

The darkness of the night spreads across the sky as the clock counts towards midnight as January approaches. Fireworks erupt incandescently, radiating their beauty outwards, illuminating the sky in an attempt to brighten the harsh cold that winter harbours. The colourful explosions paint themselves to every corner of the sky's canvas, as the clock edges towards twelve o'clock.

It is the final night of 2022 in the land of PictureGame. The time for the audit has arrived.

"PictureGame is a small land, home to around sixty thousand people. It is nestled away amongst rolling hills topped with snow, with rivers carving up the earth beneath them. Tucked amongst the varying landscape is the centrepiece of the PictureGame dynasty: the maze.

The maze houses the history and the secrets of PictureGame. It starts in an unreachable location now outside of its borders, before it weaves chaotically throughout the changing scenery, with memories etched into the walls for anyone who cares to dive back into the madness that the maze contains. It is a museum of historical artefacts, of rounds and moments that bring back emotions previously forgotten.

Every year the maze is updated with the events of the previous twelve months. That time has come again."

You hear the guide finish his introduction, and you step into the maze with him. The walls tower around you, concrete and sturdy; they are ugly but alluring, standing proudly symbolic of the unwavering empire that they support. You are led past vines growing downwards and grass peeking out from the cracks where the walls meet the sandy floor. As you walk through the beginnings of the maze, you hear the guide point out the remnants of days gone by - dormant accounts from the days of account-sharing; milestones achieved years ago; moments of hilarity immortalised in the stone of the walls.

Turning the corner, you come to a gleaming section of maze, tidier and prettier than the rest. Looking to your left, you see a silver picture frame, adorned intricately with mountains and birds. The picture inside is a man on a boat, sailing across a channel of water atop a bridge. <sup>1</sup>

"That's where the maze has ended," your guide proclaims, "The last round of 2021."

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<sup>1</sup> Round 104908

You see the guide gesture into the forthcoming section of the maze, pointing at empty walls and an untrodden floor. It's time to archive PictureGame's 2022. On the wall, a singular word etched:

## January

The guide walks ahead of you, plucking picture frames from his seemingly endless backpack, inscribing comments on the wall beneath where he hangs the frames. You notice the first solve of 2022; that honour was given to butterfreeeee1, nearly twenty-thousand rounds ago.

Pacing gently forwards, you notice another picture frame, golden this time. It glints in the moonlight that accompanies you on this journey, reflecting light across the maze, lighting the walls atmospherically. The guide informs you that these golden picture frames are for special milestones achieved by players. Glancing at the frame, you see the number 2000 carved just below the photo inside, with 'walkalong' written just below that.

"1st January", the guide explains, "walkalong won his 2000th round. Come, there's plenty more to do."

You follow him at his quick pace, passing the silver frames he regularly pins to the wall, documenting all the rounds posted. Every so often, you see him produce a golden frame, all ornately decorated and inscribed with the personal achievements of players. You pass EnferDesFormes' 600th frame, quickly followed by PackOfZigZag's 200th.

Pacing forward, you reach the first corner of the maze, the walls splitting into multiple routes that you could follow. You continue to trace the footsteps of your guide, who appears to know exactly the route he wants you to take. A colourful bird screeches and lands in front of you, apparently enticed by the glinting frame adorned with "2800 - SuperFreakonomics". You notice the red and yellow wings of the bird as it takes to the air again, soaring past frames until it finds the bright gold that it seems yearns for. It pauses between two frames opposite one another; ItoXICl's 900th and Grujah's 200th, achieved one day apart.

The bird flies away, and you drag your eyes away from it to see the guide hammering a wooden stick into the ground, with a green flag draped from the end of it. The guide explains to you these flags denote special events that occurred. Upon closer inspection, you see beautiful stitching in the centre of the flag, explaining the reason behind the

flag. This flag is embellished with soft silk reading “The Longest Gap of All Time - qwertyqyle”<sup>2</sup>.

Venturing forwards past the flag, you see six more golden frames arranged neatly alongside each other, all representing their respective milestones. Walking past them at a slow pace, you read “900 - smala017”, “200 - opht\_” and “1000 - AGlassDarkley”. You pause for a moment, but you are hurried by the guide who calls for you to keep up. Before you move on, you glance at the other three frames, celebrating the 3000th win of TheLamestUsername, marcol-copperpot’s 700th and stevekeiretsu’s 1800th. You glance up and notice the guide’s backpack a long way away.

