golden Wasteland

With a promise of reprieve after braving the Golden Wasteland, players are urged to prepare themselves for the challenge ahead. The Golden Wasteland is unlike anything the player has encountered before. Unlike the peaceful transitions between areas previous to this one, the descent into the Golden Wasteland is not one that is necessarily done willingly. As players progress past the shrine in the Valley, they are brought lower and lower, stuck between clouds as the scenery changes from warm yellows and pinks to dark shades of green. Finally, they reach a massive storm cloud, and they must make the

choice to jump. This leap forward snags and forcefully drags the player down through the storm clouds, spitting them out in a heap on blighted sand dunes coloured a dark green. The sand dunes within the Golden Wasteland and reminiscent of the Isle of Dawn. In a sense, the player is stepping back into an area that takes them back to the first steps of their life, but this time with a mature and disillusioned perspective. This is a notable turning point in their journey, as the Sky Child's plummet downwards sets the tone for the final stretch of their quest. The atmosphere here changes significantly away from the carefree and peaceful nature of the last few levels, almost as if the weight of the quest has finally come to rest upon the player's small figure.

Sky Children stand out in the green polluted Wasteland. Among the rubble and the sand, they come across the Spirits of the Wasteland. The memories here are serious, and deal with fear, suffering, loss, and resilience. Dangers lie everywhere, the water of the Wasteland is polluted, draining the player of winged light, and Crabs litter the landscape in massive overwhelming groups. One of the first Spirits the player encounters flee to hide in a broken temple, cowering from the dangers that lurk in the Wasteland. The landscape is treacherous, and the horrors of the world laid bare, the player pushes forth inside the broken temple.

The graveyard ahead holds the players first encounter with the Krill. Players watch as the Krill hunts and extinguishes a manta, ridding the world of its light and life. The players are forced to hide themselves, learning where it is safe to hide from the ever-patrolling eye of the Krill. One misstep can lead to disaster and shatters the winged light that the player has been collecting since the beginning. Players are asked to put all of their skills to use here. Within the barren wastes, they must be resourceful, smart, and most importantly, kind.

The Golden Wasteland strips bare the frivolous edges of the world of *Sky*. In this land the polluted blight is clear, and the darkness and pollution showcase the self-inflicted plight of the Spirits. The disillusionment of what the world is like is stark, and there is no ignoring the grim reality of the Wasteland which echoes adulthood. Without the rosy glasses from younger years, adulthood strips bare any illusions the player might have had about the story of this world. Within this section, players must seek each other to find light within the darkness and find the support among themselves to overcome the trials here. Only from here are the Sky Children beckoned forward into the Vault of Knowledge.

"Climb the Vault, its wisdom awaits."

-Opening text to the Vault of Knowledge

The Vault of Knowledge brings about a return to the quiet that the player has grown accustomed to. Except this time, it is different. In the eerie stillness of the Vault, the dusk of the players' quest becomes clear to them as they begin their ascent through the Vault towards the heavens. Wizedened from their journey, this leg of the quest can be likened to the senior years of life. The player knows they are reaching the end of their

quest, and yet what lays beyond is uncertainty, a looming question of “What happens next?”

The Vault itself has seven floors, mimicking the seven layers of heaven that are prominent in religious texts, such as the Qur’an (Haleem & Pickthall, 2002). Each floor showcases a new constellation that the player ignited along their journey. Much as a senior would reminisce on their past, the player is afforded the chance to do so here as well. The very first floor of the Vault mimics the Isle of Dawn, with sand dunes being present around the base. Lighting the lanterns guide players to the second floor, where a similar process is expected, with three lanterns that mimic the bell towers of the Daylight Prairie. The third floor represents the Hidden Forest, with trees that need to be nurtured by the light. The player has the chance to play the role of the caregiver here, instead of the opposite being true, much like an Elder would. Reaching the fourth floor, the Valley of Triumph architecture is echoed in the pillars on this floor calling back to the tall coliseum walls. On the fifth floor, the Golden Wasteland floor, players find a giant skeletal remain, and must summon mantas to take them to sixth floor, the final floor of the Vault before the end of the storm.

