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THANKS!

**October 18th**

**Aaron Astle**

Game Freak hack exposes employee information and source code in major security breach  
<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/game-freak-hack-exposes-employee-information-and-source-code-in-major-security-breach/>

Pokémon developer Game Freak was recently hacked with over a terabyte of information accessed, including 2,600 items containing the names and email addresses of current, former and contract employees.

We discussed the unfortunate situation for the employees more in-depth in our Week in Mobile Games podcast (check it out if you haven't already!), but here I'll just say that it has been interesting to see more of the development process behind the Pokémon themselves.

I'm avoiding spoilers on anything regarding unreleased games, but seeing the spritework for old Pokémon mid-development, and seeing how drastically some changed, is fascinating for a big fan of the franchise.

It's the sort of thing I'd love for Game Freak to release officially, as a collection of designs and its creations process. Because of course, as fascinating as concept art and early sprite art is to see, discovering them through hacking just isn't the right way to go about it.

**Paige Cook**

NetEase partners with Bungie for Destiny: Rising mobile game

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/netease-partners-with-bungie-for-destiny-rising-mobile-game/>

We've been hearing about a Destiny mobile game since 2018, when NetEase acquired a stake in its developer, Bungie. Fast-forward a few years, and it's happening with Destiny: Rising.

The game is being developed and published by NetEase, so straight away makes me intrigued on how the game itself will play; it's got the classic modes such as single-player and competitive multiplayer, but without Bungie directly being involved, it will be interesting to see a NetEase interpretation of the Destiny formula. Will this feel like an authentic Destiny experience on mobile or something else? From the trailer at least it looks like the game we would expect to see.

One thing I'm particularly interested in or, should I say, hesitant about is how NetEase will monetise the game.

Thinking about Destiny 2, some fans already feel that the game is 'pay to win', with certain exotic weapons only obtainable by paying. So take a game like that and make it mobile, a platform where monetisation is often even more prevalent. Then add NetEase to the mix, who on occasion have been known to heavily monetise titles, and it makes me wonder how they will hit the balance between making money, and retaining players.

Obviously, NetEase will want to ensure the game's profitability, but I think striking that balance might be this game's make-or-break aspect. If it leans too far into the 'pay to win' territory, player frustration will show, and it'll show fast.

I'm intrigued to see how this one turns out, and it's good to see it finally happening. However, I can't help but wonder if a Destiny mobile has already passed its best window of opportunity.

**October 11th**

**Craig Chapple**

**Scopely plans major acquisition next year**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/scopely-plans-major-acquisition-next-year/>

Monopoly Go maker Scopely is gearing up for a "megadeal" acquisition next year.

According to mobilegamer.biz, the company's chief revenue officer, Tim O'Brien, shared the plans during a subscriber-only Q&A at Variety's Entertainment & Technology Summit.

"I hope that we announce at least one megadeal," said O'Brien when asked about the company's plans for 2025.

"When I say megadeal, I mean a scaled global franchise doing hopefully at least a billion dollars in revenue."

So who could that be? I love a bit of wild speculation.

We discussed this on the latest episode of the PocketGamer.biz Week in Mobile Games podcast (which will be released soon). With the aim to target a billion-dollar franchise, the pool of potential acquisitions reduces dramatically.

With the backing of Savvy Games Group, perhaps Scopely could be targeting a swoop for Turkey's casual games giant Dream Games? The studio recently ranked fourth in our [Top 50 Mobile Game Makers 2024](#) list thanks to its runaway hit Royal Match. The title took over Candy Crush Saga this year as the world's biggest match-three game. Next month it aims to release the follow-up: Royal Kingdom.

A deal for Dream Games - with its mega-hit and potential for growth from a new title - would meet the criteria O'Brien set out. It would represent another exit for Turkey's major mobile studios, with Gram Games, Peak Games and Rollic all snapped up by Zynga.

To speculate even more wildly - perhaps Scopely and Savvy could be looking at Homescapes and Gardenscapes developer Playrix? Perhaps Moon Active with its Monopoly Go rival Coin Master and growing portfolio in other genres like merge? Maybe Playtika, which prior to its purchase of SuperPlay for \$1.95 billion, was looking for a sale not too long ago.

The M&A train continues.

## **Aaron Astle**

### **Wuthering Waves coasts to \$150 million**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/wuthering-waves-coasts-to-150-million/>

Making waves in the gacha games space, Kuro Games' open-world RPG Wuthering Waves has picked up \$150 million in gross mobile revenue in just over four months. It raced to the first \$100 million and has slowed down since, but with so much momentum behind it, it's really taken little time at all to reach the latest milestone.

In fact, it's hit the \$150 million mark only one month slower than Zenless Zone Zero, a fellow anime-esque RPG with a goliath like HoYoverse behind it. For Kuro Waves to achieve the same figure in only a few extra weeks really is no small feat, especially when RPG enthusiasm isn't what it used to be.

According to AppMagic, most of Wuthering Waves' revenue has been generated in Asia, as players in China and Japan have each contributed 23% of its lifetime earnings. South Korea rounds out the top three.

And though revenue has very clearly declined month on month, Wuthering Waves is riding another high tide with its Version 1.3 update, with the rare, limited-time Shorekeeper incentivising players to spend again; her launch day caused a 292% revenue spike!

I'll be keeping a close eye on Wuthering Waves' journey to \$200 million, curious as to how Kuro Games will turn its fortunes back around; surely something's in the works to break that monthly decline, right?

October 4th

## **Craig Chapple**

### **Unreal Engine royalty fee reducing to 3.5% for games landing on Epic Games Store on launch day**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/unreal-engine-royalty-fee-reducing-to-35-for-games-landing-on-epic-games-store-on-launch-day/>

Epic's changes to Unreal Engine pricing this week got me thinking again about how the top game engine makers have tried to compete over the years. And then more recently, how they've tried to build a sustainable model for that business.

For the longest time, Unity was on its mission to democratise development. A marketing ploy maybe, but it bled through to the product.

It seemed as though rivals then scrambled to match it. Unreal suddenly announced a change to a \$19 subscription fee at GDC 2014, also charging 5% of gross revenue. CryEngine even changed its model, making the tech available for just \$9.90 per month, per user. But even that wasn't enough to scale the business.

Unity was able to build its market share for years until, an IPO and global economic instability later, it had to find a real way to stem its losses and make a real business that would generate, shock horror, a profit.

Its solution of course was the infamous and widely despised Runtime Fee. Its announcement and fallout took down the CEO, sparked thousands of layoffs and deeply wounded its reputation. The Runtime Fee has been removed now of course - precisely a year after it was first announced - with Unity bumping its licence costs instead.

What was interesting, though, was Unity felt the best way to make money (other than to dip into developer pockets for a quick pay day) was to tie the engine business in part to its ad network. If you consider the options initially open to Unity in its attempts to turn a profit, does simply raising the licence fee really make the engine business profitable on its own?

Unreal has taken the moment to lower its fees to 3.5% of gross revenue - if you release on its store. It's tied its engine revenue to the growth potential of a marketplace it's spending billions to get off the ground - and where it'll get a further 12% cut from sales. It's also tied the business to Fortnite, a platform where its revenue share on purchases is greater than even Apple and Google would dare to take.

Developers have a lot to think about on mobile. In the EU, launching on an alternative store means opening themselves up to Apple's alternative business terms - complete with their own Runtime Fee! (Sorry, 'Core Technology Fee'). And being exclusive to Epic's is not an option for mobile developers.

Elsewhere, it'll be fascinating to see how challenger Godot grows, with its own unique take of a free and open source model.

The pricing wars continue in the game engine space. Can any succeed?

## **Paige Cook**

Balatro approaches \$1 million in seven days on mobile

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/balatro-approaches-1-million-in-seven-days-on-mobile/>

Roguelike card game Balatro has shuffled its way onto mobile and with what appears to be a great success in its first whole week on mobile devices.

The game has generated almost \$1 million from its first seven days on the App Store and Google Play... Not bad for a week's work.

Developer LocalThunk decided to blank in-app purchases and instead take a premium approach, with the game costing \$9.99. Given the nature of the game, I'd go all-in on that being the right decision.

Of course, those who already subscribe to Apple Arcade can also check out the game as part of their subscription.

The game is also available on Steam, which has generated over \$17 million in gross revenue, and the title has also seen releases on Nintendo Switch and consoles. One negative is that, as of right now, players can't chip away at their progress across platforms. Apparently, an update for this is on the cards in the future.

Bringing Balatro to mobile feels like the perfect fit, and clearly, it's a decision that is paying off as it sits as Google Play's top-paid card game and the App Store's number-one strategy game.

I'll be intrigued to see just how much Balatro can up the ante when cross-progression does come into play since more players may be willing to double down on purchases.

Now, did I get enough card game terminology references in there?

## **Aaron Astle**

Zenless Zone Zero surpasses \$150 million, but it's no Genshin Impact...

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/zenless-zone-zero-surpasses-150-million-but-its-no-genshin-impact/>

Zenless Zone Zero has surpassed \$150 million in gross mobile revenue in under three months - an impressive feat to be sure, but far behind the heights of its predecessors.

Markets change and the mobile games industry has evolved plenty since 2020, but even so, Genshin Impact did in three weeks what Zenless Zone Zero has achieved in three months. And by its own quarter-year anniversary, HoYoverse's flagship was already over halfway to \$1 billion.

Yes, that's just on mobile.

Clearly the unprecedented pre-release hype for Zenless Zone Zero hasn't converted into record-breaking revenue figures, but it's far from a failure either. There's also its revenue from other platforms to consider, and releasing only one year after Honkai: Star Rail, RPG fans can only have so much time and money to spend on games...

Even if Zenless Zone Zero hasn't scaled HoYoverse to wild new heights, realistically, the developer is probably prioritising keeping players engaged in *any* of its titles. It's got to be more profitable than losing them to other RPG makers, right?

## **September 27th**

### **Craig Chapple**

I had planned to cover this announcement in the podcast, but Virgin Media heard my rant and summarily dropped my internet connection, saving you all from my rambling. So here it is in word form instead. Sorry.

This week Meta, amongst its mixed reality announcements, unveiled the new Orion AR glasses. At first glance, it sounds great - a better form factor for the long-awaited AR wearables that will take us into the future and help us to ascend to a higher plane of existence.

Well, actually no. Meta said it will never make its way into the hands of consumers. Ascension will have to wait.

It kind of reminded me of Magic Leap, raising billions of dollars and making enormous promises that ultimately never came to fruition. Though Meta is investing more money into this endeavour, at least.

But why would Meta announce this headset at all? You can show anything as a prototype when a consumer version doesn't exist and it comes without a price tag. What would that consumer version really look like?

It came across as a marketing tool to raise share price, for justify Meta's immense expenditure in the XR space - it even changed its name, don't forget, and to generate consumer interest for its other VR products.

The danger, however, is when they do finally release their AR glasses, which they say they plan to ship in the near future, is it will be a disappointing, lesser version of what they've teased.

Which brings me to a wider point. Tech companies need to stop shipping bad versions of hardware and software and just calling it the 'first one' and that it will 'only get better'. It's what ultimately happened with the Vision Pro. An interesting headset with no practical use case and no sales.

It's a waste of consumer money. The iPhone worked because the first iteration was incredible, a game-changer. It made sense off the bat. Yes, it would only get better, but the first version was great.

Tech companies look so desperate to create the next platform after so many missed out on the smartphone era, that we're just cursed with some of these products shown to use before their time.

AR might well be the future. But please show us the tech when you really think it's ready.

## **Aaron Astle**

Pokémon Sleep sleepwalks to \$120 million in time for smartwatch update

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/pokmon-sleep-sleepwalks-to-120-million-in-time-for-smartwatch-update/>

Another day, another milestone. Or should that be another night?

Either way, Pokémon Sleep has reached \$120 million by AppMagic estimates. I'm always surprised at how much money this game's making when it's really less of a game than something like Pokémon Unite, yet it's made substantially more money.

Clearly there's a market for these kinds of games, making Pokémon something of a companion to daily life - out and about with Go, brushing your teeth with Smile and in bed with Sleep.

And the latest milestone has been reached just as Sleep has added smartwatch compatibility, finally meaning players don't have to leave the game open and running on their bed all night. Previously the only alternative was to buy the Pokémon Go Plus +, a device compatible with Go and Sleep costing around \$50.

It's a step in the right direction for accessibility, letting users on iOS and Android use their smartwatches instead if they prefer.

## **Paige Cook**

22 year old raises \$3.7 million for Roblox tool platform Gamebeast

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/22-year-old-raises-37-million-for-roblox-tool-platform-gamebeast/>

The Roblox platform is huge, with over 2 million developers creating new experiences, and no signs of that slowing down anytime soon. If anything, platforms and games with user-generated content focus only seem to be getting even more popular.

For Zander Brumbaugh, Roblox seems to have been a career and life-changing experience, and he's only 22 years old.

Brumbaugh started playing Roblox at the age of 12 and went on to create games with over 500 million visits. He's written books on coding for Roblox and now has his own company, Gamebeast, which makes tools for UGC platforms.

With \$3.7 million in pre-seed funding raised, Gamebeast can continue developing its no-code tooling platform, which focuses on helping creators develop on platforms such as Roblox. Outside of games, there also appear to be opportunities coming from the military sector.

Don't get me wrong; I don't think platforms like Roblox are without their faults, but for some, they're a place where a hobby can turn into a true passion for development and in this case a huge opportunity for success.

September 20th

**Paige Cook**



## [Playtika to acquire Dice Dreams developer SuperPlay for up to \\$1.95 billion](#)

Playtika is all set to acquire game developer SuperPlay for a massive sum of up to \$1.95 billion! When you consider other major mobile acquisitions, such as Sega buying Rovio for \$776 million, it's quite the figure.

However, SuperPlay has done something that is no small feat in the current market: It brought its game Dice Dreams to its best year yet in 2024, years after its initial launch. Its other title, Domino Dreams, is doing well this year too.

Given the steep price, some could argue that it is overpriced. However, being able to show that both games are in a strong position that will likely continue to scale is a real selling point. Some former Playtika employees founded SuperPlayees, so it may make for an easier transition.

Finally, outside of what this means for Playtika and SuperPlay in general, the acquisition is a good sign for the market, with M&A hopefully on the up.

### **Craig Chapple**

#### **Flappy Bird is making a comeback but original creator isn't involved**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/flappy-birds-is-making-a-comeback-but-original-creator-isnt-involved/>

One of the original viral hits on mobile, Flappy Bird was a precursor to the hypercasual craze and proof that making ad revenue from games was possible. At its height, the title was said to be making \$50k a day just from banner ads.

Developer Dong Nguyen later removed the game from stores, citing [concerns over its addictiveness](#).

The title, naturally, spawned a legion of clones, but nothing ever topped the original.

Now Flappy Bird is back! But its original creator is not involved, with the trademark also snapped up by the 'Flappy Bird Foundation'. Nguyen said he did not sell the IP.

Rather than simply release the title back in its original form, it now includes new worlds, modes like basketball-theme challenges and new characters. It'll also apparently include a 100 player online mode for users to compete against each other.

A web version is set to launch in October, with iOS and Android releases currently planned for 2025. An early version of the game, Flap-a-TON, has been released on Telegram.

The game's announcement has already been marred by controversy, with discussion surrounding how the Flappy Bird Foundation picked up the rights to the game - which it has responded to - as well as its links to blockchain and crypto.

As BlockchainGamer notes, while the Telegram mini-game does not require a wallet to play, players can participate in a free minting event for the game's FLAPPY token. The mention of blockchain, cryptocurrency and NFTs in games often sparks anger and controversy, particularly for well known IPs.

Creator Nguyen weighed in on that controversy, stating "I don't support crypto".

Crypto has earned a reputation for scams following years of scandals and rug-pulls. What fascinates me is how a viral hit, enjoyed by millions of people the world over, appears to have been dragged back to life to, initially at least, serve a niche audience.

New Flappy bird chief creative Michael Roberts might disagree with that assessment, stating that there is a community of 200 million gamers on Telegram.

But how big is the crossover of Flappy Bird and Telegram gamers? And how interested is the casual user in the blockchain?

This story looks set to run and run. We'll find out how the web version looks next month and whether it truly leans into the nostalgia of the original to attract its once massive audience. The current headlines aren't the best start.

## **Aaron Astle**

### **EA reveals experimental Project Air and states AI "is not merely a buzzword for us"**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/ea-reveals-experimental-project-air/>

During EA's Investor Day 2024, CEO Andrew Wilson said AI "is not merely a buzzword" at the company. An hour or so later, CSO Mihir Vaidya took to the stage to give a sneak preview of Project Air, an experimental new product for mobile demonstrating the power of AI in character and scenario creation.

Claiming to have a new category of games "that doesn't yet exist" here, EA showed off Project Air's text-based gameplay where friends tried to convince an AI investor (that's an investor powered by AI - not an investor looking to support AI, like most the investors at the show...) to support a product those players came up with.

Another scenario tasked players with proving their innocence to a detective, and another revolved around convincing a skater to dye his hair.

This was all shown in the broader context of user-generated content and its application to growing the business, as players would in theory create their own characters to share online and convince to agree with a whole range of arguments.

This product isn't a part of EA's immediate release pipeline, but is an interesting glimpse at something that may or may not materialise in the years to come.

September 13th

**Aaron Astle**

### **Monster Hunter Now celebrates its first anniversary: Evolving through one year of innovation, inclusion and monetisation**

It's been one whole year since Monster Hunter Now launched globally on iOS and Android, and anyone who reads our Week in Views regularly will know I've talked about this game a lot. A LOT.

Simply put, in its first year Monster Hunter Now quickly established itself as Niantic's second-biggest game behind Pokémon Go and proved that the developer could catch lightning twice with the geolocation formula. Is it as big as Go? No, but it's certainly a success in its own right.

With almost \$225 million gross revenue in its first year by AppMagic estimates, Now's found a niche and run with it, innovating through the months with a range of new additions from monsters to weapons to monetisation tactics. Whether that's a Season Pass or paid-only monster hunts, it's clear that Niantic's willing to give paying players some bonus treats without leaving the free-to-play market behind.

And with monsters first introduced in Rise finally coming to the game, we're one step closer to getting one of my personal favourite's Garangolm in Now. He may not be in this update, but the dream lives on, and is now one step closer to reality.

**Paige Cook**

### **[Microsoft cuts 650 jobs in its Xbox games division](#)**

Microsoft has announced more job cuts, with 650 roles within its Xbox unit gone. Unfortunately, this isn't the first slew of layoffs we've seen from the company. Back in January, Microsoft let go a massive 1,900 employees at Activision Blizzard and Xbox and then later made more layoffs at Bethesda.

This latest round of layoffs also involves the biggest acquisition in video game history, with the losses impacting Activision Blizzard employees.

Most of the positions impacted will be in corporate and support roles. Of course, when huge companies merge, it's unfortunate but often likely that layoffs will happen as duplicate roles are worked out and people are let go, but in a year that has already had so many layoffs, many from Microsoft, it's hard-hitting.

While Phil Spencer may have assured everyone that “no games, devices or experiences are being cancelled and no studios are being closed” it does appear that teams working on titles such as Warcraft Rumble and Call of Duty: Warzone Mobile have been hit.

Is Microsoft finally done with layoffs? Or will there be any other surprises as we draw toward the year's final months? Let's hope it's the former.

September 6th

## **Craig Chapple**

### **Microsoft claims App Store's 30% fee “makes it impossible” to monetise its cloud gaming service**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/in-game-audio-advertising-platform-odeeo-secures-5-million-funding-round-for-global-expansion/>

Another week, another headline about the App Store's 30% commission.

This time it's not the European Union's Digital Markets Act. This week, the latest story centres on the UK's Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) and its investigation into market dominance in mobile browsers and cloud gaming service distribution.

The regulator is seeking feedback from various parties, including Microsoft and Apple. For its part, Microsoft is sounding the alarm that its Xbox cloud gaming services is “impossible” to monetise with such a high revenue share (it also has other issues surrounding alleged inferior functionality compared to native iOS apps).

Microsoft even went as far as to say the 30% fee imposed by Apple on IAPs “is the result of a lack of competition in the distribution of native iOS apps”.

Apple, of course, is having none of it. It simply said there's no basis for treating cloud gaming apps different from other apps - it actually means from other games and non-Reader apps - and that the issues raised are “notably” from “very large developers, some of which are known for their commercial disputes with Apple more generally”.