As you sprint to catch up with the guide, sand seeps into your shoes, and you notice the wind for the first time, a refreshing breeze as you hurry to where the guide stands. He is hammering away again, seemingly unaware of your panting. He moves away, and you see the plaque left behind. It reads one word:

## February

You have made it through the first month of the year, but the guide shows no signs of slowing. Immediately, the guide produces another flag and sticks it in the floor of the maze insouciantly. With a curious gaze, you scan the writing woven into its fabrics. The flag records the addition of two new moderators to the PictureGame team. In a larger font, you see their names recorded - punchingcatto and HighestCommonFactor. In the distance, you notice another green flag blowing slightly in the wind, but your eyes wander first to the three golden frames between you and the next flag.

You are separated from the next flag by KluckyKlucky’s 500th frame, SuperFreakonomic’s 2900th and knoekie’s 400th. Acknowledging their achievements, you investigate the sandy flag newly introduced into the maze. It simply reads two words - “rules updated”. Hanging over the flag is a gleaming celebrating kmsasaki’s 100th victory in the game.

“Get used to that name!” the guide chortles, before hanging up IDontHaveSkype’s 500th frame. For the third time in quick succession, your guide whips out another green flag to signify an important event. February has been a busy month already. This flag details the picturegame.co update released by Provium.

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<sup>2</sup> Round 105870

Reaching for a bottle of water to quench your increasing thirst, you amble forwards, beginning to notice the air warming. It's hot in the maze, the concrete walls trapping the heat, making you sweat. In front of you are two celebratory frames for 100th wins - Lasnu's and Sythrir's.

The next frame is beautifully carved, the details almost flowing with grace and beauty. At the top, a small turtle smiles down at you. "1200 - i\_luke\_turtles" is what it reads. You grin slightly looking at the turtle, before turning to look at the guide. He has already hung plenty more frames for you to remember.

Aure20's 1600th, TheLamestUsername's 3100th and Jojo733's 500th are the next for you to glance upon wondrously, impressed with their high win counts. The next three are equally impressive, you muse, as you notice punchingcatto's 500th, Twizzyu's 800th and the enormous figure of 2100 by walkalong.

Looking up, you see the guide aggressively attaching another plaque to the wall. The end of the month must be near, you figure. Wiping away the sweat that's begun to accumulate, you stop before the last milestone of February. HighestCommonFactor achieved 1100 wins on February's last day.

Approaching the plaque, laboured, you wonder how the guide manages to produce the frames and plaques so efficiently and effortlessly. Sure enough, the next plaque has the exact word that you expect:

## March

Just after the plaque for March, you notice the maze separate into multiple intriguing avenues, all seeming to call out for your footsteps. Your breathing echoes across the walls, bouncing away into the distance. The floor has begun to become more earthy, with the sand slowly disappearing behind you as you walk on.

In front of you, the four paths all look identical. Without hesitation, though, the guide charges though the leftmost channel, hanging kmsasaki's 200th frame as he speeds on, closely followed by Lasnu's 200th.

You reach the end of this small avenue of the maze, and notice a large, circular room housing a chandelier on its domed roof. In the middle of the room sits a table. You assume it is oak, and it dominates the space, lit only by the wavering candles from the

chandelier above. In the room, the guide places four more frames on each side of the table. Scanning around the room, you notice “100 - qwertyqyle”, “300 - RisibleComestible” and “100 - ookisan”. The final frame is a familiar name - “300 - kmsasaki”.

You take a seat at the table, exhausted by the speed of the events that have just taken place. You muse that the guide must have incredible stamina to keep this up for another nine months of history, and note that the table must have its uses.

Indeed, the guide produces another plaque from his bottomless rucksack and embeds it into the middle of the table. It too, reads just a singular word:

## April

Immediately, you notice the plaque being covered up by a chequered board, thousands of squares in a rectangle. Behind you, a flag is stuck into the ground at the entrance to the room.

“r/place,” explains the guide, gesturing to the board in front of you. “A time for the whole community to attempt to work together to make art. Quite the occasion, really.”

As you go to rise to follow the guide out of the room, you notice the squares on the board begin to fill with colour. Reds and blues collide to form flags, artwork and graffiti in an explosion of colour. Your eye is caught by a snoo holding a picture frame, rather similar to the ones hung in the walls of the maze.

There is no time to question the similarity, however, as the guide has already galloped forward to hang yet more glimmering frames onto the walls of the maze. The first frame celebrates 3200 wins by TheLamestUsername, closely followed by marcol-copperpots second entry of the year - his 800th. Lasnu quickly follows with his 300th, just before EnferDesFormes’ 700th.