This sixth floor is where players are greeted with all the previous facings of the shrines they visited of the other Elder Spirits. Here at the summit of the Vault, players once again kneel in prayer. The Vault Elder is found waiting for the player, left seated with the shrines. They are the most reverent of the Elders. They treat the player with the utmost respect, instead of taking the flame to light their constellation for themselves, they actually indicate to the player to light the prism themselves, to make the final push. This is a symbolic change in attitude, as the player is taking complete ownership over the final task of restoring light to the last constellation. The player finally has ascended to an equal status with the constellation Elders as an elder themselves.

With this finality, players are taken to the final level of the Vault, the seventh level. This section is known as the Eye of Eden, the eye of the storm, and the final push towards the tumultuous light and darkness that are odds with each other within this space.

“Push into darkness.”

-Opening text to the Eye of Eden

These are the words bestowed upon the player as they enter the eve of their final day. The naming of the zone alone calls to the Garden of Eden, a biblical reference to the Garden of God, that served an idyllic space where humans lived prior to their fall into corruption (*Garden of Eden*, 2023). The name Eye of Eden implies that the space that the players are about to move through was once a paradise, or the center of paradise, whereas now it stands to be the eye of the storm. Considering it is the highest level of the Vault, it is implied to be the highest level of heaven.

Reaching this location is one of finality. Players are asked to do what they have continued to do up until this point and carry on to the heart of the darkness. They avoid red crystals, hazardous Krill, and onslaughts that threaten to knock them back. The entire

zone acts as a metaphor for the final stage of life. On the dawn of the last day, death and the inevitability of it is a concept that humans specifically have grappled with for centuries. The fear of the unknown, and what comes next, is a lingering question that plagues everyone's minds.

The journey through the storm builds on this. Throwing terrifying obstacles at the player, threatening them with loss of their winged lights, gusting winds that keep the player grounded, and of course, the threat of death. And yet, the player pushes forward. Every step they take moves them closer and closer to an end. An end that they are unaware of what it will be, but only knowing they are nearing towards it.

Once past the initial obstacles, players enter a tunnel. Eerily similar to the cave they progressed through at the very beginning in the Isle of Dawn, this time the dark hallway is littered with collectible winged lights, that serve to boost their wing power. These lights, that take the form of illuminate Sky Children figures, dot the final pathway to the end. Upon reaching the end of this hallway, players are notified that once they move onwards, there is no going back.

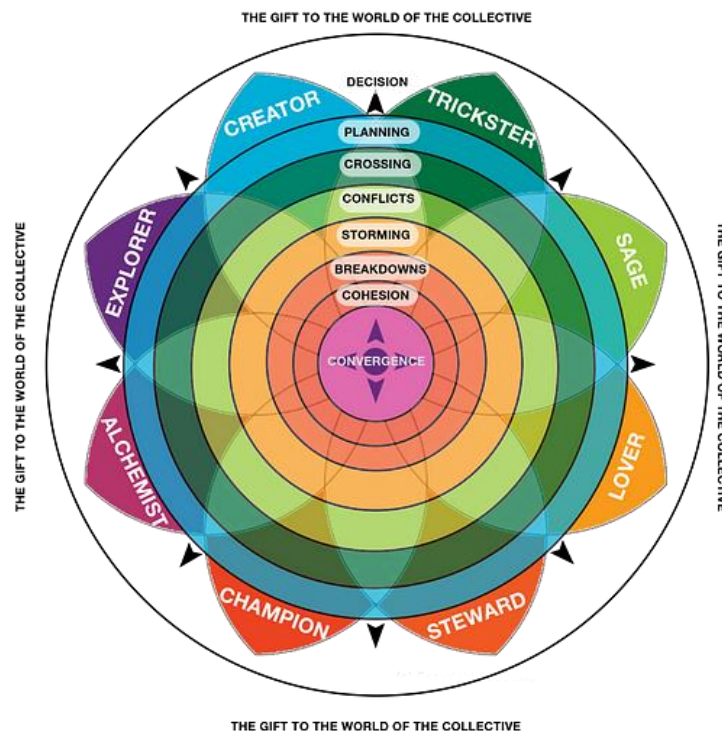
Agreeing to move on takes the player truly to the center of the storm. The landscape that stretches before them, leading up to the massive tear of light, is littered with jagged rocks and dangerous red crystals that rain down from the sky. But, most uniquely, there are huddled polluted figures of Sky Children. Frozen in time, on the path forward. Now, all the winged lights they have collected through their journey must be deposited within huddled Sky Children. Player's race through the minefield, hiding and dodging the perilous crystals, while selflessly giving up their own winged light to bestow it among the scattered frozen Sky Children. Players are physically giving up parts of themselves, leaving them behind for others to cherish and make use of as they make their own pathway forward.