We've heard a lot of this before, of course. But this week's story reminded me of how Facebook tried to get Instant Games up and running on Android. Initially, it aimed to take a 30% share of revenue from in-app purchases. Nothing strange there.

But because Google Play would take a 30% cut of sales that took place on Android on not the web, and Facebook still wanted its cut, [it left developers effectively getting a 49% share of IAP revenue.](#)

Facebook [soon had to drop its 30% fee on Google Play completely](#). Facebook was cast as a bit of the villain, but looking back, Google didn't come out of the situation smelling of roses either.

It's fascinating to see how these platforms and revenue share requirements - which we can argue all day, as lawyers are now, about whether it's right - impact the kinds of experiences you're able to get on your mobile device. And more fascinating still, how that can affect the viability of a service outside of it.

**August 30th**

**Aaron Astle**

### **[Pokémon Masters EX turns five: Lessons from an IP and monetisation masterpiece](#)**

It's been half a decade since The Pokémon Company's second-biggest mobile game Pokémon Masters first released, and much has changed since 2019.

The games industry's changed, *the world* has changed, and the Pokémon IP just keeps getting bigger. In Masters' case, developer DeNA has created a long-running spinoff featuring more than 200 characters from the Game Boy classics to Switch newcomers, spawning so many scenarios between fan favourites who would otherwise never have met.

That's Pokémon Masters' strong point: its characters. Whether that's bringing closure to loose threads from the main series or creating an entire arc around what villains get up to *after* the hero saves the day, the lore here is in no short supply.

Those characters also form the basis of Masters' monetisation model, releasing new Sync Pairs in a gacha with varying odds. The fifth anniversary banners actually have the worst rates yet, requiring more premium currency to reach the guaranteed spark - not the most favourable way to celebrate - but with some of the series' most popular characters up for grabs, players are spending bucketloads anyway.

In fact, Masters just had its most lucrative day of 2024...

**Craig Chapple**

**"Our focus is undoubtedly on the Middle East market where we have unique advantages"**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/our-focus-is-undoubtedly-on-the-middle-east-market-where-we-have-unique-advantages/>

I've been speaking a lot about the games industry in the MENA region recently. I mentioned the influence of Eastern games companies in [last week's newsletter all about Gamescom](#), and this week I analysed how Savvy's investments and new partnerships are [helping create thousands of new jobs in the region](#).

For the Week in Views, I wanted to focus on an interview by our MENA reporter Isa with Yalla Group president Saifi Ismail.

The main reason I want to highlight it is, often when asked about what successful games have come from a developer based in the Middle East, the answer isn't always immediate. There's lots of development and publishing talent in the region, but identifying a global hit isn't quite so easy.

Yalla Group, headquartered in Dubai, flies under the radar globally. It is an online social networking and games company that has a voice chat platform called Yalla, and it employs around 800 people.

Its flagship game, Yalla Ludo, has generated \$425 million in gross revenue from the App Store and Google Play worldwide, according to AppMagic data. Saudi Arabia is the No. 1 country, while the US ranks No. 2 with \$119m. It's followed by the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and the UK. Yalla Ludo is a certified global success story.

"Yalla Ludo's success is due to our deep understanding of the local market and our ability to create a product that resonates with users," said Ismail. "We focused on delivering a user-friendly, culturally relevant game that also incorporated social elements, which are highly valued in the MENA region.

"For example, Yalla Ludo was the first Ludo application that added in-game voice-chatting and chatroom functionalities in the industry, which enabled us to establish a highly engaged online user community.

"Scaling it for global audiences involved localising the game for different markets, adapting the gameplay to suit various cultural preferences, and engaging in targeted marketing campaigns. For instance, we explored outside of MENA with Yalla Parchis, a Ludo game designed for the South American markets."

Moving forward, the company plans to develop mid-core titles, and has three self-developed games in the pipeline for release in 2025.

It's a great example of the exciting momentum coming from the Middle East's games industry. Over the next few years, we may hear yet more similar stories.

**August 23rd**

**Aaron Astle**

## [Pokémon Trading Card Game Pocket opens pre-registrations as release date revealed](#)

Pokémon's next mobile project is almost here with Trading Card Game Pocket confirmed for a release this October, bringing the popular card game to a shiny new digital form.

With over 50 billion physical cards sold to date, the potential for a runaway hit here is huge, and offering out free daily packs is a surefire way to bring in players who would otherwise sit on the fence.

Why wouldn't you download the game for free cards and fresh artwork every day?

There's no downside for The Pokémon Company either - distributing two packs or 200, it's of no cost to the creators when those cards are digital, and it might well get more fans on board who end up splashing cash for juuust one more pack...

Pre-registrations are open now too, giving iOS and Android users two months to brace themselves for the latest Pokémon craze. And with the likes of Pikachu, Charizard and Mewtwo already confirmed, who knows - maybe Pocket will be the next Pokémon Go...

### **Paige Cook**

Animal Crossing: Pocket Camp to close, but fans can continue playing... For a fee...

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/animal-crossing-pocket-camp-to-close-but-fans-can-continue-playing-for-a-fee/>

Animal Crossing Pocket Camp is set to close, but it's not all doom and gloom. Fans can keep playing if they pay a one-time fee.

Pocket Camp has been popular since its release, so seeing that it will no longer receive updates came as a surprise to many. What I found interesting about this was the fan feedback. Some were instantly outraged. If they don't pay the fee, they can say goodbye to the items they've earned and the adventures they've had so far in Animal Crossing Pocket Camp.

Other fans had the exact opposite and were extremely thankful for the option to pay to gain access to the game in an offline mode.

So, while the game is technically done and won't receive new content, these players can keep hold of their items and continue to play. I saw comments from users comparing this to other instances of their favourite mobile games closing and wishing something similar had happened with those titles with the ability to pay a fee to at least keep ahold of the game in its final form.

It got me thinking about whether we'll see more instances of this. Sure, some won't be happy, but others see it as a way to preserve a game they've invested time in. As for the

developers? Well, it's one final hoorah from them and a way to gain one last surge in revenue from a game on the out.

## **August 16th**

### **Aaron Astle**

Mobile matters at Pokémon Worlds 2024 as Pokémon Go and Unite players get set to clash

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/mobile-matters-at-pokmon-worlds-2024-as-pokmon-go-and-unite-players-get-set-to-clash/>

Pokémon Worlds has migrated to Hawaii this year, with fans of all Pokémon games from Scarlet and Violet to the TCG and even Go set to compete for the title of Pokémon Master.

Instead of making the most of the sunshine, competitive players are in for three days of battling with cash prizes up for grabs as well as bragging rights. The 2024 events marks the third appearance of a Go competition, and the third for Unite too, as mobile gradually establishes itself amongst the tournaments.

With Pokémon Trading Card Game Pocket still on the horizon, and the physical card game so popular at these events, one has to wonder if a third mobile game will be added to the lineup in a year's time - and establish a prevalence beyond even the Switch's...

In the meantime, there's the 2024 event to enjoy with plenty of Pikachus and even more battles to see.

Wait, Pikachu's snorkeling now?!

### **Paige Cook**

Mobile Mavens: The expert's guide to surviving Gamescom

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/mobile-mavens-the-experts-guide-to-surviving-gamescom/>

With Gamescom just around the corner we spoke with our Mobile Mavens who offered some advice on how to get the best out of your time attending one of the games industry's biggest events of the year.

Here are just a few tips they offered.

#### **Navigation and meetings:**

- It helps if you can stay in the city
- Research the people and companies you want to meet with



- Make the most of MeetToMatch
- Schedule your meeting with time in between - it's a maze in there!
- Your Gamescom ticket allows you to use local transport for free
- If you haven't secured meeting spots, plan ahead as finding quiet spots is a challenge

### **Networking and parties:**

- Sign up to all the parties
- Decide if you need to do dinners or networking
- Parties are in various locations plan and pace yourself
- Remain open to unexpected invites or opportunities in coffee queues!
- Be ready with contact details, be it business cards or QR codes
- Don't be afraid to say 'hi' and ask questions!

### **Attending the halls:**

- If you want to attend the halls on a more quiet day go early on Wednesday ahead of the crowds
- Stick around attend on Friday for the full 'let the gamers in' experience
- Take plenty of pictures for socials and promo later

### **Practical tips:**

- Bring a refillable water bottle and stay hydrated
- Wear light breathable clothing and comfortable footwear
- Get enough sleep - it's a marathon not a sprint
- Follow up with people asap, even just a quick "thanks for chatting"
- Don't forget a power-bank for that essential recharge

Check out the full article for more advice and enjoy Gamescom!

## **August 9th**

### **Aaron Astle**

Nintendo profits down 70.6% with falling sales across Switch and other IP ventures

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/nintendo-profits-down-706-with-falling-sales-across-switch-and-other-ip-ventures/>

A fall in sales and operating profits at Nintendo come as no small surprise as the Switch winds down - with only two first-party releases in its Q1 and both of them being remasters.

Compare that with the huge success of Q1 2023 - packed with Mario movie cinema ticket sales and the highly anticipated Breath of the Wild sequel, The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom - and suddenly the scale of this year's fall is that much easier to comprehend.

So, while far from good news for the company, the decline in operating profit can at least be explained; beyond that, it suggests Nintendo may be holding back its next big hitters for whatever comes *after* the Switch.

The console is midway through its eighth year on the market and Nintendo has already teased that it will reveal its next console this fiscal year, so faltering excitement around 2017's hardware and no brand-new games this Q1, all point towards an announcement coming soon.

Of course, rumours have been rife about what that next console could be with most colloquially calling it the Switch 2. That naming convention is a bit too straightforward for a company like Nintendo, at least historically, so I'd personally prefer something more creative like the S(Wii)tch.

If somehow, someday, that name becomes reality, you heard it here first...

**Paige Cook**

**Microsoft and Activision form new Blizzard team to expand iconic franchises**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/microsoft-and-activision-form-new-blizzard-team-to-expand-iconic-franchises/>

Microsoft and Activision are forming a new team to expand on iconic franchises such as World of Warcraft, Overwatch, and Starcraft. The interesting part is that the team is apparently made up predominantly of ex-King employees, which makes me think surely there's got to be something mobile coming out of this new team.

King themselves have, of course, worked with big IP names before, but it's never quite bore any fruit for them, and Candy Crush has remained the studio flagship for many years. So I'm intrigued to see if a new team pulled from King can finally crack the code and make something mobile from one of these big IPs.

This would also be a great tie-in with the planned Xbox mobile store, which was supposed to be out by the end of July, but we're still waiting to see that come to life. New stores need incentives for players to actually use them, and being able to push games taken from already popular IPs may just do the job.

I'm absolutely expecting something mobile from this new team, but I wouldn't be surprised if it wasn't mobile exclusive but rather cross-platform. Time will tell.

**Craig Chapple**

## **Apple revamps business terms in the EU to enable App Store link-outs and out-of-store promotions**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/apple-revamps-business-terms-in-the-eu-to-enable-app-store-link-outs-and-out-of-store-promotions/>

Could things be getting any more complicated in the world of App Store fees?

Here's a challenge for those in the European Union. Without checking, what is the revenue share you owe Apple for when an App Store user makes a purchase from your game?

If you know exactly what you owe Apple, sign up here. Don't know? Me neither.

We started with a 30% revenue share. I'm not here to argue against the revenue share being dropped. And at this point, we've debated the issue to death.

But Apple is tying itself up in knots responding to new regulations around the world. It hasn't come up with a one-size fits all solution. Instead, it's playing whack-a-mole to try and maintain the status quo as much as it possibly can.

In the EU, first we had the alternative business terms with a 17% share (or is that 10%? Or 20%?). Oh, and the core technology fee that charges €0.50 per install, on an annual basis.

Now - and I had to re-read the article I myself wrote to check this - the 5% 'initial acquisition fee' and the 'store services fee', which is anywhere from 5% to 10% to 20%. Well okay then.

These cover payments from link-outs. Oh, Apple is now letting developers point to sales outside the App Store. But it has rights to receive a royalty from that user for off-store payments for 12 months (or a further install after each install, reinstall and update of the App Store app by the same user).

It's all getting a bit out of hand, isn't it? And with the European Commission investigating Apple for non-compliance and concerns over the core technology fee, it seems like more changes could be coming soon. I'm looking forward to services popping out just to calculate the fees.

If Apple was a Batman villain, it would be the Riddler.

**August 2nd**

**Aaron Astle**

Atelier Resleriana adventures past \$50 million via the power of fan-favourites

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/atelier-resleriana-adventures-past-50-million-via-the-power-of-fan-favourites/>

Koei Tecmo's Atelier Resleriana: Forgotten Alchemy & the Liberator of Polar Night has a long name, doesn't it?

It's also made a fairly big name for itself, having surpassed \$50 million in gross revenue 10 months on from its launch in Japan, and six months since its global release.

According to data from AppMagic, Japan continues to represent 91% of lifetime player spending in-game, meaning almost \$46 million. Meanwhile, Taiwan and the US comprise Atelier Resleriana's second and third-biggest markets at \$1.5 million and \$1.2 million respectively.

It's a overwhelming lead for Japan and the game's most lucrative day for revenue was even before global release - on October 10th, when the game made \$1.1 million gross revenue.

I find covering gacha data really interesting as their daily performances usually tell a story, and that's true for Atelier Resleriana too. Sudden revenue spikes reliably track with updates and new character releases, with the biggest having come the day of the Chapter 4 update and a banner debuting Klaudia - a fan-favourite character originating from the multiplatform Atelier Ryza games.

The titular Ryza herself appeared in-game on day one, and quickly got an alt on November 30th, 2023. And would you look at that: another revenue spike. It's clear Koei Tecmo knows who the favourites are.

And with the first anniversary less than two months away in Japan, I wouldn't be surprised to see plenty more alts of popular characters on the way, and yet another revenue surge at the same time.

## **Paige Cook**

### **Zynga calls in Kit Harrington for Game of Thrones: Legends launch**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/zynga-calls-in-kit-harrington-for-game-of-thrones-legends-launch-trailer/>

I have a lighter story this week after talking about layoffs for the past two weeks. This time around, we've got a new game to celebrate: Zynga's Game of Thrones: Legends!

Zynga pulled out the man that 'knows nothing', the one and only Jon Snow, played by Kit Harrington, to appear in a comedic advertisement for the game.



I feel like we're past the point of surprise when it comes to seeing celebrities taking part in marketing for games or actually being in them. As for Harrington, he can't get away from his star role in the hit series. He voiced the character in Game of Thrones: A Telltale game series but has also appeared in other games like Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare as Admiral Salen Kotch.

We've had celebrities from Pedro Pascal to Kathy Bates showing up in adverts, not to mention Supercell's [star-studded Squad Busters trailer](#). It's a fun way to promote a game, and it works particularly well here for Game of Thrones Legends.



The game itself hasn't been out very long, but I'm intrigued to see how it performs and if the Game of Thrones IP is enough to pull in the numbers to this match-3 game.

I, for one, am a massive fan of the books, spin-offs and the main show, minus that last season which we don't talk about.

If you're excited to learn more about Game of Thrones Legends, keep an eye on the site as we'll have an interview all about it soon!

## **Craig Chapple**

### **Dinosaur Polo Club scraps Magic School in order to renew focus on its Mini series**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/dinosaur-polo-club-cancels-magic-school-project-shifts-focus-to-mini-series/>

There's plenty going on in the mobile world right now - not least [Xbox's delayed launch of its mobile web store](#). As it turns out, randomly announcing your store and release date during a Bloomberg interview with few details and no follow-up was perhaps not the best, coordinated strategy Microsoft has ever mustered.

But I thought this week I'd highlight the smaller story of Dinosaur Polo Club scrapping its unannounced game codenamed Magic School - and telling the world about it.

Games are cancelled all the time, many after years of work, and we never hear about them. Announcing it doesn't take that pain away, but it was refreshing to see the Mini Motorways and Mini Metro publisher talk so openly about the project, why it was canned, and sharing some assets.

Interestingly, the project was shut down because the studio realised it would need a "much larger team" to make good on the game's plans than it could sustainably support. Perhaps if this was a few years earlier, it might have survived? The current economic and industry climate is taking no prisoners.

The journalist in me wonders if there's an ulterior motive. Maybe it wants to sell the game. Maybe it wants to attract investment by touting its focus on its hugely successful IP, while showing off what it's capable of.

But it's also nice to think that here's a studio letting the hard work of its staff make it out into the wild, so they can share it with the world, boost their career prospects and gain at least some recognition. I hope we see more of this in future.

## **July 26th**

### **Aaron Astle**

Monster Hunter Now's Dimensional Links show a conscious effort to include rural players

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/monster-hunter-nows-dimensional-links-show-a-conscious-effort-to-include-rural-players/>

Monster Hunter Now has levelled up its multiplayer with new Dimensional Link monsters, connected between players globally and enabling online hunts outside of limited Hunt-a-thons.

It's a huge win for rural players giving them access to multiplayer features on a whole new scale, and embodies the Monster Hunter Now team's efforts to make the game as fun and accessible as possible, wherever you are.

The studio is actually entirely separate to Pokémon Go's dev team, and has arguably shown much more consideration for rural players than its older AR sibling, actively listening to player feedback and implementing changes where possible.

Oh, and there's a MrBeast collab coming too...

**July 19th**

**Aaron Astle**

[Super Smash Bros. creator Masahiro Sakurai warns of market research producing "average and mediocre" games](#)

Super Smash Bros. creator Masahiro Sakurai has been busy dropping hot takes on the marketing side of games development, combining strategic advice with a perspective that clearly preferences the wild unknown over a data-based comfort blanket.

In fact, Sakurai even has issues with targeting games at a specific market, claiming that the lines are "very blurry" between audiences and that aiming for men, women, or children specifically just isn't the way to make a fun game. Coming from the same man who also created Kirby, Sakurai's words are certainly worth considering, consistent with the stance he's held since the Game Boy days at least.

"Targeting isn't as reliable as people claim, and market research is based on past results," he said. "It simply tells you a safer route - the main road."

Not only that, Sakurai believes paying too much attention to market research makes games "increasingly average and mediocre", a scathing review to be sure.

**July 12th**

**Aaron Astle**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/disney-and-gungho-strike-deal-to-launch-disney-pixel-rpg-later-this-year/>

Disney Pixel RPG is the latest mobile manoeuvre from the media empire to gamify its beloved characters, and who better to partner with than Puzzle & Dragons maker GungHo. The game's expected to release on September 9th as something of an introduction to RPGs themselves - accessible enough for Disney fans who aren't *hardcore gamers* but deep enough for those more experienced players.

Characters will range from classics like Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Pooh, to more modern toons like Stitch and Baymax. So clearly accessibility is a big theme - with Disney covering wide ground in its IP allowance to grab fans of every age.

For example, a pixelated, playable Stitch sounds perfect to me, complete with his sunglasses and ukelele from the movie. I expect we'll see many more references to come...

### **Paige Cook**

#### **How Rockbite Games escaped closure, found a publisher, and earned a hit**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/how-rockbite-games-escaped-closure-found-a-publisher-and-earned-a-hit/>

Attending Develop Brighton this week, I noticed many industry conversations about the games industry's challenging times in the last few years. In keeping with that theme, we also had a feature from RockBite Games, who shared their candid studio journey from having a hit game early on to making a profit, burning through that profit, and then facing the harsh reality that they may have to close the studio.

It's a narrative we often hear. In Rockbite's case, they were brutally honest about some of the typical start-up mistakes they made, bringing in healthy revenue but then placing it in the wrong places, moving into a huge office space, and renovating the whole thing when really more focus should have been on creating more games and better games.

With closure staring them in the face, the team decided to reluctantly join up with a publisher. They had many concerns about this, but it's probably what saved them in the end. With that extra support, they went on to release Idle Outpost, which has over 7.5 million installs and continues to scale. Long may it do so.

This past week of networking and stories such as these reinforced that, yes, the games industry is in a tough place, but it's also a resilient industry with so much talent and passion. Stories such as Rockbites, where they are willing to share their successes and failures, can help others avoid making those same mistakes and hopefully shape an even better industry.

### **Craig Chapple**

#### **The games industry survival guide for 2024: Cockroaches, pivoting and bracing for the new normal**



<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/the-games-industry-survival-guide-2024/>

*This opinion piece was first published in the new PocketGamer.biz newsletter. [Sign up for more pieces like this straight to your inbox right here.](#)*

Let's face it, it's still extremely tough out there for developers.