Wiping a smudge of dirt off one of the frames you pass, you notice a snake slide past your feet, hissing with appreciation at your presence. It has a brilliant purple back, and its eyes are a gorgeous blue. Following its eyes, you notice its sight be caught by the addition of yet another frame by the guide. This time, it is Bekko\_’s 100th victory.

Striding forward, the snake by your feet, more frames are erected with equal attraction - RisibleComestible's 400th and Kriss23V's 100th are the next two to be immortalised. A french flag adorns the frame of youlooksinister's 300th, right before the 400th win of kmsasaki. Now in front of you, the snake slithers into a crack in the bottom of the wall, seeming to wave to you with its tail as it disappears. It's yet another secret that the maze will house until the next visitors emerge.

Stopping to read the next frame - stevenettes's 100th - you see a slightly duller frame be produce from the guide's backpack. He polishes it before hanging it on the wall, ensuring it is just as bright as all the other frames. It is hung directly after IDontHaveSkype's 600th memorial frame, and reads "1900 - stevekeiretsu". A remarkable milestone, you think, giving it a quick wipe with your shirt to try and pretend to the guide that you are more than just an extra responsibility.

The guide isn't looking at you, though. Instead, you hear another plaque be hammered into the wall. You don't have to look to know exactly what it will say.

## May

Directly underneath the plaque, the guide sticks a flag to memorialise an important event in PictureGame's history. Peering closely at the green material, you see no words stitched this time. Instead, you see a small potato smiley. Confused, you glance towards the guide.

"No idea either," the guide says. "Something to do with new emojis. I'm just following my list."

Next to the flag hangs RisibleComestible's 500th win, before -Hoople-'s and Grujah's 300th win each follows. You notice kmsasaki's 500th frame before two 900s - Twizzyu's and marcol-copperpot's. The crowded wall is adorned with another intricate frame, this one displaying "3300 - TheLamestUsername".

Leaving footprints behind you as you continue to inspect the frames, you begin to realise the magnitude of the maze that you are in. Offshoots begin and end continuously, and you wonder how small the chances are that you have ended up in this exact sequence of events. You cast your mind back to the beginning of the tour, and how low your expectations were. The sheer number of events has captured you, and with a renewed eagerness you check out the next frames, as pretty as the first.

The next frame commemorates hereunseun's 300th win, before qwertyqyle's 200th is hung adjacent to it, glinting in the moonlight. Another 100th frame follows, this time arcnap's, before kmsasaki's sixth milestone frame of the year is produced - his 600th win. In between them, Aure20's 1700th win receives its frame.

Once more, you hear the unmistakable sound of a metal hitting the wall. It's time for another plaque, another month. Just before it hangs the last frame of May - HighestCommonFactor's 1200th. Then, you arrive at the plaque.

## June

The walk continues at a great pace, the guide continuing to hang up the frames with alarming precision and pace. The walls of the maze stretch upwards ceaselessly, unaware of the frames being placed upon them.

The first golden frame of June commemorates Jojo733's 600th win, aligned next to AGlassDarkley's 1100th and punchingcatto's 600th. Ahead of you, you see the blur of a green flag being produced from the guide.

"FronD\_Dishlock - most upvoted round of 2022<sup>3</sup>".

The guide does not even stop to check if the flag is secured in the ground before marching on dutifully, hanging frames detailing kmsasaki's 700th win and walkalong's 2200th.

As you walk on, you begin to notice the stars in the sky for the first time. They shine brightly, like little specks of imagination dotting the night canvas. The guide sees no time for stargazing, though, and you hear the hammering of more frames into the unforgiving concrete wall. Kriss23V, i\_luke\_turtles, and arcnap are memorialised with their 200th, 1300th and 200th wins, before a grand frame houses TheLamestUsername's 3400th. Yet another frame for kmsasaki follows, this time for his 800th win.

You take a right turning in the maze, unaware of what might greet you as you take in your surroundings. There are no surprises here, just the noise of the guide etching words into a plaque, right after Dr\_\_SteveBrule's 100th win frame. You reach the plaque.

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<sup>3</sup> Round 112690

# July

A small pause for the guide to recompose himself is all he needs before he once again begins his tireless work in the maze. You wonder if he enjoys having someone to appreciate his work, just to look over his physical exertions.

The latest products of this exertion come in the form of more golden frames, the next two celebrating 700th wins for IDontHaveSkype and Jojo733. Just next to Jojo733's frame is kmsasaki's 900th, his seemingly endless supply of frames not running dry.