Eventually players reach a point where there is no more cover to hide from the crystal onslaught. Yet, peeking out from their last piece of cover, there are still huddled shapes of frozen Sky Children ahead. Players are left to struggle against themselves. Moving forward into the crystal onslaught is to accept death. They can search for another way forward for as long as they'd like – but ultimately the realization that they must push forward is the only one left. Making this choice is difficult, but freeing once players take that leap. Careening through the crystal onslaught, being knocked off their feet, losing winged lights, losing life, yet they continue bounding forward, with the option to try and save whatever frozen Sky Children they can. Eventually, and inevitably, players lose all their winged lights, and their tiny, darkened Sky avatar begins to slow. Unable to jump, to being unable to run, to a walk that slows further and further, they become more and more hunched over until they become a frozen Sky Child themselves, dotted with the pollution darkness, they acquiesce to becoming one of the many they were helping.

This is not the end though, in a final effort, as the player's avatar grows still, the frozen Sky Children that the player helped burst free from their polluted cocoons in expansive light and fly forward. This last scene implies hope – and a chance at a new life, if selflessly given by another. The player is then awoken, and journeys through the last leg of their quest, upwards past the clouds, past crumbling towers, into orbit. Here, among the stars, they embrace their ascension into death, and are given the chance to be reborn again. Stronger, wiser, and with new knowledge under their belt, they are now the Sky Children who have the privilege of helping new players in the game through their journey. In their selfless sacrifice, new life is born. *Sky*'s narrative, from start to end, highlights the entire emotional journey of life, and teaches the player a lesson about living, and how to embrace life to the fullest extent. Life is a journey, it is a fantastic quest, and regardless of the route taken, it is something worth celebrating.

The Collective Journey

The collective journey is a rather new take on the original hero's journey path that is so well known by the broader population. This idea of a collective journey aligns with the seven realms that the player moves through in *Sky* and can be used as a new lens to interpret what the journey of a collective can manifest like, instead of the quest from a singular hero. While the player is most certainly the protagonist of the journey, they are not the only hero. As *Sky* is a game that at its core focuses on a collaborative emotional experience as the player and other Sky Children move forward to complete their quest, the collective journey helps reflect this notion that is so prominently found within the game.



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This is a diagram of the non-linear and fluid chart of how the collective journey operates, is taken from Maya Zukerman's interpretation (Zuckerman, 2018). Since *Sky* is an experience that players can live through and engage with again and again, in a cycle of self-sacrifice and rebirth, with every iteration that players move forward, they bring about more knowledge to their path to aid newcomers to successfully complete their journey through the world.

Using Maya Zukerman's model, and the Collective Journey's analysis briefing that can be found on the Collective Journey website (Gomez, 2019). We can take a look at how the mentors of the original *Sky* journey can be interpreted through a new lens of rarefied Elders, who found through happenstance, are gifts from a supernatural force that help the collective onward. Each of the realms within *Sky*, of which there are eight in total, all serve a different archetype role as listed from the diagram above. The Elder Spirits of each realm thus serve as a reflection for these archetypes.