Attending UK games industry conference Develop: Brighton this week, there was an atmosphere of anxiousness and a realistic outlook on the current state of the industry. But there was also a feeling of hope - that things will get better following a couple years of mass layoffs, studio closures and game cancellations.

The event kicked off with Super Evil Megacorp CEO Kristian Segerstrale [sharing his own opinions on the state of play](#). His comments were a mixture of the stark realities of the challenges the industry faces, with a hopefulness of better times to come. An experienced founder, he's no stranger to industry shifts and tough times.

Super Evil Megacorp rode the highs of its mobile MOBA Vainglory to employ over 100 staff. But then came the crash as growth stalled. The studio faced a reckoning that led to a reset of its strategy and cutting its team to around 20 employees. It has now since grown back to over 100 staff across three development teams, making new games every one to two years.

"The best companies in the long-term are punched in the face a few times on their journey," he said, adding that when the industry punches you in the face, "the best thing you can do is learn from it".

Other founders provided similar sentiments in their talks, born out of experience. In the Games Industry Survival Guide session, CCP CEO Hilmar Veigar Pétursson discussed surviving the dot-com crash and the company's struggles with gaining investment and even just paying staff. It eventually got its title, Eve Online, out the door - a game that continues to thrive to this day.

Fundamentally Games COO Ella Romanos said that now is the time to review company strategies and potentially pivot. Interior/Night CEO and creative director Caroline Marchal said the team had taken up creative work to keep the lights on, recommending that other founders have a board of directors or advisors to lean on for frank and honest advice.

Revolution Software CEO Charles Cecil recalled the global financial crisis of 2008, with global publishing giant THQ closing down just a few years later. He said developers should prepare for "the new normal".

"It's tempting to say just survive to 2025, but we need to do more than that," he stated, adding: "When things get better, it will be different."

**July 5th**

## **Aaron Astle**

World of Tanks Blitz celebrates 10th anniversary and \$1 billion in revenue

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/world-of-tanks-blitz-celebrates-10th-anniversary-and-1-billion-in-revenue/>

Wargaming's flagship World of Tanks Blitz is celebrating its 10th anniversary with over \$1 billion in lifetime revenue, and in those 10 years the game has grown to feature over 500 tanks for 180 million players.

The Blitz title was Wargaming's first project designed for smartphones and tablets exclusively, and being on mobile it targets Generation Z far more than its PC counterpart. There are wacky and outlandish tanks, collabs with every brand from Stark Trek to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and even vehicular combat on the moon.

If it's fun, it's good enough for Blitz. If it's historical accuracy you're after, you're better off on PC. And 10 years in with a \$1 billion game, clearly that strategy's a winning one.

## **Paige Cook**

**Finnish startup Bitmagic raises \$4 million for AI platform able to create games from text prompts**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/finnish-startup-bitmagic-raises-4-million-for-ai-platform-able-to-create-games-from-text-prompts/>

Another week, and here I am talking about AI again. This time, Finnish startup Bitmagic has raised \$4 million for its AI platform, which can create games from text prompts. The group has secured investment funding from Korea Investment Partners and additional backing from Supercell. The platform itself is currently available on Steam in early access.

This is a tough one because I feel split between two perspectives. Of course, AI is the big buzzword, so a project like this is precisely what investors would be looking for as they want to get involved in projects that seem ahead of the curve. And watching the trailer on Steam, there's no doubt how useful it is to type 'Make my characters head bigger' and VOILÀ it happens! It opens the barriers for people who don't know how to code or make games.

However, if we get to the point where games are being made by simply typing in some words, and it all just happens before your eyes, I wonder how much of the real heart and magic will be lost. Not to mention the use of talented teams that would usually bring these ideas to life.

As a singular platform it works, and it's a really interesting showcase of what AI can do to create these games for people who are full of ideas but have no idea how to execute them.

There are also AI tools out there that can be extremely useful for developers by helping them turn long-winded processes into much easier and quicker ones. I just hope that the gaming industry is able to strike the right balance in using AI to ensure that we get the best out of it while maintaining the heart that goes into game development.

**June 28th**

**Craig Chapple**

**Game over for Apple as the European Commission wades in against their DMA dodge**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/game-over-for-apple-as-the-european-commission-wades-in-against-their-dma-dodge/>

*This opinion piece was originally published in the new PocketGamer.biz newsletter. [Sign up for more pieces like this straight to your inbox right here.](#)*

It's official - in the European Commission's preliminary view, Apple's App Store has breached the Digital Markets Act and the company is likely set to face huge fines unless it changes course.

The EC said the App Store rules "prevent app developers from freely steering consumers to alternative channels for offers and content".

Meanwhile, regulators have opened up a new non-compliance investigation against Apple over concerns that its new alternative business terms devised especially for the DMA also fall short.

A report in the [Financial Times](#) previously claimed Apple could face daily penalties of 5% of its daily turnover. Fines for non-compliance, meanwhile, can rise up to 10% of annual revenue, and up to 20% for repeated infringements.

Apple can't ignore this one like it did those €5 million weekly fines from the Netherlands.

I've been hearing two sides of the Digital Markets Act debate. On the one hand, some are saying it's heavy-handed and has unintentional consequences including creating uncertainty for companies looking to comply with the rules, restricting innovation, and ultimately even hurting consumers.

[Bloomberg](#) reported Apple blocked the release of Apple Intelligence in the EU because the DMA impacts its security, specifically highlighting interoperability requirements.

The other side is that regulation is clearly needed to keep large tech companies like Apple in check and ensure a healthy, competitive market. Innovation is also restricted if a platform holder sets out arbitrary rules restricting competition and favours its own business incentives above all else.

Wherever you stand, heavy-handed regulation is what happens when industries and companies can't - or won't - regulate themselves, even when there are serious warning signs.

Apple has so desperately wanted to defend its 30% and anti-steering practices, while at the same time trying to charge publishers even more to get users into their apps, that it has effectively ignored those warnings.

Now the DMA is here and is showing its teeth, leaving Apple with increasingly little room to run in the EU. This is what happens, and it's a problem of big tech's own making.

**Aaron Astle**

**Pokémon developer Game Freak's first mobile exclusive is new IP, Pand Land**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/pokmon-developer-game-freaks-first-mobile-exclusive-is-new-ip-pand-land/>

It's not often we get a new title from Game Freak that isn't a part of the Pokemon franchise, and rarer still is a new mobile game. In fact, Pand Land is Game Freak's first-ever mobile exclusive, out now in Japan with no Nintendo console release in sight.

Being new to the mobile-only game, Game Freak partnered up with WonderPlanet for co-development duties, and though the two did apparently clash at times, they've ultimately created an original IP in Pand Land.

Curiously, Pand Land's art direction is quite similar to the blocky style of Pokémon Quest - the only mobile Pokémon spinoff Game Freak has developed - but it is a brand-new property all about sailing the high seas and searching for treasure.

And being such a veteran of console game development, Game Freak has designed Pand Land to be "like a console game, but an easy and simple game that can fit in one hand".

**June 21st**

**Aaron Astle**

Eggy Party to expand onto console with crossplay Nintendo Switch release

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/eggy-party-to-expand-onto-console-with-crossplay-nintendo-switch-release/>

There was a Nintendo Direct this week! As an unabashed Nintendo fanboy, these presentations are always a treat revealing plenty of new games to look forward to (playable Zelda, anyone?), but one huge announcement was exclusive to the Japanese Direct...

That announcement is NetEase's Eggy Party going cross-platform - coming to Nintendo Switch next month as its first move beyond mobile. The gameplay trailer for Switch is also only on Nintendo's Japanese YouTube channel, which would all logically suggest that it's only coming to Switch in Japan.

Then came a tweet from the game's global Twitter account one day after the Direct, announcing the game to its Western audience, but still with no English trailer... Does this mean it *is* launching on Switch globally? Why else announce it on the global account? But why the delay?

It's a strange one, but it seems likely that Nintendo and NetEase are walking on eggshells around legal terms - and that the legality of a transition to Switch is more firmed up in Japan than elsewhere, hence the time to prepare a trailer.

Whatever the behind-the-scenes here really is, Eggy Party is coming to Switch on July 19th, and Switch owners will be able to play against the [500 million](#) players on mobile too

## **Paige Cook**

The International Olympic Committee's executive board endorses esports at the Olympics

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/the-international-olympic-committees-executive-board-endorse-s-esports-at-the-olympics/>

The International Olympic Committee will vote next month at the 2024 Paris Games on whether esports should have its own Olympic esports games.

Of course, this isn't their first dabble with esports. We've already seen a virtual Olympic series established in 2021, but this would take things to a new level.

I'm sure that the Olympic esports would still be a very separate thing to the overall Olympic model; I'm not sure many people would be switching from the pommel horse to a round of Counter-Strike, but having the IOC backing a full Olympic esports games makes sense to me. We've got the first esports world cup in Saudi Arabia soon, with a massive \$60 million prize pool, so why not have the Olympics next?

It'll be an excellent platform for esports and let players battle it out to be the best of the best. I am a massive fan of the Summer Olympics, but it's no secret that viewership has been down for some time. While I don't expect esports to change that necessarily, it is a great way for the IOC to capture a new audience and perhaps younger audience.

I, for one, would love to see this happen and to see the continued growth of the competitive gaming scene.

## **Craig Chapple**

## A brief history of the mobile games industry

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/a-brief-history-of-the-mobile-games-industry/>

If there's one thing that's consistent in the games industry, it's change.

I wrote about the last 15 years of the mobile games industry, and it's fascinating to see just how much the sector has evolved in a short space of time.

We're now at another period of change, forced somewhat by platform policies. Due to increasing global regulation and the European Union's Digital Markets Act (which according to rumours this week of an [impending Apple fine](#), answers the question of whether or not it has teeth), alternative mobile marketplace are set to appear.

I wrote recently about the [dire state of discoverability on mobile](#). While Steam is certainly not perfect, at least Valve's strategy is designed around creating a good consumer experience based on games they want - not how much extra revenue it can extract from publishers.

Perhaps the Epic Games Store and Xbox's web marketplace can create a better ecosystem for games publishers on mobile than currently on offer by Apple and Google. We could even dream of the platform holders actually trying to compete with them! (Probably not).

Then of course alternative billing can drive down the 30% fee, as Apple's alternative business terms show (notwithstanding that core technology fee).

And another big trend is the cross-platform move. Just this past week we've seen announcements for NetEast's [Eggy Party](#), Sunblink's [Hello Kitty Island Adventure](#) and Gameloft's [Asphalt Legends](#) heading off mobile. Meanwhile, others are starting to leave mobile completely for some projects - Gameloft and no Steer Studios are prime examples.

There's a lot to learn from the history of the industry, and the sector is going through yet another time of change

Some of the top games may have stayed the same, but this business is always evolving. The lesson? Never get too comfortable with the status quo. [Even the innovators at Supercell have had to face that reality](#).

**June 14th**

**Paige Cook**

It's time to stop sexist creatives in user acquisition - here's how

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/its-time-to-stop-sexist-creatives-in-user-acquisition-heres-how/>

This article by Matej Lančarič delves into the concerning issue of sexist ads that persist in mobile game advertisements. These ads are not just shocking but also a reminder of the work that still needs to be done to eradicate such harmful content.

Many of these games are casual titles, match-3, or what is supposed to be something quite tranquil, so why any aggressive themes are being used at all seems ill-fitting, never mind ones that clearly show abuse, sexism, body shaming and a whole host of bad behaviours.

Although many platforms have regulations, guidelines, and, of course, advertising standards, it seems that many are still getting away with showing these ads.

While you should still report these ads and make it a known issue, we, as an industry, must also speak up and ensure the rest of the industry knows we shouldn't tolerate such ads. Not only are they offensive and send out the wrong message to players, but some of these games actually target children, and such creatives could be incredibly damaging to impressionable minds.

I understand the market is competitive, and standing out from the crowd is a challenge, but lines are being crossed, and studios need to think of the bigger picture and be accountable for the message they are sending out to their players.

Many of these studios will have people from all walks of life, genders, races, sexualities, etc., who should speak up if they feel their creatives are crossing a line. Collectively, as an industry, more people can make their voices heard and show that we can do better.

**Aaron Astle**

**Zenless Zone Zero surpasses 40 million pre-registrations, beating Supercell's Squad Busters**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/zenless-zone-zero-surpasses-40-million-pre-registrations-in-new-record-for-genshin-impact-dev-hoyoverse/>

So, just after Squad Busters eked its way to 40 million pre-registrations in time for launch, HoYoverse's Zenless Zone Zero has "exceeded" that sum total with three weeks still on the clock.

If that isn't the strongest bit of evidence for hype around the game - and in gamers' trust in HoYoverse to deliver a stellar product - then I don't know what is. 40 million downloads with three weeks until launch... Putting that in perspective, HoYoverse's highly anticipated 2023 title Honkai: Star Rail gathered up around 23 million pre-registrations before it released, so Zenless Zone Zero could well do double.

To put it simply, this game's going to be huge. Expect to hear all about its record-breaking achievements in the coming weeks, when it inevitably surpasses Honkai: Star Rail's 20 million day one downloads...

**June 7th**

**Paige Cook**

Could a new Xbox handheld be revealed this Sunday?

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/84126/could-a-new-xbox-handheld-be-revealed-this-sunday/>

A YouTube leaker who has correctly predicted Xbox plans in the past believes we could see a teaser for an Xbox handheld gaming device during Sunday's Xbox Showcase. It seems likely since handhelds are becoming more popular, and then you have the PlayStation Portal, so it almost feels like Xbox has to have its own entry in that market at some point.

While it makes sense for Xbox to have a handheld device, which would be in keeping with their new outlook of being able to game anywhere, I can't help but wonder what type of capabilities it will have.

I personally think that this device needs to offer far more than just being a GamePass machine since other handhelds can do that anyway, like the Steam Deck and Asus Rog Ally.. The ability to play the rest of your Xbox catalogue that isn't tethered to GamePass or the cloud would be interesting and set it apart. However, if it is a device centred around GamePass, then the price point should reflect that.

The upcoming Xbox Showcase on Sunday needs to be a good one. Lately, the Xbox brand has been facing some challenges, with controversial decisions like the layoffs at Tango Gameworks and other studios. So it would be great to see something that reignites the passion of the Xbox community.



Ultimately, it feels like this generation of Xbox hasn't had much to offer yet. With a new refresh upcoming for both the Xbox Series X and S and now a potential handheld gaming device, that's a lot of hardware, but hardware is of little use if Xbox users don't feel like there are any noteworthy Xbox games to get excited about. Here's to hoping that changes soon.

## **Aaron Astle**

Monster Hunter Puzzles: Felyne Isles is the series' latest mobile venture, launching later this month

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/84133/monster-hunter-puzzles-felyne-isles-is-the-series-latest-mobile-venture-launching-later-this-month/>

So, there's another mobile Monster Hunter on the way. This time it's a Match-3 game, not a geolocation one, and it features the Felynes much more prominently than Monster Hunter Now. You heard that right. This is a cat game!

Monster Hunter Puzzles: Felyne Isles looks like a fun spin on the puzzle formula as monsters can attack the board to disrupt certain squares - setting them on fire, dousing them in water, etc. Meanwhile, the player's matches deal damage back to the monsters, in an effort to stop their rampages.

The rewards for completing levels include materials that can be used to customise the player's cat and the Felyne Isles, able to be decked out with restaurants, huts, and all sorts - judging by the trailer - to help the cats out in getting back to a life of luxury.

If not for the Rathalos, it almost sounds peaceful...

## **May 31st**

Aaron Astle

[Lego Hill Climb Adventures launches today, jumping 3D hurdles in Lego worlds](#)

The classic physics-based driving game is back in 3D and with a shiny new coat of paint! Or perhaps coat of bricks? Either way, developer Fingersoft landed a deal with Lego to bring a new entry to the Hill Climb Racing series in the form of Lego Hill Climb Adventures, and it looks a spectacular blending of old and new.

The physics-based gameplay remains, but building and smashing Lego bricks adds a freshness to the formula with even the skies not out of reach; aerial manoeuvrability has never been so easy, with Lego propellers to build and attach to vehicles, or jet boosters, or... Whatever will they come up with next?

Bill the hill climber makes his return in Lego form too, and this time around he has not only hills to surmount, but deep caves and fantastical Lego worlds to explore too, all in newly kitted out vehicles, naturally.

## **Paige Cook**

YouTube Playables are out now with over 75 games available

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/84094/youtube-playables-are-out-now-with-over-75-games-available/>

Last September, we knew that YouTube's staff had access to the platform's new Playables as they tested the service. Fast-forward to today and Playables are available to every YouTube user with an account... So that's nearly everyone, right?

YouTube is just the latest player in this trend. We've seen games on Facebook for years, and even LinkedIn has jumped on the bandwagon by adding games to its platform. It's clear that having games is the 'it' thing.

But besides it being cool to have on your platform now, I can't say I'm seeing a massive point to Playables. I'm not saying it's a bad thing; it's more games for everyone, and with over 75 already on there, they've given us plenty to choose from.

But this isn't something YouTube are monetising and yes, you need to have a YouTube account to play, but as I already mentioned, I don't think many users don't already have an account. So in the end is it just a way to keep people on YouTube for longer and, therefore, likely to see more ads? At least one positive is that it's a quick way to play some games without having to download them.

Overall though I'm not too sure how effective YouTube Playables will be or what the goal of having them is outside of being able to say "We have games now" I'd be intrigued to see if there are any stats in say a year's time telling us how much time people are actually playing Playables.

May 24th

Aaron Astle

[Rovio, ratings, global expansion: Sega CEO Haruki Satomi reveals plans for FY2024](#)

While transparency from any big games company is always great to see, it's especially refreshing to hear a CEO to discuss the importance of employees and their motivation levels. That's precisely what Sega CEO Haruki Satomi has just done, laying out plans for Sega's next year while acknowledging how essential its team is to achieving those goals. In an industry mired in a swamp of layoffs and cutbacks, Sega has seen net sales rise 21.4% year-on-year and sets employee passion among its most important values.

"As group CEO, I have many roles and responsibilities, but the most important thing for me is to get our employees to fully understand and empathise with our mission and vision, and to help bring out their passion and energy," said Satomi.

Of course, he also spoke on the Rovio acquisition and the Angry Birds maker's potential in bolstering mobile opportunities, as well as Rovio's stronger presence in Europe than Sega's.

Indeed, a plethora of interesting topics were raised and discussed, making Sega's year ahead that much more exciting to follow...

**Paige Cook**

### **PlayStation's mobile aspirations are alive, well, and recruiting**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/84053/playstations-mobile-aspirations-are-alive-well-and-recruiting/>

PlayStation's mobile ambitions have been slow to get off the ground. When they acquired Savage Game Studios, I expected an update on their mobile plans, but it never happened.

Looking back, PlayStation's mobile gaming plans have been relatively quiet. Last year, they did mention having 12 live service games under review, with a target release date set for 2025 and 2026. This perhaps sets them up for a mobile push in the future, but it's still quite the wait.

This latest news, albeit not a direct announcement from PlayStation, is the first hint of their mobile gaming strategy in a while. The job listing, with its extensive list of responsibilities and skills, particularly stands out. It describes the development of a free-to-play mobile game platform, so this isn't a game announcement but rather a platform on which to create games. Given that the platform is being built from the ground up, it will take some time until we see something.

While I think PlayStation has some catching up to do, it makes sense for them - and Xbox - to have a mobile effort alongside their core focus on console gaming, so it's good to see something in the works. I'll certainly be intrigued to see exactly how this platform works and how it integrates with the broader PlayStation ecosystem.

**May 17th**

**Paige Cook**

### **Epic Games hit with €1.1m fine for unfair commercial practices in Netherlands**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/84001/epic-games-hit-with-11m-fine-for-unfair-commercial-practices-in-netherlands/>

Epic has been fined €1.1 million by the Netherlands Authority for Consumer Markets. The fine is said to be due to 'unfair commercial practices' regarding players under the age of 18.

The investigation concluded that the Fortnite creator was exploiting children's vulnerabilities by how the game's item shop functions. For example, saying things like 'buy now' or 'get it

now' puts younger people under pressure to get these items. There was also a note on items with timers, where they would disappear from the store, creating fear of missing out.

So, basically, they're saying these advertising tactics are too aggressive, but Epic, of course, is appealing the decision and has made changes to the Netherlands store until they can get this under control.