The next entries into the maze are arcnap's 300th and the beautiful carvings of smala017's 1000th win. Once again, the guide places down a green flag into the damp floor of the maze, this time with a blue border. The guide explains to you this special flag commemorates kmsasaki reaching the top 25 players on the leaderboard, made by Provium.

"Speaking of Provium," continues the guide. "This flag marks the discord bot update with the new notify feature, along with others."

He ceremoniously places the flag next to kmsasaki's, before hanging up a frame to celebrate stevekeiretsu's 2000th win, and kmsasaki's 1000th.

You watch intently as the frames continue to materialise, the endless supply of them listing player after player, win count after win count. The guide reads them out to you as he places them onto the wall.

"200 - TheLoyalOrder," he starts. "1000 - marcol-copperpot, 300 - opht\_, 3500 - TheLamestUsername, and 800 - EnferDesFormes."

Impressed with his tenacity, you notice him rummage around his backpack and pick up another plaque. The month must be over, but there's still time for one more green flag:

"Monthly win record - kmsasaki"



# August

Frame after frame continues to be nailed into the wall as you pace along behind the guide, watching with curiosity at each name and number that appears. 1100 for kmsasaki, 400 for Grujah and 800 for Jojo733 begin this month's proceedings, but they are far from done.

400 for arcnap and 3600 for TheLamestUsername are next, the guide not even breaking a sweat in his routine work of retrieving and arranging the frames. Dr\_\_SteveBrule reaches 200 before Lasnu archives 400 and qwertyqyle 300. KluckyKlucky's 600th is the last before another green flag makes its appearance.

The guide gently places this flag against the wall, showing off its stitching - a torch ablaze, with PictureGame Olympiad etched beneath it.

More frames adorn the sides of the maze, giving it character the concrete walls lack without the glamour of the gold. 300 for Kriss23V, 1200 for kmsasaki, 100 for HenryMacHenry and 800 for IDontHaveSkype - the awards are beautiful in their number.

The next frame contains golden puzzle pieces, and you notice the genius in the creation of it - they all fit together perfectly. Beneath it is written "1000 - chuttiekang".

Perambulating forward with intrigue you notice kaalterdu's 200th frame and iGeography's 1000th, right before another green flag. You crouch down to read the inscription on this one:

"The conclusion of TheLamestUsername's 243 day win streak, the longest of all time"<sup>4</sup>.

Then, the monotonous sound of a plaque being smashed into the wall of a maze. You glance upwards, just to check your suspicions.

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<sup>4</sup> Round 116339

# September

A new name for the year greets you in the first frame of September, as you see aidanmco reach his 300th win, his frame positioned directly above another flag, this one commemorating the largest number of rounds ever in a 24 hour period - 105.

Jogging to keep up with the robotically efficient guide, you pass Dr\_\_SteveBrule's 300th frame and RisibleComestible's 600th. The moonlight reflects off the golden frames into your face as you continue to speed up in order to not lose the guide.

You smile as you realise the fortuitousness of this occasion, and the brilliance of seeing the lines of golden frames celebrating such achievements - the latest one being SuperFreakonomics achieving 3000 wins. The guide calls out the next frames to you so you don't have to stop to admire them visually. You hear his melodic voice ring out across the maze:

"Jojo733 reached 900 wins here; TheLamestUsername reached 3700 wins here; kmsasaki reached 1300 wins here. A new entry comes in next, that's always exciting!"

You peer over his shoulder to see "100 - TheRandomistUK" and smile at the thought of someone's first milestone. Above you, the stars twinkle elegantly, perhaps to show their appreciation for Grujah's 500th win and his frame.

A great clanging noise. That can only mean one thing, you realise.

# October

With a distinct lack of grace, you set off around the latest twist in the apparently never-ending maze of PictureGame history. You note how the lanes of the maze funnel you into reliving history that occurred so recently, yet seemingly so long ago. The cries of the birds in the night encourage you to keep walking, the maze's secrets have not been fully uncovered yet.

"2400 - quatrevingtneuf" is the next engraving to catch your eye, before Dr\_\_SteveBrule's 400th win precedes yet another green flag. Upon closer inspection, you realise this is the second with a blue border. That means another player ascended into the top 25 players - Jojo733.

Two consecutive 1000 win frames are your next ports of call, hanging gloriously next to one another, with ItoXICI's and AirplaneReference's names beneath them in a congratulatory manner. You note that the call of the birds is particularly relevant to the next name, as you peruse over commonpuffin's 100 win frame.