Each of the Elder Spirits and the Sky Children could be assigned thusly:

Character	Archetype	Descriptive Traits
Isle Elder	Steward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide • Caretaker
Prairie Elder	Alchemist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformative • Creative
Forest Elder	Creator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative • Prideful
Valley Elders	Trickster and Explorer	Trickster <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mischief • Humor Explorer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovery Oriented • Challengers
Wasteland Elder	Champion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courageous • Tough
Vault Elder	Sage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledgeable • Intelligent
Sky Children	Lover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passionate • Kind

The Isle Elder begins the journey for the player as the Steward. Heralding as the first Elder that the player encounters within the comfortable sandy dunes, soft pinks, blues, and yellows, the player is found within a collective safety in the Isle of Dawn's embrace. Left to their own devices, the player has free reign to visit and interact with the Spirits in the Isle of Dawn, and, for the first time learn emotes that teach the player about how to interact with the other players in the world. The three Spirits they meet teach

them how to point, how to disagree, and how to usher someone along. The pointing Spirit is a unique one, as the player follows their memories, they learn about the Elder Spirit that watches over the land, and the Elder Spirits role in shepherding Children of Light onwards up into the sky. The ushering Spirit helps build this story narrative, as their memory retells of a falling star – a Child of Light – that has fallen out of the sky. These story pieces help the player learn about the caregiver role that the Elder Spirit performs. As the first Elder Spirit, their greater role within the *Sky* world is one of a shepherd. The Isle Elder acts as a guide to the new Sky Children bringing them to the clouds to begin their journey and fills the role of Steward well.

The Prairie Elder is an Alchemist archetype, although they preside over what I argued as a domain of play, a school recess yard of sorts, the Prairie Elder works as a magical being that aligns with the fantastic nature of the world. The Daylight Prairie is a space of wonder, play, and magical fortitude. The Alchemist archetype is akin to that of the magician archetype, and they bring about a fantastical nature and wonder to the world. The Prairie Elder injects a sense of divine magical wonder into the rejuvenation of their constellation, turning the flame that is offered to them into a butterfly.

The Forest Elder is a Creator, and they move and behave with a singular purpose in mind – securing the flame to restore use of their anvil and hammer to fix the octahedral prism that was broken. They are focused on their job of creation, heedless to anyone or any other tasks around them. This focus on creation is echoed in the Hidden Forest they watch over, that is filled to the brim with water and light, two things that drive creation in this world. Albeit the Forest is contaminated, yet in the Forest the player is asked to create, rebuilding destroyed bridges to shape and mold the Hidden Forest back together, which echoes the archetype of the Forest Elder.

Subsequently, the Valley Elders are a unique pair. Instead of the stoic nature that the Forest Elder held towards the player, the Valley Elders represent the carefree duality and the natural challenging energy for the player. They are guides that ask the player to test their skills and see if they measure up to the Elder's themselves. Together they are the Trickster and the Explorer. These two archetypes are reflected within the Valley of Triumph, where players follow Spirits teach players backflips, handstands, how to cheer for their fellow Sky Children, and one of the most notable and used emotes, how to bow and show reverence for each other. The memories of the Spirits here and carefree and joyous, often exploratory in nature, they are confident and unafraid, seeking to push the known bounds of what is possible and discover more about the world and the environment around them. This sentiment is echoed in how the players are asked to interact within the Valley of Triumph, and within the cutscene of with the Valley Elders that challenge and tease the player.

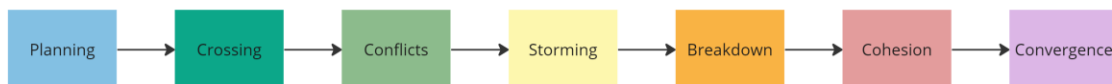
Next, we have the Champion, the Wasteland Elder. The shrine of the Elder stands alone in an empty room, forgotten, past the war-torn battlefield. After braving the perilous journey to reach the Wasteland Elder, players are faced with a brave warrior, one who is stalwart in their defense, but has weakened with time. A defeated warrior.