While the € 1.1 million fine may not significantly dent Epic's finances, the real concern lies in the potential ripple effect. If one country has taken a stand against these practices, how long until others follow suit?

While I completely agree that more measures need to be in place to protect minors and the importance of responsible advertising, it's not just Epic and Fortnite that use these tactics; I can think of numerous games with similar stores using the same terminology and having timed products.

To me, if it's an issue here, then surely we can expect the same to happen elsewhere. It makes you wonder where the line will be drawn between what can and can't be said; so many stores use terms such as 'buy now' or have timed deals.

It's intriguing to consider the potential implications of this issue for other companies. If they, too, are approached, we could be on the cusp of a significant shift in advertising practices across gaming and perhaps all other industries too.

## **Craig Chapple**

### **Aristocrat Leisure eyes potential sale of Plarium and Big Fish Games**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/84014/aristocrat-leisure-eyes-potential-sale-of-plarium-and-big-fish/>

\$1.5 billion later, Aristocrat Leisure is conducting a strategic review that could see Big Fish Games and Plarium sold.

It was just six years ago that the Australian casino firm splashed \$990 million on Big Fish Games in January 2018, and seven years since it acquired Plarium for \$500m in August 2017.

But the mobile games market has changed a lot since then (thanks ATT). Now like almost all other companies, Aristocrat wants to refocus its core business of regulated gaming and social casino, and it's decided to cut out games.

To that end, it plans to keep Big Fish's social casino titles, but casual and midcore games are out. That includes the highly successful RAID: Shadow Legends, EverMerge and Gummy Drop.

It can almost seem inevitable that a large company looking to diversify has decided games is what needs to go. It's usually big tech and entertainment companies (Snap, ByteDance, Disney, Google, Facebook and many more) that pull the plug, but in essence, Aristocrat is no different.

Hopefully the teams can find a new home, rather than face any closures or layoffs. Big Fish will certainly be less appealing, however, without its social casino portfolio in tow.

It's a sign of two major challenges - mobile games isn't the massive growth market it once was, and macroeconomic factors mean companies are tightening their belts and squeezing profits.

**May 10th**

**Daniel Griffiths**

**Apple's iPad problem isn't new hardware - it's new software**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83961/apples-ipad-problem-isnt-new-hardware-its-new-software/>

Of course, we all love a new Apple announcement and - as PG.biz resident (but highly critical) Apple 'fanboy' - I was right there at the edge of my seat when, earlier this week, they finally clarified and upgraded their confusing iPad line.

The iPad has always been an odd fish. At once a 'big phone' and a 'mini Mac' it too easily falls between two stools for many, and, as phones have got bigger, the use case for 'a tablet' have increasingly diminished. Thus hundreds of thousands of iPads go un-upgraded each year as each becomes 'the thing in the kitchen' that you casually glance at, or read from, or use as a spare TV for media consumption. Somehow the iPad is pure simplification and luxury rather than being anything you actually need...

So Apple upgrading their new iPad Pro with their fastest chip ever (and giving it better cameras, a new 5.1mm thick case - making it their thinnest device ever - and an updated OLED screen) is pure overkill for the most 'Mum-friendly' device they make.

So they must have something up their sleeve... All this power and no utility to use it? We're hoping and praying for a major (most likely AI-fuelled) upgrade to what iOS is and does. And that could come as soon as June 10th at their annual WWDC event.

Such a reveal will not only give the new iPad a reason to exist but also fuel a dwindling iPhone upgrade cycle and - perhaps - make this year (and iPhone 16) worthy of an upgrade. We hope - for Apple's sake - that while their hardware continues to soar, they don't skimp on the really smart stuff too.

**Aaron Astle**

"Rovio x Sega" is real as Sonic Rumble enters closed beta May 24th

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83960/rovio-x-sega-is-real-as-sonic-rumble-enters-closed-beta-may-24th/>

It's here already - the first fruit from the union of Sega and Rovio and - surprise surprise - it's got a speedy blue hedgehog on board. What's not to like?

While I'd be churlish (insane?) to complain about the fusion of minds and brands coming from Sega + Rovio I have to question the authenticity and volume of creative juices flowing for Sonic Rumble. Battle Royale format? Colourful characters on levels and landscapes? Sorry... Isn't this just Sonic meets Stumble Guys?

Hey, don't knock it. If you're going to go chasing a game, Stumble Guys is a prime candidate for cloning. With countless spin-offs and in-game events and endorsements Stumble Guys has rewritten the book on what's possible with a franchise... Even if it is - itself - a copy of Fall Guys, the game that came before it...

So let's just say my attention and interest is 'piqued' at this point. We're certain that the brains behind Sonic and Angry Birds can work magic and without having seen and played the game we, of course, have to reserve judgement. But as a huge fan of Stumble Guys AND a long-term fanatic on all things Sonic, my expectations are high.

Rovio + Sega. I've every confidence in your ability to create greatness... But this is one fan of your IP who's watching your next moves very carefully.

Craig Chapple

Xbox mobile games store launches on web in July

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83965/xbox-mobile-games-store-launches-on-web-in-july/>

Microsoft's new mobile game store is launching in July!

But it's going to be web-based.

And it will only include Microsoft games like Candy Crush Saga and Minecraft. Everyone has played or owns the former. And the latter is already available everywhere.

It's great that Microsoft wants to challenge Apple and Google - its store will, of course, open up to other publishers. There's no inside track on the terms yet, but surely a 30% revenue cut would make it dead on arrival for third-party titles it doesn't pay for.

I'm generally quite pessimistic about the opportunity of new mobile game marketplaces. Including Epic's attempt coming later this year.

Government scrutiny and regulation - like the Digital Markets Act - over app store monopolies is welcome, but it all seems massively too late, doesn't it?

If the Xbox Mobile Games Store launched tomorrow, how big could it be? There is no doubt an audience for the games it could provide, but how large? It will ultimately never be bigger than the App Store and Google Play.

And how do you get the casual consumer to install your store as an app, or visit it on the web? Free-to-play was born out of convenience and accessibility. A web store is neither of these things. It's a monumental task to get consumers to break habit and leave behind the familiarity and ease of use of the App Store and Google Play. Just because you want to make money in the mobile space, it doesn't mean you can launch a store and consumers will flock to your store and stay there.

You only need to look at the heavy investments Epic is making on PC to take a fraction of Steam's sales to see the mountain Microsoft and others have to climb.

And just to be clear - I'm not saying web stores pointing consumers toward web payments won't work. It's already been proven - Playtika makes approximately 25% of its revenue from its direct-to-consumer platform, while games fintech company Aghanim says the share for developers could be as high as 55%.

Asking a player to make the effort of leaving to a web store where there's a clear value proposition for them makes sense.

Getting them to download Candy Crush Saga and Minecraft again through another store? Not so much. A better opportunity for Microsoft is a Nintendo Switch-like device that brings its cross-platform strategy together. But we'll have to wait until the next hardware lineup reveal to see if it's truly bringing its games strategy together - or if it's just throwing darts at a wall.

I hope my prediction is wrong, though. The App Store and Google Play desperately need competition. And in games, Microsoft and Epic are some of the most likely to provide a new marketplace.

Microsoft's opportunity in mobile is likely more pairing its web store strategy with a new device than it is with the iOS and Android mobile ecosystems.

**May 3**

**Aaron Astle**

**King's Paula Ingvar: a games industry journey from "I'm not worthy!" to Candy Crush Soda's VP of product**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/interview/83863/kings-paula-ingvar-a-games-industry-journey-from-im-not-worthy-to-candy-crush-sodas-vp-of-product/>

During my time in Sweden last month, I had the chance to sit down and chat with Candy Crush Soda's VP of product Paula Ingvar, whose journey has been an immense one. After all, in the past decade Ingvar's career trajectory has changed from traffic engineer playing Candy Crush Soda for fun, to a key member of King's team in charge of Soda's product teams.

She's quite literally burst up the ranks despite self-doubts a decade ago, when she thought she wouldn't be "worthy" of working at King. Yet here she is now.

Of course, this Week in Views segment is only a taster of our full interview, so be sure to check out the full thing too!

**Paige Cook**

**Man City and Norway striker Erling Haaland joins Clash of Clans**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83904/man-city-and-norway-striker-erling-haaland-joins-clash-of-clans/>

You would think Supercell is too busy focusing on the soft launch and soon to be global release of Squad Busters to have any other big news dropping, but nope! They've announced that the first ever real person is making their way into Brawl Stars as a character. Who is it? Man City striker Erling Haaland. My first thought about this was, well, why him? I can't say I'm a big football fan, but I know he's a huge star player; even still, there are plenty of sports stars or celebrities out there, some who have worked with Supercell before to promote games, so why do we now see the leap of someone actually joining the game?

Apparently Haaland approached Supercell as a fan of the game, but regardless of how it came about, it's a win-win situation. The next thing this makes me think is that surely he won't be the only one. They've opened into new territory now, and I'd be surprised if this is a one time only thing; why not bring other people into the game or even other characters from various media? Plenty of games are doing this, and it's a brilliant marketing plan. It gives current players something new to work toward, and if you're a fan of whomever they're adding to the game, it's highly likely to engage that player or even create new ones.

I think it's a great announcement and another showcase of how gaming is collaborating more with other media and entertainment and attracting some of the world's biggest stars. Now, all we have to ask is, who's next?



**April 26**

**Aaron Astle**

### **Pokémon Sleep goes IRL with \$1,800 hotel experience for fans**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83881/pokmon-sleep-turns-irl-with-1800-hotel-experience/>

If you need to take a moment to relax today, I'd suggest having a look into Pokémon's upcoming hotel experience. Because to celebrate Pokémon Sleep's first anniversary this summer, the game is partnering with a hotel of all things...

Together with the Grand Hyatt Tokyo in Japan, "a range of charismatic wellness experiences" are being prepared as we speak to give guests some much needed R&R. And what could be more restful than sleeping beside a Snorlax, indulging in herbal teas, or eating a Pikachu pancake?

Okay, admittedly that last one sounds equal parts disturbing and intriguing, but not the most relaxing...

Of course, if you want the premium experience - and who wouldn't, if you're flying all the way to Japan to share your bed with Pokémon plushies - then that will set you back almost \$1,800. For one night.

So sleep well! And may your pockets be lighter...

**Paige Cook**

### **Call of Duty Warzone: Mobile generated 'just' \$6.92 million in its first month**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83859/call-of-duty-warzone-mobile-generated-just-692-million-in-its-first-month/>

With over 50 million pre-registrations, Call of Duty still has a significant pull on gamers and had players keen to dive into the franchise's latest foray into mobile with the release of Warzone. This latest update however shows that the game has only made \$6.92 million in its first month. It's not a number you would usually say negatively, but Call of Duty Mobile brought in a massive \$44 million in the same amount of time... So what's gone wrong?

Well, the answer is simple: the game wasn't ready. The concept of Warzone on mobile is a good one, but the actual game itself falls flat; it has performance issues, drains your battery extremely fast, even on the latest models, and then there's the issue of the game being

riddled with bots. What fans are left with feels more like an underbaked cash grab rather than a fun Call of Duty experience on mobile. It's a shame all around because players have missed out, and from a business sense, if the game had been released in better shape, it could have reached or perhaps even surpassed the numbers of Call of Duty Mobile.

Now, I'm sure the team will be hard at work trying to improve the experience, but with mobile gaming, once a player hits that uninstall button, it's very difficult to get them to come back. So I'm left wondering: Is the damage already done, or is there hope further down the line for Warzone?

## **Craig Chapple**

### **Supercell's Squad Busters launches globally on May 29th**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83874/squad-busters-launches-globally-on-may-29th/>

The biggest story in mobile this week is, of course, the news that Supercell will launch Squad Busters worldwide on May 29th.

It's been five and a half years since the Finnish developer released its last game, Brawl Stars. I remember being at the Helsinki studio for the launch!

It was a long journey to that game's global release - it even looked like it might get cancelled. But the team continued to roll out the changes, such as famously shifting from portrait to landscape, while its Android soft launch helped propel the title to greater heights.

And it all worked out! Brawl Stars has been a multi-billion dollar hit and, after years of decline, its revenue has supercharged over the last few months thanks to the additions of features such as Starr Drops.

I noted in my [analysis of Supercell's games and its company changes](#) that a lot has been said about the long wait for the company's next game. Supercell was being written off, it was past its best. All frankly valid criticism of a company that has ultimately seen revenue decline and unable to launch a game.

But Supercell has its own way of running a games business, unbound by the need for growth at all costs all the time. It could release more games, but it prioritises quality and its reputation higher than short-term gains.

If it takes five and a half years to make a \$1 billion hit - if Squad Busters can indeed hit that milestone, the industry will be watching closely - then perhaps it's worth the wait?

**April 19**

**Paige Cook**

## Fallout Amazon series boosts Fallout Shelter downloads by 516%

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83802/fallout-amazon-series-boosts-fallout-shelter-downloads-by-516/>

The Amazon Prime series of Fallout has boosted revenue for Fallout Shelter, which is perhaps not much of a surprise. We've seen a similar outcome with other video games once they're adapted to TV or Film, such as HBO's The Last of Us, having an impact on game sales. I don't think the impact would be quite as successful if the show was a flop, but in this case, the show is great, and that must certainly help.

The fact that Fallout Shelter had a boost of 516% in downloads and managed \$200,000 in total gross revenue across just five days is a true testament to the power of a great IP adaptation. As I mentioned, it may not be a shock, but it is still interesting, even more so considering the rate at which games are now becoming a wider part of mainstream media culture. I remember when gamers would hear that 'X' game is being turned into a movie, and we would all wince in pain knowing that the odds of it being done well weren't high, but I feel like we're finally getting to the point where - mostly - these adaptations are actually good!

Not only is it nice to see video games getting a new level of respect, but it's also smart business. There's clearly much to benefit from when this is done right, and while game adaptations may not be a new thing, there's undoubtedly been a shift in how frequently we're seeing them get picked up, and I'm all for it.

**Craig Chapple**

## UK skills crisis prompts call for games industry-led body to tackle key challenges

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83829/uk-skills-crisis-prompts-call-for-games-industry-led-body-to-tackle-challenges/>

I highly recommend checking out the [Skillful report](#) on the 'Skills Crisis in the UK Games Sector'.

Issues with junior developers breaking into the industry has long been a key challenge. When I previously worked at Develop magazine, we published a feature 10 years ago about the difficulties graduates faced. There simply weren't enough jobs for the amount of talent coming through.

A decade later, there remain few opportunities for graduates and inexperienced developers. Last year Games Jobs Live director Colin Macdonald presented data showing a lack of opportunities - with [just 34 roles out of 1,170 openings in November last year open to juniors](#). And now the sector is being hit hard by widespread layoffs, further limiting opportunities and leaving some of those who finally broke through without a job once again.

This report highlights that problem - it noted only 7% of vacant roles were open for new entrants, which it said risks “creating a stunted pipeline of skilled workers, which could hinder future growth”.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum, there’s a shortage of experienced and skilled talent to fill mid-to-senior level roles. It’s hardly surprising when you consider factors such as developers exiting the industry entirely, heavy competition with other global games hubs, and a lack of support for mid-career progression.

The report, which brought together representatives from 65 games sector employers, comes at a critical moment for the UK games industry. It has called for the formation of a games-led body to take on these challenges and find practical solutions. The report sets out clear problems that need to be fixed to improve the situation for what remains one of the world’s most successful games hubs. And without action, they will only continue to fester.

**April 12**

**Aaron Astle**

[End of an era: Nintendo 3DS goes offline, but what does this mean for mobile?](#)

Well, that’s it. No more 3DS or Wii U online. It’s the end of an era, and the final blow to so many games that survived into the Switch era thanks to their strong multiplayer communities. Mario Kart 7 racing, Pokémon Sun and Moon battles and Monster Hunter 4 Ultimate quests will never be the same again - and for those who hadn’t bought their fill of past-gen games, they’ve now missed their chance unless they brave the oft-expensive second-hand market.

Because online functionality going down includes the 3DS and Wii U eShops: the digital marketplaces to buy games direct from Nintendo.

Even as someone who’s largely moved on to the Switch, it’s hard letting go of so many features in so many games - with Pokémon being the biggest hit for me personally. The inability to trade online practically quashes any notion of going back to complete the Alola PokéDex another day, and the inability to battle with long-distance friends using old favourites in nostalgic titles of the past - X and Y, ORAS, Sun and Moon - it’s really all too much too soon.

But it’s a clear sign from Nintendo that the old age is over and it’s time to move on. If you haven’t bought a Switch already, get with the times, buy a bunch of new games, and start over...

**Paige Cook**

**Microsoft saves the day: Activision Blizzard games are set to return to China in new NetEase deal**

Activision Blizzard's 14-year strong deal with NetEase came crashing down over a year ago, resulting in popular games such as World of Warcraft and Overwatch no longer being available in China. This was bad news for everyone involved. Players missed out, NetEase went from having something in the way of a deal to nothing, and Activision Blizzard lost access to a popular gaming market.

Fast forward to today, and Activision Blizzard's new knight in shining armour, Microsoft, has stepped in to build a bridge between the two. Whether Microsoft offered up a pretty sum to seal the deal or simply had enough sway to convince NetEase to get back on board, who knows, but it's a positive for all those involved, players in China will regain access to numerous titles and Activision Blizzard gets to benefit from a whole host of Chinese players. This also marks one of the first big moves to come out of Microsoft buying Activision Blizzard. We all remember the long acquisition process and the question of 'is this good or bad for games?' and you've got to give it to them; this is one of the good things that may not have happened if Microsoft hadn't been involved.

Of course, there's something extra in it for Microsoft, too. Things don't stop at the rekindled deal between Activision Blizzard and NetEase, it also opens the way for Microsoft to bring NetEase titles to Xbox. I expect we'll hear more about this in the not-too-distant future.

## **Craig Chapple**

### **No love for mobile at the BAFTA Game Awards**

Mobile has long had a rough relationship with the BAFTA Game Awards and other events of its ilk.

You can argue whether awards matter, but I think it's great that organisations like BAFTA offer an opportunity to celebrate and shine a spotlight on the achievements of the people in the industry.

An accolade doesn't pay the bills, but recognition from peers and players has value. When the winners take to the stage, it means something.

So it's sad to see the mobile - a platform that makes up half the market and has billions of players around the world - was given the cold shoulder by BAFTA this week (bar cross-platform titles like Genshin Impact and Terra Nil). And when I say mobile, I mean the people who work in the industry, who were ignored, as if they aren't part of what makes the games sector great.

To quote BAFTA: "Through its Awards ceremonies and year-round programme of learning events and initiatives ... BAFTA identifies and celebrates excellence, discovers, inspires and nurtures new talent, and enables learning and creative collaboration."

While I doubt anyone working in mobile games is losing sleep over being blanked, hopefully next year will celebrate the excellence of developers that make them.

**April 5**

**Aaron Astle**

[10 games industry questions answered: From AI and alternative app stores to layoffs and more](#)

It's always interesting hearing different opinions on the future of man and AI working together. Are we nurturing our new best friend's personal development, or teaching a meniacal machine how to destroy us? Either way, it looks like AI's continuing to improve and many game developers have found their footing firmly on one side of the fence or other.

According to analyst Omdia, over 30% of game developers are already using generative AI, but only 21% expect the tech to be a net good. 18% foresee an outright negative result of using generative AI, while everyone else either anticipates some pros and some cons, or frankly don't know what to expect.

Omdia's data also answers questions around the mass layoffs seen across the industry, the potential of alternative app stores, and more key topics of 2024.

**Paige Cook**

**72% of women play video games with half of female players being payers**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83734/diversity-in-games-is-a-key-issue-with-65-of-men-and-62-of-women-affirming-the-point/>

As a woman who plays games, I always find it interesting to see the numbers in reports such as this. Mostly, they tend to prove the same few things: yes, women are playing games, and the gap between women and men gamers is often closer than some would think.

That last part, however, still confuses me. Are there still people unaware that women enjoy games almost as much as men? The diversity and inclusivity questions are always interesting to me too. The report states that 65% of the men surveyed and 62% of women consider diversity in games important. Again, is this something that people aren't aware of in 2024?

I understand that the industry is generally far more aware of its audience now, and some even use that knowledge exceptionally well to cater to a specific demographic. I'm also not knocking the report; having actual data and numbers that explore who players are and what they want is always insightful. I'm more just wondering, or should I say hoping, that as an industry, most of us are reading such reports and not being surprised to see that gamers are

a group of diverse people who want to see that diversity reflected back in the media they consume.