"Busy month for Jojo733," calls the guide, producing another frame, this one engraved with 1000.

"That goes along nicely with this flag, marking the introduction of a new role to celebrate top 25 hitting one thousand wins."

Sweating with effort now, the night breeze not enough to cool you completely, you walk along to inspect the last four frames of the month, as you have already seen the next plaque erected far in front of you by the guide.

"500 - arcnap", "1400 - kmsasaki", "2300 - walkalong", and "3800 - TheLamestUsername" and the final events placed into the October section of the maze. Pausing for a breath, you look up to see where you've got to.

## November

With only two months left of the year to navigate, a renewed sense of invigoration is located inside yourself. The row of frames stretches far across the wall, like a rich set of dominoes lined up against one another. The first of this month is kmsasaki's 1500, followed by kaalterdu's 300th and opht\_'s 400th.

You see the guide glance back at you to check your progress, and, not wanting to hamper him, scurry along quickly to get side by side with him. In the process, you pass Dr\_\_SteveBrule's 500th win frame and the 100th win frame of marl6894, before commonpuffin's 200.

The guide explains to you that there is not long to go now, but the maze floor will begin to become more uneven as the end of the year approaches. Sure enough, you notice a slight bump in the floor as you walk, meaning you are slightly peering down to read the inscription on the next frame: "600 - arcnap".

Taking care where you place your feet, you venture forth into the corridors of the maze, noticing AirplaneReference's 1100th win and Kriss23V's 400th win. Following these are

stevenette's 200th win frame and PoliticsIsCool13's first entry into the museum - his 100th.

Your footsteps begin to become more laboured as the floor rises into a gentle incline, the grass growing longer. Amongst the grass, a frog ribbits his approval of your perseverance, and takes great interest in the frame which it sits below, observing walkalong's 2400th win. You notice a familiar name - TheLamestUsername - engraved after 3900 on the next frame.

Three more frames decorate the sides of the great maze in your eyeline, and you stop in front of each one to take in their beauty. "400 - youlooksinister" is the first, and then "600 - Dr\_\_SteveBrule". A new entry is the last frame that you can see for now, and reading it closely you discover azure\_monster's 100th victory.

Looking around, you find the guide nowhere to be seen, just a trail of footprints leading off to the right of the maze. Looking up where the footprints seem more disorganised, you see a familiar sight.

## December

A spluttering cough alerts you to the guide's presence as he bends down to insert a green flag into the floor of the maze. It simply reads "secret santa".

The guide strolls ahead, seemingly lifted by the lightening weight of his backpack as he places punchingcatto's 700th frame and commonpuffin's 300th.

Now with a spring in his step, the guide seems to bound forth, erecting frames at an almost alarming pace, but with incredible accuracy. The next frames to be inducted into the maze's museum are marl6894's 200th, AGlassDarkley's 1200th and kmsasaki's 1600th.

A quick jog to catch up with the guide allows you to see his work more closely, as he methodically aligns each frame with one another to make them perfectly straight, before nailing them against the towering walls of the maze. The ornate frames contrast so beautifully with the harsh dullness of the concrete behind them, the latest example being Jojo733's 1100th win.

The maze splits after this frame, allowing for three choices to be pursued. Pausing slightly, the guide leads you down the third option, briefly pausing to hang Grujah's 600th frame and upshawam's 200th.

As you turn the corner, something new catches your eye. Instead of towering walls reaching towards the sky, a vast landscape of trees and rivers greets you. The guide hangs another frame right at the end of the wall - "700 - Dr\_\_SteveBrule" - before dropping his bag and looking out over the landscape.

"Well, there we are." The guide speaks softly, staring into the alluring water of the river across the horizon.

"The end of PictureGame 2022. It had moments of great hilarity, of impressive achievements and of wonderful togetherness. There were outstanding rounds, majestic solves and exceptional teamwork. It's been a memorable year with new players dominating, old faces returning and trends both set and upheaved. I can only thank you for joining me on this journey of memories and remembrance. I hope to see you next year too. Who knows where the maze will take us next."

He pauses, then sits down to look out over the landscape. His gaze shifts towards an illuminated city with a tall church tower. There is a wonderful moment of silence, filled with reflection, before a charming noise rings out over the hills.

The church tower rings out with bells, a symphonic eruption of noise to accompany the fireworks that burst brightly against the darkness of the sky. You look at the guide and smile, as the church bells fade.

The new year has arrived.