Summoning the confidence that was not present in the Valley, players interact directly with the Elder of the Wasteland. This time, they are the ones who make the step forward, placing the flame into the spear of the Elder, and granting renewed strength and courage to continue with their stalwart protection. The Wasteland Elder is a protector, a fallen Champion of sorts, but one that is renewed by the Sky Child.

The Vault Elder takes on the archetype of the Sage. This Elder, seated within the Vault of Knowledge, reflects to the player the journey that the player has moved through thus far. The Spirits embody teachings of worship, magic, and ascension. Providing a quiet mind and new knowledge to the player. The Vault Elder guides the player to make the final leap for their journey, operating as the keeper to the knowledge that will guide the player to the final leg of their journey into the Eye of Eden.

Finally, the Sky Children are the Lover archetype. Selfless and a friend to anyone who crosses their path, Sky Children take on the role of the Lover throughout their journey. They seek to restore the light within the world, and it is this Light and the world itself that they are in love with. The player-to-player friendships highlight this the most clearly, with hugs, high-fives, and the gifting of heart currency and candles, serving as clear messages of selfless love. A collective love. The Sky Children are unique and are all Lovers of both the world and the community that they build and summon strength from within.

Returning to the collective journey itself, the linear view of planning, crossing, confictions, storming, breakdowns, cohesion to convergence, can be followed throughout the trajectory of the narrative and gameplay within *Sky*.



Starting with the initial decision and the spur of the quest to reignite the constellations, players begin with planning. This is seen through the Isle of Dawn, where they learn about the world, and subsequently plan how the initial journey will flow. This then bleeds into crossing, within the Daylight Prairie, where a sense of collective is built as players are introduced to social spaces and begin to build the sense of community within the world. This moves into conflicts, where the polluted rain of the Hidden Forest introduces the threatening concept of darkness onto the players. Funneling from the conflicts, the storming aspect is brought to the forefront, where players compete with one another in challenges. The collective, for the first time here, begins to turn on another, thriving amidst the chaos and the thrill of the high-speed races. The Wasteland then drops the players into the major breakdown. Physically thrown sunder from each other within the tornado, players are strewn about, faced with the crumbling temples and polluted Wasteland to match the breakdown of the collective, left to learn to find their community again. This community is brought back together in the Vault, where cohesion is mandatory for success. This is physically represented at the end of the level, where the

player is brought to stand with all the Elder Spirits that they have aided throughout their quest.

This cohesion is then catapulted into convergence. This collective, following the final trial and the sacrifice that is made by the Sky Children within the Eye of Eden, and brought back into the spectacle of the collective light. With their sacrifice made, players are greeted with a harmonious sequence, witnessing all the friends, Spirits, and Elder Spirits they met along their journey, all they shepherd them forward to begin life anew. Within this harmonious collective, right before the rebirth of the player, ever new ascended Spirit they aided physical boosts the players powers into their next iteration. This finale truly encapsulates this collective. All the Spirits line the final starry walkway, bowing and giving thanks to the player as they move forward to their next life. Embodying the journey, the shared vision, and the goal of reuniting in the stars and the light, this propels the cyclical nature of the journey to begin again anew.

Safety and Power in Community

Now that the overarching journey of life and the collective journey have been analyzed, the common theme of community and the lessons in which can be derived from them can be seen time and time again within *Sky*. The journey of *Sky*, which is a journey of life, is one that is made better with friends.

Within the entirety of *Sky*, collaboration between players is encouraged throughout. Beginning truly in the first truly social space of the Daylight Prairie. The Daylight Prairie is the first area where there are puzzles that require player-to-player cooperation. Like practice in kindergarten, this is where players learn to play nicely, to cooperate, and to help each other out. There are doors here that require two to open, a puzzle with an elevator that demands cooperation from 8 players, and even a secret that needs 8 Sky Children to wait, pray, and be patient for a special surprise of summoning a dog. There is wonder and play here, and it is the time to experiment and learn kindness between each other. This is the first lesson that *Sky* brings to teach, this aspect of strength in community, and an altruistic approach to interaction.