## **Craig Chapple**

### **Laton Ventures secures \$35 million for games investments in Turkey and beyond**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83717/laton-ventures-secures-35-million-for-games-investments-in-turkey-and-beyond/>

VC funds are opening up to new waves of investments as we enter the new financial year. Laton Ventures has just raised \$35 million to invest in pre-seed and seed stage startups with the potential to “scale into massive companies”.

Meanwhile this week a16z [opened up its third Speedrun accelerator](#) with \$75 million up for grabs to startups. On top of that, Wargaming co-founder Nick Katselapov has launched investment company [Mika Games with a \\$50 million fund](#) for mobile games companies.

So between just the three of them, that’s potentially \$160 million for startups announced in just the past week.

This year is still expected to be a challenging one for the industry, but it’s positive to see investors still open to funding companies on what remains a very lucrative and exciting sector. It’s a good sign for the future of the industry as it gets back on its feet and looks toward brighter years ahead.

## **March 29**

## **Paige Cook**

### **Call of Duty Warzone: Mobile generates \$1.4m in first four days**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83683/call-of-duty-warzone-mobile-generates-14m-in-first-four-days/>

Call of Duty Warzone has managed to generate \$1.4 million in just its first four days, which is impressive, but you can’t help but think Call of Duty Mobile managed to do \$4.2 million in the same number of days. It’s quite the difference.

So why is it off to a slower start? Have players finally reached the point where they’ve had enough Call of Duty and different ways to play? I don’t necessarily think so. The IP is and probably always will be an absolute giant. However, for a game that has a hefty initial 1.5GB download followed by a bigger 5GB download, there are certainly some performance issues. The way the game streams graphical assets means you’re sometimes playing with a less

than desirable visual appearance and forget playing it at all unless you have a high-end phone. The game does state that graphics improve with play, which, in my experience, they did to an extent, but there were still some issues. Add on top of that bugs and some instances of the game just crashing, it leaves something to be desired.

But again, this is Call of Duty, and the franchise has a huge following, so it's one I'm interested in keeping an eye on and how it performs. I think if the team can iron out some of these issues sooner rather than later, then the pros the game has, such as smooth controls and cross-progression, could see it rival its own predecessor in the long run.

**Aaron Astle**

[Report: Tencent's top studios developing Palworld-like mobile games](#)

It comes as little surprise that game developers would be jumping onto the Palworld bandwagon after the game's major success in January - right to be called a phenomenon at the time. And even if it's not dominating every gaming conversation two months on, it's clearly still a big enough deal for other devs to want a slice of the pie.

Palworld is the biggest third-party Xbox Game Pass launch ever, after all, and that's even more impressive coming from a relatively unknown studio - at least compared to the industry giants.

Speaking of, the Chinese giant Tencent reportedly has two Palworld-like games in the works, being developed by TiMi and Lightspeed. For now we can only wait and see how these games turn out, and wonder if their creature designs will rub up just that bit too close to Pokémon's too...

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**March 22**

**Aaron Astle**

[Roblox's \\$35M Creator Fund to support short-form video content](#)

The Roblox platform is already used by more than 60 million people every single day, and it looks like that number's only going to go up with short-form video content on the way. If TikTok really does go down in the US, perhaps Roblox will be the company to take its place in the space, with so large an audience already behind it, full of Gen Z and Alpha fans with attention spans juuust long enough to handle a quick video clip.

Roblox has launched a \$35 million Creator Fund to support "next-gen experiences" like this on the platform and has already tested the waters with longer-form videos, like the [premiere of the 2023 Bakugan reboot](#) ahead of its Netflix release.

Short-form content, though? That could prove an entirely different beast. For all we know, we may be on the precipice of Roblox's latest industry-defining move, with the potential to rival YouTube and TikTok for video content. Or, maybe not. But it's an exciting thought either way.

**Paige Cook**



## **Analytics firm Sensor Tower has just bought rival, Data.ai**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83642/analytics-firm-sensor-tower-has-just-bought-rival-dataai/>

I don't think people saw this one coming and if they did I think many would have assumed it would more than likely be Data.ai snapping up Sensor Tower, but here we are, and what does it mean?

It's hard to ignore the obvious which is that, in the short term, this will lead to more layoffs. When two companies doing the same thing merge, you inevitably get people doing the same jobs. I imagine many people working for both are feeling nervous about what's to come next and given how many layoffs we have already seen, it's tough to think that more are likely to follow.

One of the most interesting points about this is that by combining forces, they now have no big competitor to oppose them and I have to wonder if no competition is a good thing. I'm personally not sure that it is. When you think about how many game companies use services like this daily, it gives them a lot of power, and I'm sure that on the more positive side of things that also means that with a combined effort the data they actually provide will probably be even better than before but does that also mean eventually they'll charge more? I'm still unsure about how this one will play out and I'm not yet entirely convinced on how the industry overall will benefit from the acquisition, but time will tell.

**March 15**

**Aaron Astle**

[\*\*Six months of Monster Hunter Now: A well-earned celebration as Niantic catches lightning twice\*\*](#)

Capcom once again takes the spotlight for me this week, with Monster Hunter Now having celebrated its six-month anniversary yesterday after what only feels like a few months at most. Certainly no more than five and a half...!

In these past six months, Monster Hunter Now has established itself as one of the big players in the geolocation genre with \$150 million under its belt (or talon?) so far, predominantly from Japanese players.

Being from a famous franchise can certainly help in this genre (just look at Pokémon Go) but it doesn't mean automatic success (maybe don't look at Harry Potter: Wizards Unite) - a mobile game has to have its own merit. And Monster Hunter Now has it in spades, successfully adapting the main series formula of hunting, crafting new gear from the rewards, and hunting something stronger to craft new gear from.

Not only that, but it has succeeded in leveraging mobile hardware and developer Niantic's specialties, AR and location-based gameplay, to give Now its own special something that makes main series fans want to play too - to get off their consoles and computers and look at their screens outside for a change.

It's a game I've thoroughly enjoyed so far, and as a bow user I'm pleased to report I finally got my Azure Rath Soul Helm to Grade 6 thanks to the celebratory monster spawns. If you know you know...

## **Paige Cook**

### **Supercell axes Clash Mini as "bold changes" get underway, but there's still hope...**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83620/supercell-axes-clash-mini-as-bold-changes-get-underway-but-theres-still-hope/>

Clash Mini is no more... Well, sort of. The game won't be completely lost since there are plans to integrate the Clash Mini experience into Clash Royale. So game fans can download that instead if they haven't already, which is quite a smart move.

Supercell is no stranger to giving a game the axe, and within the mobile market, I think, in many ways, it's a strength to know when enough is enough. This part of the gaming industry moves particularly fast, so if something isn't hitting the mark, it's good to ask if the resources going into it would be better served elsewhere. Of course, it's always a shame to see fans lose a game they enjoy or a team taken away from a project they have worked hard on, but with the integration to Clash Royale, it seems, in this case, there's at least a silver lining.

We [recently spoke with Supercell's Head of Live Games, Sara Bach](#), and she made it very clear that Supercell already is and intends to continue to commit to the changes mentioned earlier in the year by CEO Ilkka Paananen. Changes that acknowledged that Supercell's year-on-year revenue had been in decline, but there was a plan in motion to get back into the top spots. It might seem like an odd way to show it, but I think that the decision to end the development of Clash Mini is in keeping with those changes. Doing good business isn't just about making new things; sometimes, it's about knowing when to count your losses and move on.

## **Craig Chapple**

### **Nazara Technologies commits \$100 million to expand globally through M&A deals**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/asia/news/83612/nazara-technologies-commits-100-million-to-expand-globally-through-manda-deals/>

Indian games publisher Nazara Technologies has pledged \$100 million for M&A activity over the next two years as the company looks to scale its operations globally.

There's an element of buzzword bingo to this - investments could range across games, web3, VR and AI, or any manner of combinations of these. But it's fascinating to see companies in emerging markets like India expand their ambitions and take to the world stage.

India's games market still hasn't fulfilled its great potential, but over the years titles like PUBG Mobile and Garena Free Fire have proven that there are players willing to spend in-game. But India has grown substantially as a development hub over the years, developing own-successful IP and collaborating with international partners.

A growing Nazara, if successful, is a sign of how far India's games industry has come. And with so much market potential - and increasingly more talent - we could start seeing yet more publishers in the country make it big on the world stage.

## **March 8**

### **Aaron Astle**

#### **[Capcom to "invest in its people" with a payrise for all employees](#)**

It's refreshing to have some positive news in the world of video game jobs this week, and Capcom has delivered just that, announcing plans to give every employee a payrise. Existing employees are expected to receive a 5% rise on average with a one-off special payment on the way too.

Investing in its people has been a focal point for Capcom for a while now, having introduced a stock-based compensation system for employees and raising base salaries by 30% since 2022. With the upcoming changes, new graduate hires can expect to earn 27.7% more next year, equating to \$440 bonus pay per month.

It's a nice reward for employees after Capcom's recent successes like Monster Hunter Now, and offers some comfort in a landscape that's been increasingly dower lately with all the layoffs. Turns out there are still game makers doing well and thanking their employees for their hard work, investing back into this industry's exceptional talent and nurturing a culture where great work means great reward for all.

Take note, (*redacted*)!

### **Craig Chapple**

EU slaps Apple with €1.8 billion fine for "abusing its dominant position" in music streaming space

**<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83540/eu-slaps-apple-with-18-billion-for-abusing-its-dominant-position-in-music-streaming-space/>**

The European Union has fired its first serious shot at Apple's business practices. Spotify's complaint to the European Commission about Apple's dominant market position, and the EC's promise to investigate back in 2020, finally came to a climax this week.

The result? A €1.8 billion fine against Apple for "abusing its dominant position" in the music streaming space on iOS devices by banning alternative and cheaper music subscription services available outside the App Store. It said such anti-steering provisions were illegal under EU antitrust rules and amounted to "unfair trading conditions".

The announcement came just as the Digital Markets Act is set to come into force, with Apple in the EU's crosshairs as one of the big tech 'gatekeepers' it's targeting. Talk about timing...

I think this shows the EU isn't messing around when it comes to bringing regulation to tech. The EU (and the DMA), as Daniel discusses and as Deconstructor of Fun's Eric Kress stated during Think Games Istanbul this week, isn't messing around. The EU is showing its teeth and is willing to deal out record fines to rein in big platform holders.

Apple, of course, criticised the EC's ruling and said it would appeal. On the one hand, it's understandable that Apple is looking to protect its business interests and revenue. I get it.

But wouldn't it be great if a company like Apple tried to innovate on the App Store - make it a better ecosystem and fix discovery for users and publishers. Instead, the App Store business appears to be run by lawyers, coming up with new and 'innovative' legal ways to navigate regulatory hurdles to maintain the status quo, rather than provide an industry-leading service that publishers want to be a part of.

## **March 1**

### **Aaron Astle**

#### [DeNA shares on fire, surging 24.4% after Pokémon Trading Card Game reveal](#)

As expected, The Pokémon Company celebrated another Pokémon Day on February 27 with a slew of announcements spanning mobile and the Nintendo Switch, and this year noticeably swung towards the former.

Not only were all five active Pokémon mobile games given screentime in the Pokémon Presents presentation, but so too was a sixth game revealed. The next to join this expanding catalogue is Pokémon Trading Card Game Pocket, a lengthy title to be sure, but thorough enough to explain what it is.

Pocket is, after all, a mobile version of the incredibly popular collectible card game, and is a mobile adaptation in the truest sense: with daily incentives to play like free in-game card packs, online trading and even a battle mode.

Anyone who knows about Pokémon cards will know what a big deal this is, with huge potential given physical card sales have exceeded 50 billion over the years. Putting them

onto mobile with free daily packs, and leveraging the digital format to introduce interactive cards, it certainly looks like Pocket's developers know what they're doing.

That's where DeNA comes in, already having a hand in Pokémon's mobile pursuits via Pokémon Masters. Pocket is being developed by DeNA together with The Pokémon Company and Creatures Inc, and within a day of the card game's announcement, DeNA got a much-needed share surge, up an impressive 24.4%.

Indeed, it looks like investors have high hopes for Pokémon Trading Card Game Pocket too...

## Paige Cook

### Sony Interactive Entertainment axes 900 staff across the globe

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83506/sony-interactive-entertainment-axes-900-staff-across-the-globe/>

Sadly, it seems this was always only ever a matter of time. With thousands of layoffs throughout the gaming industry this year and last, every area of the industry is taking a hit. Back in January, Microsoft had layoffs over its video game workforce, and many commenters stated, 'Playstation would never', and here we are, they would, and they have, which only emphasises that nobody is above what is currently happening in the industry.

Despite fantastic success last year with massive games such as Spider-Man 2 arriving on the platform, several studios, including Spider-Man creators Insomniac, have been hit with losses, not to mention the entire closure of a London studio. It's understandable why so many feel scared right now to be working in games. If giants such as Sony are laying off staff for many of its biggest studios, creating titles worth millions, can anyone feel secure in their position?

Then there's the question of why is this still happening? It's been discussed numerous times that many of the layoffs are due to rising costs of operations and how team sizes increased over the course of the pandemic, and this is the inevitable comedown. While that makes sense, I can't help but think that companies must have known that this wouldn't be sustainable in the long run, and more could have been done to prepare for what we are seeing now. Of course, there are likely other reasons behind the scenes that people don't like to speak of when letting hundreds of people go, such as profit margins and debts that make businesses look unappealing to investors; there's even the question of AI. Is that already playing a part in these restructures?

It is truly a sad time in the industry when friends and passionate people are losing their jobs. It's hard to predict when the end is in sight for layoffs, but all we can hope is that it comes soon and the industry can begin to build a space that feels stable and secure to work in

again, because one thing that is for sure, the demand for games shows no sign of slowing down.

**Craig Chapple**

**Unity shares fall 18% despite revenue growth to \$2.2 billion in 2023**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83498/unity-shares-fall-despite-revenue-growth/>

Unity is still deep in its cost cutting measures, which it elaborated on further during its financials this week. It is laying off 25% of its staff, closing offices, cutting cloud hosting costs, limiting its Professional Services unity to “a few strategic engagements”, and “exiting the hardware components of its multiplayer business”. All this would reduce \$250 million in annual non-GAAP losses, it said.

And you can see why it's cutting back on so much. While revenue rose 57.2% year-over-year to \$2.2 billion, it accrued net losses of \$826.3 million - a reduction of just 10.1% Y/Y.

But it's got a mountain to climb still regardless of the cuts it makes. Applovin is eating its lunch in the ads space. I found it interesting that interim CEO James Whitehurst blamed the consolidation period between Unity and IronSource for the lack of competitiveness in the space. Now that's completed, he said, growth awaits.

But you look deeper... IronSource executives have left the company, and it starts to look like, to date, the merger has been mismanaged. They have allowed Applovin to grow considerably, and clawing those gains back won't be so easy after the horse has already bolted.

For what it's worth, Applovin's share price is nearly double Unity's now. Unity has a market cap of \$11.1 billion, while Applovin is valued at \$19.4 billion.

In its engine business, Unity is still going ahead with the runtime fee. It said that, despite all the controversy, there wasn't a great impact on their business. But I don't think we won't see the full impact for a few years. It'll take time for licences to be up for renewal and for current projects to finish production. Then we'll really see how developers feel about the broken trust.

Nobody wants Unity to fail, and hopefully it's able to refocus on key areas most beneficial for developers. In the meantime, it would likely help developer confidence if it didn't keep talking about growth outside of games.

**February 23**

**Aaron Astle**

## [Monster Hunter Now's half-year anniversary reveals time-limited monetisation tactics](#)

As a Monster Hunter fan and day-one Now player, the fact it's almost six months already since Niantic's latest hit is frankly hard to believe. But, with so much content and quality-of-life improvements planned for the half-year anniversary, I'm not exactly complaining.

In a win-win-win for players, Niantic and Capcom, during the celebratory event there will be more monsters spawning in and more often, giving fans more to do throughout the day - and needing more potions to do it. This will inevitably lead to more player spending on potions, especially among the resource-hungry playerbase who want to forge the best weapons possible from monster parts.

And with exciting beasts like Azure Rathalos making a comeback, plus the tease of brand-new additions from the main series, March is certainly looking set to be a lucrative month.

In addition to six months of Now, March also marks three years since Rise released on Nintendo Switch and a whole 20 years since the Monster Hunter series first launched, opening the doors to plenty more celebratory content in Now. Ideally there'll be some new monsters from Rise joining the roster...

### **Paige Cook**

## **Ubisoft launches first Invincible mobile game for the 21-year-old franchise**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83470/ubisoft-launches-first-invincible-mobile-game-for-the-21-year-old-franchise/>

Mobile news from Ubisoft. Findings show that Ubisoft's mobile earnings were way down [from 35% to 7%](#). They highlighted the studio's quiet presence with its mobile titles, but it seems that is about to change. Ubisoft recently dropped Rainbow Six SMOL as part of the Netflix lineup of games; then we have a mobile Division game to watch out for AND Assassins Creed Jade.

Players are getting two mobile games pulled from massively popular titles, a third that is connected with Netflix Games, which allows anyone with a subscription to play and with this latest announcement, a game based on a long-running popular comic book series that has also now become a hit TV series.

It's clear Ubisoft is cracking things up a notch in terms of mobile releases, and it's also interesting to see the various avenues they are approaching it from, making use of popular platforms and IPs. Time will tell if it's enough to see Ubisoft gain a stronger foothold in the mobile market, but at the very least, it does appear that change is on the horizon.

### **Craig Chapple**

## **From losing a job to millions in revenue: How Clap Clap Games began**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83468/from-losing-a-job-to-millions-in-revenue-how-clap-clap-games-began/>

There are lots of negative stories surrounding the games industry right now, with continuous layoffs each week impacting thousands of workers. In just the last couple of weeks, we've reported on job losses at [Gameloft](#), [Blizzard](#), [Popcore](#) and [Scopely](#).

So it was refreshing this week to get a positive spin during a session at Kwalee's Gamemasters Summit. Clap Clap Games CEO Gabriel Stürmer discussed the early days of the developer, which started as a result of his firing as CMO from Brazilian studio Cupcake Entertainment.

With an ambition to stay in games, Stürmer set out to start his own company. But he lacked investment, and perhaps more importantly, the skills to code. Unfettered, he got to training himself on Unity and within a few short years the company has partnered with hypercasual heavyweights Kwalee and Voodoo and has generated millions of dollars in revenue.

It's a reminder then out of awful setbacks can come unexpected opportunities, often born out of necessity. It doesn't make the job losses being suffered at scale right now any easier, of course, but it was nice to hear a story of someone bouncing back.

## **February 16**

### **Aaron Astle**

#### [Japan generates 50% of worldwide geolocation game spending](#)

Ever since the 2016 phenomenon that was Pokémon Go, countless developers have attempted to take a slice of the location-based pie, but only few have succeeded. Go remains the most popular in the West and continues to make Niantic its millions, but 2023 saw its second major success with Monster Hunter Now.

Another Japanese IP, Now understandably took off in Japan and quickly surpassed \$100 million in revenue, while also becoming one of the five biggest geolocation games in its IP's home country.

Square Enix's Dragon Quest Walk together with Niantic's two titles made up the top three location-based games in Japan last year, while the top five generated \$620 million in revenue. It's a hefty sum, and doubly impressive considering it accounts for half of the genre's global revenue last year - showing just how willing Japanese players are to get outside and walk.

It's also just the latest bit of evidence of how willing they are to spend...

### **Paige Cook**

#### **Zuckerberg tries Apple Vision Pro: "Quest 3 is the better product. Period."**



<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/feature/83437/zuckerberg-tries-vision-pro-quest-3-is-the-better-product-period/>

Of course, it was only a matter of time before Zuckerberg had his say on the Apple Vision Pro, and really, it would be weirder if he said anything other than “our product does it better”, but is there any truth in what he has to say?

I find the VR market interesting and one with lots of possibilities. I understand how people can get carried away and start thinking that one day it'll be Ready Player One, but for real (minus the real-world chaos, please). But in all honesty, I don't know if VR is as far along as it appears to be. Yes, the technology is impressive, but it's getting people to want to or even be able to use it regularly, and that's the heart of the issue.

This brings me back to Zuckerberg's points. I'm not a VR expert or a Zuckerberg fan, but he does bring up some good points. He can't outright claim it's the better product overall since the Pro has some great features, but with people returning the Vision Pro due to the most simple of reasons, such as it being uncomfortable to wear and sometimes difficult to navigate you have to wonder if the lighter Quest 3 with it's hand-tracking controller support and of course much lower price point may be the VR product that more people steer towards.

I think the key to the VR hardware market won't necessarily come down to who has the overall better high-end product; it'll be the one that does all the simple things well and at a realistic price point.

**Craig**

**Embracer sees record \$1.2 billion in Q3 earnings after axing 1,400 staff**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83434/embracer-sees-record-12-billion-in-q3-earnings-after-axeing-1400-staff/>

Embracer's troubles need little introduction. This week, the publisher said its restructuring program has resulted in approximately 1,400 job losses - around 8% of its global workforce. At the same time, the company posted record revenue of \$1.2 billion in Q3. But it's still forecast to be off target for lowering net debt and is considering selling off assets, consolidating existing teams and potentially laying off more staff..

The company is sitting between a rock and a hard place entirely of its own design. But it offered a particularly callous way of covering its mistakes and desperately trying to convince shareholders that a brighter future awaits.

“Our overruling principle is to always maximise shareholder value in any given situation.”

Embracer Group CEO Lars Wingefors touted in an earnings call, courtesy of [Seeking Alpha](#), how significant it was it posted record revenue during a period of significant restructuring, and that this was “an achievement we should be proud of”.

But surely that highlights the problem: despite record revenue it still isn't making enough money. And that is a consequence of a strategy of growth at all costs.

Despite the company's collapse, Wingefors remains as CEO. It could be that investors and the board do trust his vision to turn the company around, while capitalising on the all IP it has scooped up. Those investors include Lars Wingefors AB, the private investment company founded by Wingefors himself, [which is the single largest shareholder in Embracer Group](#) at 19.6%, while holding a 37.76% share of voting rights.

But that Embracer ever got into this position in the first place is a shocking indictment on the way it has conducted its business, with developers bearing the brunt of those costly decisions.

## **February 9**

### **Paige Cook**

#### **Disney invests \$1.5 billion into Epic Games as it plots new "entertainment universe" with Fortnite**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83389/disney-invests-15-billion-into-epic-games-as-it-plots-new-entertainment-universe-with-fortnite/>

The announcement of Disney's \$1.5 billion investment into Epic Games was quite the story this week. Not only is that a large sum of money, but it's also between two absolute giants. Love it or hate it, Fortnite has changed the face of gaming and will likely continue to do so, something that Disney is obviously aware of and doesn't want to miss out on.

The story notes that Disney is looking toward creating a new 'entertainment universe' where users can play, watch, shop and engage with content from the world of Disney and everything under its umbrella, such as Star Wars and Marvel. Disney has always had an interest in gaming, but they have lacked a certain level of commitment to it, so to me, it makes complete sense for them to team up with Epic Games to compete in the market. Is this another push toward the elusive metaverse? Perhaps, but buzzwords aside, Disney knows much of its current and future audience are and will be gamers, so they need to create an evolving space for them and what better way to do that than through Fortnite?

Disney already has its space in movies/TV, theme parks and physical products, but it also knows where the audience is heading and sees Epic at the head of the spear; a pairing between the two allows Disney to have a foothold in yet another prominent space, one that can be forever updated. I'd say the deal is a win for all parties involved.

### **Craig Chapple**

#### **Elden Ring free-to-play mobile game reportedly in the works from Tencent**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/asia/news/83372/elden-ring-free-to-play-mobile-game-reportedly-in-the-works-from-tencent/>

As a fan of Elden Ring (and the Bloodborne and Dark Souls series), I'm intrigued what Tencent plans to do with the franchise as it plots a free-to-play mobile game based on the IP.

It comes at a time when Tencent has pulled the plug on titles like Apex Legends Mobile and a Nier game with Square Enix after two years in development. The news also comes after Tencent chairman Pony Ma said the firm had been "resting on its laurels" in the games space. Ouch.

But the fact is, Tencent needs to show returns for its big investments in the global games industry and it needs new hits to navigate the challenging regulatory environment in China.

Elden Ring was a smash hit, but can it really make it as a free-to-play mobile game? The idea seems to brush up against the core of what a Souls game is all about and what the audience would be clamouring for in the next entry into the series.

It does feel a bit like a sign of the times. Big gaming IP going cross-platform and companies looking for top licences to help propel them up the app stores in a tough marketing landscape. I wouldn't put success past the teams at Tencent, but I'm curious, in light of recent failures in bringing console and PC IP to mobile, how this particular project will fare and if it will ever make it to a global release.

## **February 2**

### **Aaron Astle**

#### **7 Years of Fire Emblem Heroes**

Today marks seven years since the release of Fire Emblem Heroes, and in those seven years the game has proceeded to become Nintendo's most lucrative mobile title - earning more than any mobile Mario.

There's no better time for a retrospective, therefore: a look back at what's changed over the years and how Heroes has sustained itself through the ever-changing mobile gaming landscape.

### **Craig Chapple**

**European Games Developer Federation "disappointed" over Apple's new "anticompetitive" EU rules**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83353/egdf-expresses-disappointed-over-apples-new-anti-competitive-eu-rules/>

While most other companies might have taken stock of Unity's catastrophic Runtime Fee announcement (which still remains, mind) and thought "maybe charging per install might piss publishers off, Apple took it as inspiration.

I expressed some early thoughts last week on Apple's attempt to adhere to the Digital Markets Act while maintaining the status quo of owning the App Store and keeping its 30% share.

Since the announcement, we've heard from [Epic Games' Tim Sweeney](#) (of course), [Spotify CEO Daniel Ek](#), Xbox president Sarah Bond, and now the European Games Developer Federation.

I always find the reactions fascinating to big news, especially when it comes to platform holders. When Unity announced the Runtime Fee, the entire games industry was up in arms, and very publicly so. Unity, at heart, is ultimately a services company and tools provider, reliant on keeping customers happy.

Apple is an entirely different beast. Other than a few of the very biggest companies (like the aforementioned Spotify and two companies that want to create competing marketplaces - Epic and Microsoft), there aren't really too many in the industry willing to go on the record.

There's a very real concern that should they do so, Apple may retaliate or they'll lose the App Store team's good graces. And Apple has proven that if anyone defies it or its rules, it will take swift action (as with Epic Games' Fortnite).

The EGDF can call out Apple, as it's the voice of a large collective, with its very mission to advance and represent the industry.

Either most publishers are happy with the status quo - or perhaps the lack of public, industry-wide condemnation, as we had with Unity, says more about Apple's position in the market than those headline-grabbing quotes from tech's biggest companies.

## **January 26**

**Aaron Astle**

[AI vs NFTs... What's really the next big thing in games?](#)

At PGC London this week, I sat in on plenty of panels and talks and heard a whole range of opinions on the state of the games industry - across every subject from cross-platform power to AI to voice acting, and even cyborgs.

Of course, AI was the big one. And in one such discussion, it was especially interesting to see the diverging opinion of panellists as to whether it's a net good or bad for the games industry. In the short-term at least, it's allowing cheap and fast work and giving indie devs more of a chance to compete. But there are rightful concerns of even more layoffs ahead if AI is able to replace employees, not to mention the legal grey area that is AI-generated content.

The future may be uncertain, but for right now, AI has certainly replaced NFTs as the "next big conversation".

## **Craig Chapple**

### **How Playdemic's founders are following up their \$1 billion Golf Clash success with new studio ForthStar**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/interview/83266/how-forthstar-hopes-to-follow-up-golf-clash-as-another-1-billion-uk-success-story/>

Former Playdemic CEO Paul Gouge revealed his new studio with long-time business co-founder Alex Rigby this week called ForthStar. But why now? App tracking transparency has rocked the mobile games industry, inflation has made money harder to come by, while the sector is flush with regular layoffs.

But in my interview, Gouge was there to offer some perspective during these tough times.

"In my experience of being in video games, which is quite a long time, I'm regularly told that this is the hardest time to ever launch a games business," says Gouge. "So this won't be the first time anyone told me this is a really bad time to start a company.

"What I try to do is not get too caught up in the particular moment that we're in, and think more generally.

"At any particular period, you can zoom into video games and go, oh, this is a really bad time. If you zoom out, and you see the journey of the growth of our industry, of the incredible scale that we now have, I think it is just a massive success story.

"Think back to where we were 20 years ago, the market growth is phenomenal."

His words don't make what's happening to many developers right now any easier. I was very much surprised to see leading UK recruitment agency One Player Mission (OPM) [is closing this week](#), which highlights just how tough business is.

But Gouge's words offer some hope and inspiration, that new opportunities will arise in this industry, and things won't always be this way. ([Not that Apple wants anything to change, mind](#)).

**January 19**

## Aaron Astle

### [Pokémon Masters surpasses \\$300 million in lifetime player spending](#)

Pokémon Masters surpassing \$300 million in revenue is quite the milestone, and though far lower than Pokémon Go's earnings, this still lands the game as The Pokémon Company's second-biggest on mobile. It's also my most-played.

With everyone from Ash Ketchum to Red to Irida making their way into this gacha title, it has something for everyone, be they veteran or newcomer to the series. That's probably why it's made \$300 million: each new addition to the gacha has to be *someone's* favourite.

It's unsurprising, but still impressive, that Japanese players have accounted for more than half of Masters' revenue, and it also explains why certain characters get more in-game furore when introduced than others: Ingo and Emmet are popular in Japan but not so well-known in the West, yet they released as limited-time Poké Fairs in the same way as the world-renowned Champion Cynthia. It shows that The Pokémon Company and developer DeNA know who their biggest audience is...

## Paige Cook

### **Netflix's Grand Theft Auto re-releases dominate December's mobile app rankings**

#### <https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83240/netflixs-grand-theft-auto-releases-dominate-decembers-mobile-app-rankings/>

Grand Theft Auto is easily one of the most well-known gaming franchises ever. Even most non-gamers know of GTA, perhaps not always for the right reasons, but for Netflix, I imagine it was an absolute no-brainer to include some of the classic titles on its streaming service.

Despite Netflix having a pretty impressive gaming offering now, getting subscribers to use the service for games has always been the issue. So, if one franchise could change that, it makes sense that it was GTA. All three titles from the trilogy made it into the top 10 charts in December, with San Andreas sitting in the number two spot in global downloads.

It's clear that the inclusion of GTA on Netflix has benefitted the trilogy itself and, of course, massively benefitted Netflix in getting people to use the service for its gaming offering. Now that people have seen how well it works, maybe they'll stick around and play some other titles on offer. I expect that now Netflix has witnessed the magic of a big classic franchise on its service, it'll be looking for additional lucrative IPs to host in 2024.

## Craig Chapple

### **Despite new regulations Apple will still be able to charge 27% on external platform payments**

#### <https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83228/despite-new-regulations-apple-will-still-be-able-to-charge-27-on-external-platform-payments/>

Just as some publishers and payments companies popped the champagne following Epic's victory in its long-running court case against Apple (and by victory I mean losing almost its entire case except for achieving a 'win' for web store links), Apple pulled its best trick yet. Sure, have your silly web links, but you need to pay us 27% for off-store(!!) transactions, and we'll stick a big warning suggesting nowhere is safe outside of Apple's warm embrace.

We'll see how the courts find Apple's interpretation of the ruling, but it's a stark reminder that Epic's fight was never going to be an easy one. Despite all the global pressure, Apple and Google have fiercely stood their ground on a 30% cut, and their miniscule concessions ensure alternative payment methods through their stores are more expensive and entirely unviable.

Don't like it? They really don't care. Unless you're non-gaming - sorry, reader apps, dating apps, etc - then maybe they care a little bit.

## **January 11th**

### **Aaron Astle**

#### [20 years of Monster Hunter: Capcom celebrates two goliath decades in 2024](#)

Monster Hunter producer Ryozo Tsujimoto released a statement thanking fans for 20 years of support for the series, with its 20th anniversary close upon the horizon. A vote for the most popular monster has already taken place with results to be revealed in May, and in the meantime players are encouraged to keep busy with World, Rise and Now - a trifecta of titles all sustaining popularity across a range of consoles.

As a Monster Hunter enjoyer myself, particularly of Rise, Now, and Stories 2, there's no better time to be a fan of the series as everyone continues to engage in plenty of existing content while waiting with bated breath for more information on Wilds. Loads to play already and more to come? Sounds good to me.

I'm also hoping for an Astalos reveal in Now, and I refuse to stop saying it until it happens!

### **Paige Cook**

#### **Twitch slashes 500 jobs - 35% of its staff - in latest cuts**

#### <https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83170/twitch-slashes-35-of-staff-in-newest-job-cuts/>

It's the start of a new year, and unfortunately, the mass job losses we saw throughout 2023 seem to show no sign of slowing down into 2024. Amazon owned streaming company Twitch was hit this week, losing 35% of its staff in the latest cuts. Amazon itself has also suffered more job losses despite huge layoffs last year.

One of the big debates that surrounds Twitch is streamers' pay. Sure, there are people earning enormous amounts of money, but that accounts for a very small fraction of streamers using the platform. Most streamers on the site struggle to make money, with the standard split being 50% for and 70% for those in the partner program, something that has been hit with much debate over the years. But from a business standpoint, Twitch finds itself in the difficult position of trying to satisfy those using the platform and being profitable, which is something it's never actually achieved!

With massive costs and financial challenges for Twitch, it was only a matter of time until job losses became part of the strategy to cut costs. These aren't the only measures the streaming platform is taking, given that it's also closing down operations in Korea next month despite the popularity of esports in the region. If these changes will finally make any difference to the profitability of Twitch, only time will tell. Hopefully, those impacted by the layoffs can find their next adventure soon.

Craig Chapple

### **Unity to lay off 1,800 staff as it continues company reset**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83153/unity-to-lay-off-1800-staff-as-it-continues-company-reset/>

Unity interim CEO Jim Whitehurst was very clear in November, following the engine firm's financials, that he was gearing up for what he called a "rip off the band-aid reset" as the company looks to finally start making money. Unity, of course, spent a decade intentionally investing millions into making itself a dominant force in the game engine space before looking for profitability.

There was an enormous backlash to the runtime fee announcement after Unity plotted to alter the licensing deals developers had already signed with the company (though the runtime fee remains, slightly changed). Its plans to dominate and then monetise aggressively have been scuppered by that sheer aggression, and Unity, it seems, needs cash right now.

After the warnings of layoffs, product discontinuation and office closures, this week we now know what the reality of this looks like: 1,800 layoffs, or 25% of its global workforce. The move will impact all teams, regions and areas of the business. The company's growth at all costs strategy has backfired and employees are now having to pay the price for it.

Job losses will mean fewer developers working on the engine, which could have wider ramifications for the industry at large.

Can Unity be both profitable and have an industry-leading game engine business? So far, this is a goal it has yet to achieve.

**January 5th**



## **Aaron Astle**

[Genshin Impact, Fate/Grand Order, Goddess of Victory: Nikke... How would the big gachas fare with a China ban?](#)

You have to hand it to China: they certainly know how to cause a stir. Somehow, the country's plan to ban gacha games, login bonuses, and more has been met with a "How could they do that?" and a "Yep, that sounds about right!" all at once.

The region's anti-gaming legislation is either unpredictably predictable or predictably unpredictable - it's hard to decide which - and the announcement of the potential ban came just at the end of a good year for gaming in China, at that.

I looked at some of the biggest gacha games right now and their revenues without including the Chinese market to gain a bit of perspective on how their monthly earnings could look in the future if they get banned, and they're optimistic, really.

Of course, I don't claim to know every game's business expenses, and the list speaks for revenues, not profits, but even so, \$28 million from Honkai: Star Rail in one month, excluding China. I'd be happy with that!

For now, all we can really do is keep our eagle eye on the news in China as it develops because, ultimately, anything's possible...

## **Paige Cook**

### **Square Enix promise greater globalisation and "aggressive" use of AI**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83106/happy-new-year-square-enix-reveals-ai-ambitions-and-multimedia-targets-for-2024/>

It's the first week of a new year, and Square Enix has wasted no time presenting its intentions for the year ahead. In the letter, Takashi Kiryu highlighted some areas that we can expect to see the company pursue further, and to nobody's surprise, AI is listed here as a focus.

Last year was a massive one for the growth of AI and the beginning of a much broader adoption of this technology in the gaming industry, and I see no sign of that slowing down in 2024 or beyond.

I find it interesting that Square Enix was giving blockchain the big talk in the previous few years, and now, in this letter, it's only afforded a fleeting mention. While 2024 will see the release of the anticipated Final Fantasy VII Rebirth on PlayStation, I'm still waiting for a solid mobile contribution from Square Enix. Is 2024 the year for that? Will AI play a role in its creation? I suppose time will tell.

**Craig Chapple**

**Kim Kardashian: Hollywood removed from app stores with end of service in April**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83124/kim-kardashian-hollywood-removed-from-app-stores-with-eos-slated-for-april/>

News that the Kim Kardashian: Hollywood game is closing actually had me surprised this week.

Clearly Glu Mobile had moved on from the game, particularly with the success of the MLB Tap Sports Baseball series and its acquisition of Covet Fashion and Design Home developer Crowdstar many moons ago.

It was a fascinating game of its time - utilising celebrity power (at apparently great cost) to market a game, and it worked extremely well. According to AppMagic data, the title generated \$324.3 million from lifetime player spending. Such success was not repeated with another big name game - Britney Spears: American Dream.

Kim Kardashian: Hollywood has clearly passed its sell-by date. Though it's interesting that its closure comes at a time when huge IP is being touted as one of the answers to privacy challenges and user acquisition woes.

Perhaps sometime soon, Glu will be looking for another big licence to shoot its next game up the charts.

And around and around we go.

**December 15th**

**Paige Cook**

**E3 is dead. And for good this time**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83032/e3-is-over-for-good-this-time/>

I can't say this news came as a surprise, but it still stings. I have incredibly fond memories of E3, and it was always THE gaming event of the year and the one everyone would share in their excitement for the industry. I even remember being in university, and there would be 'E3 parties' where everyone stayed up late just to watch the show!

Unfortunately, I think some of the cracks started to show for E3 when developers and publishers realised they could do their own show. A digital one at less cost which could take place anytime they wanted, and they wouldn't have to share the limelight. On top of that, add a pandemic and competition with other shows, such as Summer Games Fest, then the cancellation of E3 2023, and it was clear that the future of E3 was in serious trouble.

But you're supposed to never say never, right? I find it odd that they're saying, "That's it. We've killed E3 off forever, goodbye". Fans will miss it, and sure, we have Summer Games Fest, but it doesn't feel quite the same. As for The Game Awards, that shouldn't even compete; in my opinion, that has its own identity crisis because it's trying too hard to be a game announcement show, rushing winning developers off stage after 30 seconds at what is supposed to be an awards ceremony. It may just be nostalgia talking, but I genuinely feel like with a fresh plan in place, there's still space for E3.

I understand times have changed, and this event struggled to shift with those changes, but it's still a shame to see it go. It truly is the end of an era... Or is it?

### **Aaron Astle**

#### **[Monster Hunter Now is a roaring success, making \\$100 million in under three months](#)**

As if we needed any further evidence that Japanese monster IPs and AR walking games are a perfect match, we have even more proof this week in the latest Monster Hunter Now milestone. The Niantic and Capcom collab has drawn in \$100 million already, not even needing a full three months to do so.

Now is safely Niantic's second-biggest game at this point, and though it still has a long way to go if it wants to catch up to Pokémon Go, the silver medal isn't so bad when competing against the world's highest-grossing media franchise.

Monster Hunter Now's success is largely attributable to the series' Japanese fanbase, who are also quite willing to go out and exercise while playing games. Between the effective implementation of Niantic's tech and a loyal adaptation of Monster Hunter's main series formula, it isn't all too surprising to see Now soar.

The promise of new monsters gives a lot of revitalised incentive to play, too; not only does it mean new behaviours to learn and battles to win, but also new armour and weapons to forge, unlockable based on the materials sourced from the latest hunts. Personally, I'm still waiting on an Astalos announcement...

### **Craig Chapple**

#### **Netflix has nearly 90 games in development as it touts cross-platform vision**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/83046/netflix-has-nearly-90-games-in-development-as-it-touts-cross-platform-vision/>

Two years later, Netflix is still continuing with its gaming ambitions. It's made key hires - including its VP of games Mike Verdu, who has extensive games experience at Atari, EA, Zynga and Kabam - made a couple of studio acquisitions, and by the end of the year will have 86 games available on the platform. And there are nearly 90 more titles in development for Netflix subscribers.