Subsequently, within the Hidden Forest players encounter Crabs for the first time. Unlike previously, where players were untouchable and were only able to be blown over by clouds and their own folly, players can be knocked down and hurt by the Crabs that prowl and hide in caves and what could be considered “safe” locations from the rain. These first encounters with injury and struggle are the pinnacle to the lessons being taught within *Sky*. Other players being essential to survival and learning how to move through the new dangerous world they’ve stumbled into. There is a lesson here about safety in community, and safety in numbers. As players can combat the Crabs with a call, when banded together multiple players can take on the Crabs with ease.

On top of this the safest way to travel through the Hidden Forest is to hold hands with another player and make the journey together. This allows for combatting the drain of light that the rain brings to be less daunting and easier to manage. Most notably within the Forest temple, players will encounter their first large darkness plant. This darkness plant can only be burned away with the help of another player. This plant serves as another tool to help players learn that working together will help them succeed against challenging elements.

The Golden Wasteland area takes these lessons that were learned within the Hidden Forest, and begins to repeat them again, but with more urgency, and more gravitas. Sky Children in this area crucially need to assist each other. With the constant threat of the darkness and the Krill, and with enemies lurking around every corner, players must find the light and keep each other safe. Spirits lying within the Wasteland are challenging to relive, and a group effort makes the treacherous task of crossing the Wasteland alive imperative. Dark flowers here are large, and often require more than one player to burn them away. Lights are few and far between, and often a passing player can make all the difference if they choose to stop to help recharge each other's winged light. This piece, of making the choice to stop and help other players that might be out of winged charges, is a selfless one, but is one that is common among the community. With all the effort that the systems perform earlier in the game, Sky Children have fostered a sense of community, and they will help and protect their own. The Wasteland provides an opportunity to begin the process of mending, moving through the tumultuous time to foster a collective community strength.

The Vault of Knowledge takes a different approach than the previous zones, within this one, there are multiple extra side puzzles that deviate from the main pathway that require teamwork to complete. Furthermore, each level comes with a joint task, with a strong emphasis on collective teamwork. While possible to complete it alone, the journey goes smoother and faster with others by the player's side. The Vault is rather stronghanded in its approach in reinforcing the narrative of working in a community, but it does successfully strengthen the lesson.

This is unlike in the Valley of Triumph, where the active competition pits player against player, and actively works against the initial comradery that was being built up until this point. This choice works well with the collective journey, as it sows discord within the community building aspect, and brings about a storm. But overall, the message here falls a little flat, as the races tend to drive a wedge in the community messaging, and actively build potentially harmful competition – which is something to be mindful of when there are players who can be winners, and others that will inevitably be losers.

Finally, all this builds to final confrontation in the Eye of Eden. Whereas before in the Hidden Forest and in the Golden Wasteland travelling together was more optimal, within the Eye of Eden it becomes painstakingly crucial that players work together. With crystals that drain winged light rapidly and can outright knock winged light right out of a player, along with flying rocks and Krill, light sources are few and far in between.

Holding tight to another player's hand, sharing light, flame, and seeking each other out for help and assistance is the best way to make it through the Eye of Eden to the center of it all. Here, players must actively help each other out to reach the end safely. The odds of making it through are much higher in numbers than alone.

Once passed Eden, and into orbit, the final few cutscenes of the player moving into their death sequence drives home this message of community and the strength found within it. Upon waking from their death, players find another lost Sky Child here in the darkness. They can offer their hand to them, drawing them to their feet, and then are given the ability to hug. This emote, learned from accumulating friends within *Sky*, is a powerful tool that shapes the next few scenes to come. This emotional output of hugging the other lost Sky Child results in the player absorbing their winged light to be able to have wings to fly to orbit. This final selfless act from the other Sky Child, showcases the importance of relying on others, and building and fostering relationships within a community.

As said in the beginning of this analysis, the journey through *Sky* is an emotional and beautiful one, but it is one made all the better with friends to accompany you along the way.