Its ultimate strategy is clear to see: it wants games to be made available to subscribers across all devices. Less clear right now, though, is the execution. Exactly how these games will be played on TV screens, and how Netflix will attract the world's top publishers to release exciting new games on the platform, remains to be seen. It bagged the GTA 3 trilogy, but will it really invest the money necessary for the biggest new titles and exclusives?

Experimenting on mobile makes sense to test the waters - but I'm curious exactly what kinds of experiences Netflix ultimately wants to see on its service and what that business model looks like. It's a long way off being Game Pass, and Netflix lacks both the finances and in-house capability to compete.

I recently wrote about how big tech, social media and entertainment companies invest significant sums of money into games, only to abandon the industry at a moment's notice. If Netflix hits a rocky road with its core business, or sets its eyes on a bigger prize, will it stay the course in games?

## **December 8**

**Paige Cook**

**Candy Crush to lose its crown in 2024? But overall mobile game revenues will be up**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82984/dataai-predicts-candy-crush-will-lose-its-crown-in-2024-but-overall-mobile-game-revenues-will-be-up/>

This report covers the expected rise of AI and which gaming genre revenues are on the up in 2024. The part I want to touch on is that the longtime King, Candy Crush, may finally be knocked off the top spot in 2024. Frankly, it's impressive that it's remained wearing the crown for as long as it has, and it isn't even another game that may steal said crown but TikTok.

However, don't expect that to knock King's momentum in 2024, as we have already seen the soft launch of Candy Crush 3D and various other games, such as Candy Crush Solitaire and Rebel Riders. So, is that top spot forever gone? Or can lightning strike twice, and King reclaim its crown?

Given the mass popularity of TikTok, I think it's unlikely, but I am intrigued to see if these titles one day end up on an app store created by Microsoft in an attempt to compete with both Apple and Google.

**Aaron Astle**

## [Nintendo pulls out the stops for Fire Emblem Heroes' billion-dollar future](#)

A major update to Nintendo's most lucrative mobile game with Version 8.0 is already a noteworthy accomplishment this week, but add onto that almost seven years of history and you also have Nintendo's longest-running mobile game that's still adding any new content - let alone *major* new content.

That mobile game is Fire Emblem Heroes, which also happens to be part of my favourite game franchise, and also ALSO happens to be my most-played mobile game of all time... So of course it's my pick for this week! The biggest update of 2023 has just been released with a whole new story, Book 8, focused around the new protagonist Ratatoskr and set against the backdrop of Yggdrasil, the World Tree.

The inspirations from Norse mythology are deeply rooted beyond just Yggdrasil, with Ratatoskr shown racing down it just like the Nordic squirrel of the same name; it suggests the mythological inspirations will continue on through Book 8 after prior appearances from Fire Emblem's interpretations of Loki, Thórr, Nerþuz and more.

The update has also brought in a new game mode and a batch of new characters from the 3DS era's Fire Emblem Awakening, with fan-favourites Lucina, Severa and Inigo among them. Between all the new heroes to collect, the story to play through and a heap of celebratory quests to complete, I know what I'll be playing this weekend...

## **Craig Chapple**

### **Hybridcasual conquers the \$2 billion mark in 2023**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82973/hybridcasual-conquers-the-2-billion-mark-in-2023/>

I'm fascinated by publishers eyeing up the 'hybridcasual' space. For years following the launch of Habby's Archerio, what looked set to become a new genre had faded into obscurity - a one-hit wonder.

But then Apple dealt a critical blow to hypercasual (and the rest of the industry) with ATT. Suddenly, hybridcasual was one of the hottest topics again. Struggling in a new marketing landscape that has made advertising and UA much more challenging - to say the least - publishers began jumping aboard the hype train. Hypercasual specialists, from Kwalee and Homa to SayGames and Voodoo, all launched hybridcasual games and divisions. Some even abandoned hypercasual completely. I [wrote an in-depth piece on the trend for Deconstructor of Fun earlier this year](#), labelling the move a gamble.

So is it working out? Well... maybe? Hybridcasual game revenue (player spending only) has hit \$2.1 billion so far this year, according to Sensor Tower, having generated \$1.6 billion in 2022. It's a positive rise for publishers in the space, but they are arguably going to need a lot more to combat high UA costs and lost ad revenue. I'm curious where these publishers will be a year from now - assuming Apple continues to make conditions worse for mobile.

## **December 1**

**Aaron Astle**

### [Pokémon Go changes tack and adds Pokémon Legends for cross-platform promo](#)

Pokémon Go's eighth year is now well under way, and having only tried out the mega-hit mobile game [for the first time](#) this July, my main experience with the game has been its drip-feed of Scarlet and Violet content. Inclusion of the latest Switch species makes sense from a business perspective - promoting Go players to try out the latest main series game and recent Switch players to jump onto mobile - but I won't deny my excitement at an older title getting another chance to shine.

And of those older Switch titles it happens to be my personal favourite, Pokémon Legends: Arceus. By introducing Go fans to the pocketable monsters previously exclusive to Legends, The Pokémon Company may well find some new Switch players among its mobile ranks and see a Legends sales surge (the game is currently one of its worst selling on Switch). At the same time, Legends fans like myself have a new motivation to get out playing Go again, searching for Hisuian Decidueye and a shiny Samurott all to the benefit of Niantic. It's a win for everyone, really. As long as I find that shiny...

### **Microsoft in discussions with potential partners over mobile app store for games**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82967/microsoft-in-discussions-with-potential-partners-on-mobile-app-store-for-games/>

I'm always sceptical when any company says they are going to launch their own third-party app store, and Microsoft is no different.

In theory, the European Union's Digital Markets Act will pave the way for Apple and Google (particularly the former) to open up their platforms and make it easy for new marketplaces to launch.

But the new regulations are unlikely to change the status quo. Consumers are stuck in their ways and locked into their ecosystems, with a preference to stick with the App Store and Google Play. There's a reason Epic sued Google - it wants to be on Google Play. Its own Android store, awkwardly side-loaded by users, was clearly not doing enough to attract players.

Microsoft faces a frankly herculean task to get consumers onto any mobile app store for games, even if platform holders were forced to allow it.

You can also look to the state of the PC games market to see the scale of the task ahead. Steam has created a dominant position as the de facto digital storefront for PC gaming. To compete, Epic has spent well over \$1 billion on exclusives and free games in an effort to gain market share, while taking just a 12% revenue share (which includes other exceptions) as another incentive to join its platform. In the face of this, Steam continues to grow.

It may make sense from a cross-platform, play anywhere perspective for Microsoft's Game Pass service. But it will never be a direct competitor to the App Store and Google Play - it would need to attract the world's biggest publishers, bring over billions of consumers, and all in a sector it has few ties with.

## **November 24**

**Paige Cook**

### **Supercell-backed studio Papukaya is closing down after three years**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82899/supercell-backed-studio-papukaya-is-closing-down-after-three-years/>

Papukaya's CEO and Co-Founder, Drussila Hollanda, broke the sad news over LinkedIn that Papukaya would be closing down. This just goes to show how difficult making games is and particularly how challenging the mobile market can be to navigate.

The company was founded in 2020, so it already had a tall order having to contend with getting off the ground during a pandemic, and the nature of Papukaya's games being experimental and relatively niche just hasn't worked out in the long run, despite having backing from the giant that is Supercell.

It's sad to see a team with such out-of-the-box thinking unable to make this work, but at the same time, I commend the decision to know when to call something quits. Hopefully, it's just a case of going on to the next adventure. When the dust settles, I would love to chat with the Papukaya team because there are valuable learnings here that many studios would benefit from hearing.

**Aaron Astle**

[Everything you ever wanted to know about Noice: Is this the future of livestreaming?](#)

My week started off with attendance at a preview event for the latest livestreaming platform, Noice, geared towards gamers who want to "play the stream" themselves. Giving viewers something to keep their hands busy and minds active while they watch a stream that relates directly to that stream is an intriguing concept, and I was eager to try it out.

It proved to be a fun time, but is this the future of livestreaming? Jussi Laakkonen's latest project certainly fits the bill for an innovative new concept at the very least, with plenty for streamers and viewers to get involved with if they reach out for closed beta access.

## **Craig Chapple**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/comment-and-opinion/82926/why-is-the-uk-games-industry-struggling-to-fill-vacancies-despite-mass-layoffs/>

The last couple of weeks has seen industry data surface that compounds longstanding and recent issues.

There have always been layoffs and studio closures in the games sector, but this year has proven particularly punishing. As noted in this article, one games industry layoffs tracker (!) estimates there have been more than 8,000 job losses so far this year - and that's just the reported ones.

The other longstanding issue - I even [ran a feature on the topic in September 2015](#) back in my Develop magazine days - are the lack of opportunities available for aspiring junior developers. Studios want the top senior talent to build the best games. That's understandable, but it must be crushing for young developers fresh out of university (or other career path) to see that, according to Games Jobs Live, there are only 34 junior vacancies at studios in the UK out of 1,170 open positions right now.

And to get those roles, they are competing with thousands of other young developers, and numerous laid off employees looking for their next role in the sector. On top of that, remote work may not be an option, so it could require relocation.

It's a shame more isn't being done to provide opportunities. I'm sure for successful companies that's just business. But if there is a skills shortage for senior developers in the UK, it's a short-sighted attitude for the industry.

## **November 17**

### **Aaron Astle**

[Top Chinese publishers accounted for 38.7% of October's mobile revenue](#)

Sensor Tower's monthly reports are always an interesting read, just to make sure the big mobile players are still playing big. As for October, 37 of the top 100 mobile publishers were based in China, and as usual, Tencent, NetEase and miHoYo had their shares of success.

It's miHoYo who's been the most interesting to watch this year, from the anticipation of its next project after Genshin Impact through to a record-breaking launch and a lucrative first six months for Honkai: Star Rail. And it turns out October was the company's second best



month of the year for revenue, rising 10% month-on-month and showing no signs of slowing down.

These monthly reports are always an intriguing place to discover new games too, often with the most unusual names. For me, this time around, it was King of Salted Fish. Yum...?

## **Paige Cook**

### **68% of UK games developers are suffering from skill shortages**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82870/68-of-uk-games-developers-are-suffering-from-skill-shortages/>

This report caused quite a stir, given that this year, the gaming industry has seen mass layoffs across the board, yet somehow, there's a skills shortage. Understandably, this ignites a spark of outrage. I feel like this comes down to a few things. Firstly, many of these 'skills shortages' are probably talking about senior roles, and secondly, given how rocky of a year it's been for those working in the industry, some have left this space for good.

Another issue I have discussed before is the dated hiring process that many, not just within the gaming industry, implement. To get more seniors, sometimes you've got to make them yourself, promote from within, and work with the talent you have to nurture their skills so that one day, maybe that new junior will be a senior. Also, lowering the entry barrier to something feasible, so many jobs out there demand X amount of years of experience or won't even look at you unless you've shipped a couple of triple-A titles. Sometimes, enthusiasm can compensate for a slight lack of experience, and everyone has to start somewhere.

While I'm sure there are other underlying issues behind this data, I can't help but find the report almost maddening when I know there are a ton of passionate and skilled developers out there looking for work and ready to embark on their next adventure, all they need is an opportunity to do so.

## **Craig Chapple**

### **Embracer's Q2 sales up 13%... but 900 employees are out**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82880/embracers-q2-results-are-in-as-900-employees-are-out/>

In just a single quarter, Embracer's restructuring has seen 900 people lose their jobs - and it won't stop there. The publisher was careless in the boom years, splashing out on all kinds of IP, developers and teams with little discernible strategy to bring it all together. It always felt like a house of cards, even in the good times. All it needed was a few poor releases - and this is games, it happens all the time even with the best of intentions - to spark a chain reaction that would bring the whole thing down.

The company notably gambled its future on money it didn't yet have, which has left a \$1.4 billion black hole in its finances in Q2 2023, though that has been reduced by 31% year-over-year. Now the new investment has run dry, the inevitable is here - exacerbated by macroeconomic conditions like inflation and high interest rates - and it's hard working developers and Europe's games industry that are paying the price.

**November 10**

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82820/crunchyroll-introduces-the-crunchyroll-game-vault/>

Crunchyroll is arguably the Netflix of anime, so it seems only fitting that the company is now offering its own game streaming service - and with mobile being the most accessible platform for developers and gamers alike, it seems only natural that Crunchyroll has made phones the first step in its mobile ambitions.

Six games may seem small, but with tens of thousands of hours of content, Crunchyroll has plenty to draw from in the future - and with the company already hosting a variety of the world's biggest anime, it's seemingly only a matter of time until we see more and more games on the platform.

Moreover, game offerings can go a long way to encourage subscriptions or get people to upgrade. Those who may have been considering signing up for Crunchyroll now have another reason to do so - and may just discover their new favourite anime along the way.

**Paige Cook**

**Warcraft Rumble approaches \$4M in four days with almost half of all revenue from the US**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82813/warcraft-rumble-approaches-4m-in-four-days-with-almost-half-of-all-revenue-from-the-us/>

Blizzard's latest addition to mobile, Warcraft Rumble, is off to a promising start, \$4 million in four days, and that's considering the game hasn't launched in one of the most prominent regions, China - which is also host to many a Warcraft fan.

Blizzard's Diablo Immortal suffered near-instant backlash at launch due to its massive sense of pay-to-win, but lessons were learnt as that isn't present here in Warcraft Rumble. I got to speak with the game's senior animator, Carin Huurnink and senior game designer, Brendan Farrell, just before launch day, and one of the things mentioned was how players can [own everything in the game without ever having to spend real money](#).

The other thing that stood out in our interview and is clearly present in the game is the genuine love the team has shown the universe of Warcraft. We are seeing more and more, particularly on mobile, how advantageous it can be to base your game around an iconic IP.

Warcraft Rumble's opening days have been a hit, but time will tell just how big of a success it becomes.

## **November 3**

### **Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82772/kingdom-hearts-missing-links-closed-beta-confirms-geolocation-gameplay/>

Geolocation games aren't new, but lately, it feels like they're on the upswing. More and more games are using geolocation to bring established IPs into the real world through AR technology thanks to geolocation, with Kingdom Hearts being just the latest of them - and it could prove to be a big success.

Kingdom Hearts has become a major name in gaming through the combination of two very different IPs - Final Fantasy and Disney - into a unique blend. Not only does this offer a vast universe with plenty to explore, but it translates well into a variety of different genres. Outside of the action RPG core of the franchise, its games have incorporated card-based mechanics and the latest game in the franchise, Melody of Memories, is a full-blown rhythm game. As such, while a geolocation game might be new for the franchise, it's still in keeping with it as a whole. It's a series that isn't afraid to try something new, and this represents just the latest experiment.

### **Paige Cook**

#### **Bungie axes staff throwing rumoured Destiny Mobile into uncertainty**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82766/bungie-axes-staff-throwing-rumoured-destiny-mobile-into-uncertainty/>

In a year that many are dubbing one of the best gaming has seen, it's incredibly sad to see that behind the scenes, numerous studios have conducted mass layoffs. Bungie being the latest.

Redundancies are tough enough as it is, but when it was previously stated that no major restructuring would happen after Sony acquired Bungie, but in fact, \$1.2 billion had been allocated for staff retention, it sure does make it an even more bitter pill to swallow and understandably leaves many scratching their heads asking what went wrong.

Bungie claims these layoffs were due to Destiny 2 underperforming, and the upcoming DLC for the game had lower than expected pre-orders. Bungie's latest statement also notes that

“we know we have lost a lot of your trust.” Let's hope they can regain it, and those who lost their places at Bungie find their next adventure.

## **October 27**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82726/square-enix-gives-another-kingdom-hearts-missing-link-tease-after-9-month-silence/>

Kingdom Hearts is a favourite franchise of mine, but I'm reluctant to say it's a franchise I understand. Quite frankly, if someone told me a game starring Donald and Goofy would be confusing I would have laughed in their face.

One aspect of the franchise that does stand out is its historical use of multiple platforms. Prior to the release of Kingdom Hearts 3 - and the preceding 1.5, 2.5, and 2.8 collections, which were released on multiple platforms - each of the games in the franchise was released specifically on a different platform, meaning players hoping to get the whole story needed to explore outside just one console.

It appears that Square Enix have no signs of slowing down with this strategy, offering mobile-first players a unique entry in the franchise. However, the fact remains that Square Enix has thus far had mixed success in its mobile efforts. As such, it remains to be seen whether Kingdom Hearts Missing Link will be a success, or just the latest failure to meet expectations.

## **Paige Cook**

### **Fallout TV series gets April 2024 release date**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82713/fallout-tv-series-gets-april-2024-release-date/>

I'm actually surprised this hasn't happened sooner. Movie and TV adaptations of video games are nothing new, but recent years have seen a dramatic increase in video games having live-action counterparts. There is an abundance of brilliant stories being told in video games, so why not?

I was recently watching the series of Silo, based on the book series by Hugh Howey and the entire time, I was getting major Fallout vibes and thinking Fallout would make a great show. And now here we are!

Interestingly, the show will follow Vault 33, which will also feature in the franchise's multiplayer game entry, Fallout 76, in a future update. I wonder when we'll see another stab at a TV show with a video game counterpart that simultaneously updates as the show progresses, similar to how Defiance attempted to have events from the show impact the game. Mobile gaming could be a front-runner for pulling this off as they often feature continuous streams of regular updates.

**October 20**

**Iwan Morris**

[Bethesda veteran Pete Hines to make exit after 24 years in the job, here's what | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGBiz](#)

I wasn't overly familiar with Pete Hines before his exit, but I do think there's something admirable about certain companies like Bethesda and how unchanging their upper-management has been. Say what you like about Todd Howard, but it's rare to see someone like him remain in a top position - even gaming alumni like John Romero and John Carmack have moved on since the 90s.

But, regardless, that's not necessarily what I was interested in when writing this piece. It occurred to me that, in his 24 tenure Hines has been there for some major moments in Bethesda's history. From Morrowind, to Oblivion and even Skyrim, not to mention Bethesda's resurrection of Interplay's Fallout - yet it's not the mobile games that are often talked about.

Of course there's Fallout Shelter, and Blades, but for me the most interesting tidbit in Bethesda's mobile history is The Elder Scrolls Travels. A stripped-back, laser-focused take on the Elder Scrolls franchise that stands out for pushing the hardware of the day as far as they could take it.

It's an interesting look into pre-smartphone mobile gaming, so if you have time, check them out...if you can find an old Nokia or N-Gage that is.

**Paige Cook**

**Gamers actually spend MORE time outdoors, but 58% still think they're lazy**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82659/gamers-actually-spend-more-time-outdoors-but-58-still-think-theyre-lazy/>

Stereotypes around gamers are something that, as a lifelong gamer, I am very passionate about. We often get tarnished with the brush of living unhealthy lifestyles. Video games are also often the target of blame for bad news regarding violence; we've seen mainstream media branding video games as a cause for these issues, particularly in young people.

Studies like this one always interest me when they tell a different story. It shows that gamers do, in fact, venture into the great outdoors and actually, gaming can have an overwhelming positive effect on a person's mental health and learning ability. It can even be a great way to socialise.

The media doesn't seem to complain quite so much when people spend their entire day watching TV or TikTok so why should gamers get all the bad rep? It comes down to enjoying something in moderation and not neglecting the other essential aspects of your life,

something which applies across the board, not just for gamers. I, for one, look forward to seeing more studies that dispel outdated gaming stereotypes.

October 13

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82628/alien-isolation-spin-off-mobile-game-alien-blackout-to-be-shuttered-joining-raft-of-closures-this-year/>

Alien: Isolation is arguably the scariest game of all time, and for good reason, with fans clamouring for a sequel for years - a sequel that eventually arrived in the form of Alien: Blackout. However, it appears that the game failed to capture the attention of players in the same way as its predecessor - and while some part of me is eager to think we'll get another attempt at a sequel (after all, stranger things have happened in the Alien universe - including a crossover with Buffy the Vampire Slayer), the most likely explanation is that the developers aren't happy with the game's performance or its ability to attract an audience.

Horror is a tricky genre to get right, especially on mobile, so it's a shame that players will lose the opportunity to play the mobile exclusive sequel to one of the genre's strongest games, and reiterates the continued importance developers are putting on consistent revenue streams.