Strongest Element

The strongest element within *Sky* is the ludonarrative element of the winged lights, and the collection of them. Within the world of *Sky*, players can collect winged lights that help boost their overall wing power to fly through the world. They often act as glowing beacons for players. These winged lights, and the Children of Light, are perilously important to the final scene in *Sky*, where players are asked to give up these lights to frozen Sky Children in the final dash towards the shattered corrupted light in Eden. As previously discussed, this element really serves to highlight the overall importance of selfless altruistic sacrifice, and the rewards that come from this. These lights represented by a UI module at the top of the screen and as small patterns on the cape of the Sky Child act to denote more senior players within the game, and as form of knowledge. Players with more winged lights have run through Eden a multitude of times and have experienced more lives than others with fewer. It helps to serve as a narrative function when players lose these lights to Krill, rain, and red crystals, but ultimately are a pinnacle piece that help communicate the overarching themes within *Sky*.

Unsuccessful Element

As aforementioned within the analysis, in the Valley of Triumph, the most unsuccessful element within the game was with the competitive nature of the races in the

Valley. While it helps the player build confidence and communicate the race and competitive nature of young adulthood – these themes really only are highlighted for the winning player. Losing players are not given the same sense of satisfaction or learning experience that the winners are afforded, although they get the same physical rewards, it is the emotional one that is lacking. While from one viewpoint it can be understood why these competitive races were included, the biggest detriment to the narrative is upon a player winning, if the loser does not reach the arena within a timely manner, they do not have the chance to experience the race, and instead are instantly teleported to the finish. This causes dissonance, and although the purpose of this can be understood from a mechanic perspective, when there are veteran players who are skilled at the races against players who are experiencing it for the first time, there is a large skill gap that can cause friction between the two.

Narratively speaking, the competitiveness of the race feels out of place among the lessons of community building. Especially considering this section arrives just before the Golden Wasteland, where players need to band together to survive the darkness, this can throw off the sense of community that has been fostered up until now, and even potentially create conflicts and rifts among different groups of players. Ways to mend this conflict of interest could be to have a more informal race, much like the race at the beginning of the Valley of Triumph. Instead of pitting players against each other to reach a destination before the other, having players be able to fulfil the race on their own accord, or even offer the opportunity to require all players to finish sections together could help maintain the sense of community without losing some of the competitive nature of the Valley races.

Highlight

In *Sky: Children of Light*, once players have reached the point of no return, and have been dodging between the shattering red crystals, and hiding to take cover – when players reach that final hiding spot and are gazing out on the remainder of the open terrain towards the large polluted light, the dawning realization that **there is nowhere to hide** and that the only way forward is right into the killer crystals is momentous. It is one where players are forced to reckon with the fact that there is no safe way forward. No safety ahead, and no way to back out. The only pathway is forward, into the crystals, and towards death. It is this acceptance to push onwards, blindly, with no knowledge of what awaits at the end, that brings the story to its emotional crest. Between this, and the slow realization that the other frozen Sky Children they were helping are about to become themselves, this moment within the game finally brings about all the different aspects together into one cohesive emotional moment. Players mourn their own life, they mourn the lives of the other Sky Children, and are left wondering what is to come next. It is a powerful emotional moment, realizing that a sacrifice to death is the only way forward, and that there are no remaining options left. Death, when staring you down at the very end, is inescapable, and somehow both terrifying and comforting. At the end of the line, *Sky* brings about a masterpiece of a silent emotional narrative.

Critical Reception

IGN 8.5/10 – reviewed by David Jagneaux.

David Jagneaux comments that *Sky: Children of Light* “is a game about discovery in more ways than just its world.” Jagneaux details the story as both charming and healing in nature, with subtle and delightful storytelling. Specifically highlighting heartbreaking Spirit encounters. The overall review remarks that it is a rich emotional experience, with the main drawback being the similarity between the ending of *Sky*’s story and that of the predecessor of *Journey* by the same game studio.

Game Spot 8/10 – reviewed by Alessandro Barbosa.

Alessandro Barbosa reviews that *Sky* is a tale of charm, enthusing that the Spirit memories are “vague stories that come across as anything from humorous to tragic.” Barbosa details the Spirit characters that players come across, and the “breadcrumb trail” that players follow to uncover more of the world’s secrets. Overall, Barbosa professes that while like its predecessor, it is charming in its own right, although the major drawback would be in the revisits to previous areas are not as captivating as the first experience.

Nintendo Life 8/10 – reviewed by Ollie Reynolds.

Ollie Reynolds describes the story as “taking place within a beautiful kingdom”, with unique encounters with Spirits. The overall sentiment from Reynolds professes towards the interactions between players, attributing them to wonderful experience throughout exploring the areas within the world. Generally, Reynolds describes the experience with stunning visuals, but with drawbacks on the simplistic gameplay that might hinder the longevity of the game.

Lessons

- **Player-to-Player interaction is a powerful medium to enhance the story:**
In massive multiplayer games, the story can often be convoluted, long, and relies heavily on non-player characters to deliver new quests and content to players. *Sky* manages to showcase how player-to-player interaction, even on small, unknown scales, manages to have massive impacts on the overall story of the game. Players enhance the narrative, when faced with difficult seemingly impossible tasks in the Golden Wasteland, or difficult puzzles in the Vault of Knowledge, players choosing to volunteer and help each other can shift the experience a player has in the world and help enhance the overall storyline. Without making friends along the way, the final flight in orbit would not have the same impact if players were one among many empty Sky Children. Instead, they can view the names they have given to the friends they have encountered along the way, further

highlighting how player-to-player experiences and interactions can help bolster a story's narrative delivery.

- **Emotes, gestures, and actions can convey more than words:**
While most narratives tend to be conveyed through dialogue, conversations, and words, *Sky*'s narrative is predominantly silent. There are key moments in this story told only through gestures and impressions. None of the Elder Spirits ever speak to the player. Every cutscene and impression of a character is interpreted through actions, gestures, and how their body language conveys emotion. Language is a fantastic tool to communicate, but when words fail, a game of charades can always take its place. A fantastic example is after the players sacrifice when they awaken alone in the dark. Finding themselves in the dark, and discovering one other Sky Child, it is through an outstretched hand and finally a hug, that the final sequence of the narrative through that single emote that delivers a powerful narrative experience that could not be conveyed properly were it done with words. That hug emote is one that is used throughout the journey with friends made along the way, and it is in that reuse that when asked to be done in such tense emotional moment that it carries even more impact.
- **Focusing on a collective journey versus a hero's journey can fundamentally impact a solo experience:**
The hero's journey has been a long popular way to explore and structure a narrative arc. The introduction of the collective journey analyses the popular group journey that has been prevalent in television and movies and applies this formula to the structure of narrative in *Sky*. Having used this analysis structure to investigate the narrative, focusing on a collective approach to the hero's journey format, impacts what is predominantly a solo journey into a new different impactful experience. The use of the collective allows for more player-to-player engagement and feeling of cohesion when moving to the final act of the game. One of the major highlights from *Sky* is how seamlessly a close community is curated and integrated within the world from the Isle of Dawn to the Eye of Eden. Through following the collective journey structure, this twist builds upon the players experience as one of a greater collective, while still maintaining an individual experience in an interesting approach that introduces a new format to explore an overarching structure from existing roots.

Summation

Sky: Children of Light is an emotional journey, which captures many different shades and sounds of life. It weaves a tale that follows some of the fundamental joys, sorrows, and experiences from life. Life is a journey worthy of experiencing, in all of its faculties, and Jennie Kong delivers this narrative in a charming and captivating way that explores community, sacrifice, and the strength that lies within a collective.

Understanding the question of existence, what it means to live, and tackling the difficult subject of the inevitability of death and loss, the team at *thatgamecompany* has built a compelling story and world, with a uniquely altruistic community. As a narrative built on the journey of life, the narrative of *Sky* is worth analyzing just as any other story that grapples with the innately human fear of death and pursuing what it truly means to live. The journey is different for everyone, but it is one made better with a hand to hold along the way, and friends to share it with.

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