**Aaron Astle**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82612/too-big-for-your-rules-mihoyo-tried-to-dodge-apple-app-store-fees-twice-in-one-month/>

News that one Chinese developer of Genshin Impact fame has been trying to dodge Apple's App Store fees has come as a bit of a surprise, especially with miHoYo and Apple's relationship looking so strong from the outside.

Then again, if you're making billions off your mobile games, you probably would be a tad reluctant to fork over 30% to Apple!

So far, we know of two strategies miHoYo's tried since August. Will there be a third attempt at slipping under the radar? Will miHoYo bow down to the Apple overlords and keep on paying the tax? Or will Honkai: Star Rail reach such galactic heights that even the App Store won't be able to catch it...?

**Iwan Morris**

[Team17 cuts so deep that devs are concerned whether company can still function | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

It's a shame that Team17 have felt these cuts are necessary, but I do think it represents a terrible dichotomy for game companies. On the one hand when times are good - i.e. during Covid, when everyone was playing games - they come under constant pressure to expand. But when times are bad - like right now - they have to start cutting costs at an even more rapid pace. There's no good way to go about them, but it still stings, not least for the people losing their jobs.

However, the statements mentioned by Eurogamer in their report, that some devs are worried about the depth of these cuts, is indicative of another issue. Knowledge and experience loss are much, much more damaging than the cost involved, and can take years to replace, especially since when or if these roles are filled once more it's unlikely to be with the previous occupant.

Here's hoping that the management of Team17 have a solid plan for the future and can allay these fears. Bearing in mind the current level of job cuts is unconfirmed, it may be that the losses are less serious than expected. But any level of redundancy will still be a terrible loss for the industry and those who work in it.

October 6

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82581/silent-hill-ascension-is-launching-on-halloween/>

Horror is perhaps my favourite genre, and Silent Hill is among the most beloved horror franchises in gaming history, so having a release date for the long anticipated revival is exciting, both to me and to legions of fans.

MILE's are experimental, and being the centrepiece of one of horror's scariest franchises could help bring them to wider attention - and a story unravelling over six months is the cherry on top.

However, fans worldwide are likely to be disappointed that the air time - 6 PM PST is reasonable for California viewers, but what about fans worldwide? That's 2 AM in the UK, when many viewers would be in bed, or 10 AM in Japan when many would be at work. As such, it feels like the experience offered to a lot of users, perhaps even the majority, won't be on par with what's offered to those in the Americas, as they will need to contend themselves with primarily watching the series, rather than taking part in the interaction that's set to become a core of the experience.

For these users, the only hope is that the series eventually goes on sale as an experience akin to the likes of The Quarry or Detroit: Become Human - after all, the series is likely to have multiple endings and many different paths to explore on the way to them, all of which have been shot and edited in advance, and it seems a shame that not only will some users be unable to participate, but that so many options will go unexplored.

**Aaron Astle**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82548/honkai-star-rail-goes-irl-collaborating-with-famous-restaurant-chains-around-the-world/>

Those of us who spend too much time in the digital world are well aware of miHoYo, Honkai: Star Rail and its success. The game smashed records from day one and has already accrued well over \$500 million in revenue. But what about those among us who aren't always thinking about gaming? (*Yes, such people still exist!*)

The upcoming collaboration between Star Rail and restaurants around the globe is an intriguing marketing tactic, as it will place the IP in front of a fresh set of eyes out in the real world who may try out the game because of it. And I must admit, the thought of offline diners enjoying a night out, only to find a horde of cosplayers charging into the restaurant and getting discounts for their efforts, does tickle me.

**Iwan Morris**

[Modern Times Group acquires Pocket Gamer Award winner Snowprint Studios | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

Speaking as a journalist, this acquisition really excited me - mainly because of the excellent statement by Modern Times Group explaining why they decided to acquire Snowprint. It's rare to get a proper thesis statement, and MTG's simple explanation that "We think Tacticus is already a great game, and we want to help Snowprint grow it to be even bigger" is basically any writer's dream statement. It's simple but detailed and lays out a clear plan for the future with very little grey area.

More than that, it also further vindicates our awarding of Mobile Game of the Year to the title. Warhammer-based games are quite oversaturated at the moment, sadly, but the fact is that the universe, IP and the many elements of it are ripe for exploration. We've seen amazing games across multiple platforms, whether that be Space Marine, Total War: Warhammer, the cult-hit Freeblade or, yes, Tacticus.

What MTG seem intent on doing is unlocking the mass-market appeal and bringing in sceptical Warhammer fans to build Tacticus into a true adaptation of the famous tabletop franchise for mobile.

**Paige Cook**

**Agent 47 and the Hitman franchise are back for one last job... On mobile**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82577/agent-47-and-the-hitman-franchise-are-back-for-one-last-job-on-mobile/>

I'm a long-time fan of the Hitman franchise and its infamous barcoded silent assassin, so I absolutely will be diving into Hitman Blood Money - Reprisal. The title comes from Feral Interactive, the same team behind the Lara Croft switch ports. It offers to celebrate Hitman's 25th anniversary in style with reworkings to the game, such as improved gameplay, and it even comes with full keyboard and mouse support.

It's great to see more iconic games making their way to mobile, with more players gaming on their phones than ever before, it's a fantastic way for those who may have missed these gems the first time around to dive in.



Many people still see mobile gaming as only for casual players to spend ten minutes on, but we're seeing more variety in the types of games that are making their way to mobile. It's not just old classics coming to the platform but big triple-A titles such as Resident Evil 4 Remake. Mobile gamers really are spoiled for choice.

September 29

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82536/over-90-industry-partners-are-backing-special-effects-one-special-day-fundraiser/>

Gaming is a hobby that has something for everyone, whether that's giving people the chance to connect with fans all over the world or experience being the hero of their own stories. However, it's also a hobby that has historically had significant barriers in place affecting people with disabilities. While more and more games are going out of their way to include robust accessibility features, the fact remains that more can be done.

With that in mind, SpecialEffect's mission to help lower the entry barriers is a remarkable one, and with One Special Day attracting the attention of some of the biggest names in gaming across platforms highlights that the industry at large is aware of where improvements can be made.

Technology has played a big part in making the world more accessible, and as such it's important that companies worldwide take note not just of how they can make the world a better place, but how they can make technology itself more accessible.

Iwan Morris

[Bidstack's big cheeses talk the past and future of intrinsic advertising | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

I personally found the business decisions behind intrinsic advertising a fascinating read. While the benefits for players are obvious - intrinsic advertising being so much less intrusive - I've often theorised about how it helps brands too, putting players in a better state of mind before they observe their ad and not dragging them out of the experience.

This is one of those times where I think outsiders coming in and disrupting the game industry can be a good thing. Too often, we think of in-game advertising in terms of raw statistics and KPIs and forget that other gaming forums and events have been doing them for years without bouncing people off.

I suppose the next thing is to see how well esports athlete sponsorships do...

Aaron Astle

[Can young Sephiroth save Square Enix from crisis?](#)

As a big JRPG fan, the influence Square Enix has had on the genre is undeniable. So, it's a shame to see the company floundering - closing down games and releasing many more as Japan exclusives. Even the company's Final Fantasy series isn't doing so hot right now, leading to a serious loss in shares.

Final Fantasy VII: Ever Crisis has potential, gaining an innate boost from the prestige of the VII moniker. But it needs more than that to turn things around for Square. Perhaps the charm and guile of a beloved series villain?

Introducing a young Sephiroth with new story content is certainly a power play on Square's part. For now, we just have to wait and see exactly how powerful this One-Winged Angel is...

September 22

**Iwan Morris**

[Brawl Stars \\$2bn revenue is just the icing on Supercell's success | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

I wouldn't deny anyone who claimed that it's quite a shame that Supercell has killed so many promising titles over the years. But at the same time I think it represents both good business sense and strategy. The company clearly understands that, with a relatively limited team you can't keep your eye on every project, and with the way Supercell's "cells" work, having new projects to explore on a constant basis is clearly important.

I think Brawl Stars passing \$2bn is a clear indicator that this strategy works long-term, as Brawl Stars only released in 2018 and has already made a huge profit for them. I am wondering though, in the time that we've seen so many games like Everdale and Flood Rush get the axe, are Supercell risking throwing out potential winners if games like Clash of Clans and Brawl Stars start to lose their lustre?

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82447/pokmon-go-sets-sights-on-tenfold-increase-in-monthly-active-users-in-india/>

Pokémon is one of the world's biggest gaming franchises, with Pokémon GO as one of mobile's most successful game, effectively giving players worldwide the chance to become real-life Pokémon Masters.

Despite its success, Niantic is still aiming to take the game to the next level, with an aggressive expansion campaign in India. With the game unavailable in China, India's status as one of the world's biggest mobile gaming markets makes it an attractive prospect, and the plans to bring in new languages and four million new pokéstops over the next twelve months could help take the game to the next level. After all, India is among the most lucrative mobile markets where the game is available, but isn't currently one of Pokémon GO's top ten

markets. A tenfold increase could see India rise in the ranks - and certainly has the potential to be a lucrative move for Niantic.

## Paige Cook

**Microsoft's big gaming leak: Meet Brooklin, Sebile, Ellewood and more...**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82459/microsofts-big-gaming-leak-meet-brooklin-sebile-ellewood-and-more/>

Microsoft just can't stay out of the headlines if it isn't about their acquisition of Activision Blizzard, then its major leaks of internal documents that show they have a packed schedule of new hardware on the horizon.

Xbox is looking at a 'refresh' for its mainline consoles and controllers all aimed at a 2024 release window. However, the refresh isn't all the leaks covered. Images show an entire list of hardware on the 'Xbox Gaming Beyond' slide. This features a one-handed control and a mobile controller that clips onto the side of phones. These documents are somewhat outdated, and plans always change, so some of these things may not come to fruition or they will be modified versions of the mock-ups we have seen; I'm holding out hope for a better Brooklin design.

While much of the leaked 'refresh' content seems predictable it does emphasise that Xbox is very serious about expanding not just its console offering but making gaming more accessible no matter where you are or what device you're playing from.

September 15

Aaron Astle

[Niantic and Capcom's Monster Hunter Now launches with three million pre-registrations](#)

Even putting the Unity fiasco to one side, it's been a busy week for mobile gaming news - one full of exciting announcements and releases. From a [Vikings game on Netflix](#) to an upcoming [NFT dinosaur game](#), yeah, there's been a lot going on... *A dinosaur game!*

Anyway, putting my inner child to one side for a second (like that's possible), I would say Monster Hunter Now has roared the loudest this week. Combining the IP of a Japanese gaming giant with the tech of AR powerhouse Niantic, and using said combination to hunt monsters in the real world, is a story we've all heard before. It's been seven years since Pokémon Go's tale began, and Monster Hunter Now has the right formula to do it all again.

Niantic and Capcom's new game launched yesterday after accumulating an impressive 3 million pre-installs, and since entering players hands it has already proven to be a faithful adaptation of classic Monster Hunter mechanics, merging surprisingly well with Niantic's niche.

Whether or not Now becomes as big a behemoth as Pokémon Go, it's always fun to start a new game. And it has the Pukei-Pukei too! Niantic, add the Astalos and Tigrex next, please.

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82417/square-enix-shares-drop-30-after-lacklustre-final-fantasy-roll-out/>

Here's a fun piece of trivia: Final Fantasy, one of the world's most beloved gaming series', got its name due to the fact that it may well have been Squaresoft's final game before collapsing. Luckily, the initial game proved a hit, spawning a hit franchise encompassing games, films, anime, live concerts, merchandise and, of course, mobile gaming. From ports to original games, the series has found success on phones, but also significant struggles.

Ever Crisis is the latest game in the company's mobile roster, bringing the hit Final Fantasy VII to mobile in a new form, and giving players the opportunity to experience not just the base game but its various spin-offs and sequels all in one place. While this unique selling point has led to the game garnering five million downloads in its first week, the game received mixed reviews for its use of gacha mechanics.

While gacha is a proven moneymaker, the question remains: is it always a necessity? Many gamers and governments find issue with the mechanics, and the idea that progress is too heavily tied into luck and in-app purchases. As such, it appears this latest retelling of the Compilation of Final Fantasy VII (to give the subseries it's proper name) has stretched itself a tad too thin, putting monetisation and mass appeal over its existing fanbase.

Gacha, in and of itself, isn't a dealbreaker, but it's not a gamebreaker, either. While games certainly exist that benefit from the mechanic, it's also not one that needs to be brought into every title, and doing so can lead to significant backlash - both from governments and consumers.

Despite some success on mobile platforms, Square Enix has repeatedly failed to capture the same level of adoration and acclaim as it has managed on other platforms, and it appears that this latest attempt to leverage the proven popularity of gacha mechanics has left some fans uninspired. With the company reporting \$2 billion in losses since June, largely due to the shuttering of several mobile gamers, it may be time for the company to reevaluate its strategy on the world's most profitable gaming platform.

**Iwan Morris**

[Hungry Shark developers Ubisoft London to close | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

It's always a shame to see a studio shuttered, especially one with such a tenure as Ubisoft London. I think this move reflects further uncertainty behind the scenes at Ubisoft regarding mobile, but I also mention in my article that this may indicate their focus on bringing their core console titles to mobile instead of creating bespoke games.

The big surprise with the iPhone 15 reveal, at least for me, was that they would be able to run games such as Resident Evil and Assassin's Creed: Mirage natively. I think, if this works

as intended, this would be a huge step forward...however it would also risk severely damaging the mobile industry as is.

We've seen how many console adherents praise graphical fidelity over anything else, and say what you like about mobile, but the inherent limitations of the platform have made it a haven for stylised, creative graphics. Sadly, this may be lost if the capabilities of the platform achieve parity with console and PC.

That's a bit of a tangent yes, but I think that, given Ubisoft's flagship series was the one featured at the iPhone reveal, that they are looking to lessen their mobile development in favour of full cross-platform functionality for their titles. Unfortunately, it seems that stylised graphics may not be the only casualty of this move, as studios such as Ubisoft London are cut out of the future plan too.

### **Paige Cook**

#### **Are today's developers being held back by a global talent shortage?**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82374/are-todays-developers-being-held-back-by-a-global-talent-shortage/>

According to a report from software developer Perforce, one of the biggest challenges developers commented on was facing a talent shortage in the industry. That blows my mind because the games industry has always had such a massive amount of talent. Not only that, but it's an industry that has had vast appeal, with many people having ambitions to break into the industry.

So what's the problem?

In my opinion, it isn't that the talent isn't out there. We have industry veterans with years of experience under their belts, and new people are always looking to get involved in games. You only have to look at how education has changed over the years with its expanding list of games-related courses in colleges and universities.

The problem may be what the industry expects. Certain game studios won't even look at you without a university degree; some won't even glance at your CV unless you have X amount of years experience. Don't get me wrong, I do understand that teams want to ensure they're hiring the right person for the job and someone capable, but if the barrier is so high, there's potentially amazing creative talent being looked over simply because maybe they've never shipped a triple-A game before, or they didn't get a masters degree.

The report also mentions a lot about remote working. Working from home means people can expand a far wider net when hiring because, let's be honest, the right person isn't always going to be local to where you're based. More companies exploring remote or hybrid working possibilities may be a helping factor when acquiring talent.

This is something I sincerely hope we see a change in as we head into the back end of 2023 and onwards to 2024 because the gaming industry has a mass of creative and passionate

people just waiting to embark on a new journey; someone just needs to give them a chance to show their talent.

September 8

Daniel Griffiths

EA downplays the importance of mobile

I honestly don't get it. I mean, you ARE allowed NOT to be interested in certain things. I mean, thrash metal leaves me a little cold. Flesh tunnels? Not for me, thanks. And as for my ability to name a single English cricketer?... Um... Dave Boycott?... But when you're one of the biggest and most enduring gaming entities on the planet are you really allowed to say "Mobile? Nah..."

I always thought that EA were ruthlessly resolute in business? They invented grinding out sequels, honing and tweaking their initial dev investment year in year out with irresistible improvements that kept players coming back. They're the smartest guys in the room. They spotted the inevitable gaming money train back when it was still being hand-cranked by cranks in a spare bedroom. I can recall a Christmas top 10 console chart where FIVE of the 10 were EA games... But mobile? Nah...? Really?

Your PC and console business is doing just great. Well done. Business as per. But just two mobile games in the last three years? Just 18% of your profits from the most popular platform on the planet? Come on fellas, I preferred you when you were greedy.

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82356/ea-downplays-the-importance-of-mobile-1098102/>

**Iwan Morris**

[\*\*Razer's Michael Mucci on alternative payments and Pocket Gamer Connects: "With S | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz\*\*](#)

After a bit of an absence due to travels - I'm back, and I think so far the most interesting interview I've done in the lead-up to PGC is this one with Michael Mucci. As far as I'm concerned, alternative payment systems for mobile represent a massive shift away from what was previously quite a closed loop when it comes to the mobile ecosystem. Google and Apple had what many would, rightfully, term a monopoly for far too long, and I think if anything alternative payment methods and systems will push them to respond more proactively to community and business concerns.

Razer are an especially unique company to do so, most people will know them for their hardware work, but they're a group with a long tenure, so it's no surprise they're branching out. However, I do wonder who else we'll see try and get into this area, and how Google and

Apple will respond. Are they going to try and put a halt on this competition? Or, as I'm hoping, will it encourage them to do better, for players, developers and publishers alike?

## **Blumhouse Games appoints horror expert Louise Blain as creative lead**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/job-news/82345/blumhouse-games-appoints-horror-expert-louise-blain-as-creative-lead/>

I've written previously about the potential of horror in the mobile space. By honing in on what makes mobile unique rather than trying to emulate the experience offered on another platform, developers can potentially create unique games impossible to replicate on console or PC.

With that in mind, Blumhouse Games is a company that captured my interest from the first announcement. The company is responsible for some of the biggest horror movies of the last twenty years, and the creative freedom offered to directors often results in films that go against the grain, ranging from Happy Death Day - a slasher set in a time loop - to Unfriended - a horror told entirely through a Skype call.

The company's business model and focus on independent projects - one it's carrying forward into its gaming arm - is in many ways perfect for mobile. It's a platform always on the hunt for the next killer app - which, incidentally, would be a fantastic name for a mobile horror game - and one where developers can make their millions with a game made in a matter of months, and with a fraction of the budget of a console or PC title.

More importantly, the fact that the announcement specifically noted that the company will release mobile titles - as opposed to the frustratingly vague "all platforms" - emphasizes that mobile games are actively being worked on. Mobile's accessibility to developers has made it the ideal starting point for companies hoping to break into the world of gaming, allowing for great levels of innovation with both established IPs and new properties.

With horror specifically, we also have to consider the concept of narratology. Every genre has rules, but perhaps nowhere else is that more evident than in horror. The Scream franchise has made its name in the genre by identifying and subverting these rules, and one of my most vivid memories of the genre is opening a door in Until Dawn and immediately realizing I'd broken these rules, and sure enough I was punished for it. In fact, many early horror films were morality tales, where those that broke the rules of polite society were routinely punished.

In short, it's important for creators within the genre to identify what makes the genre work, something Louise Blain has proven over her career - among other things, she has hosted numerous podcasts that examine and discuss the horror genre, including Hello Sidney: The Scream Podcast, devoted to the world's most meta horror franchise. While some may question the decision given her relative lack of game development experience, fans of the genre have reason to be optimistic. Blain is someone who knows the genre inside out, and understands the rules - and when those rules can be broken.

**Paige Cook**

**Niantic gives 8th Wall developers new AI tools**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82306/niantic-gives-8th-wall-developers-new-ai-tools/>

Niantic has announced that its 8th wall platform, which serves as a development platform for webAR and webVR, is gaining its very own generative AI tools. Niantic's 8th Wall will now see integration of OpenAI, which offers tools such as DALL-E and ChatGPT. The sample videos shared show the seamless use of DALL-E to use simple text inputs, which can change the appearance of the sky or furnishings. They even showcased a sample from Inworld AI's module, which allows for the creation of characters who can have conversations with users.

Overall, it all sounds like pretty valuable tools to have at your disposal, and it gives creators the ability to try new things without the pressure of putting in hours of work only to find out they don't like the result.

But herein lies the double-edged sword of AI. In some instances, it's a brilliant tool that can help creatives in their job and expand their possibilities. Look at the recently announced Broken Sword remake, a project that wouldn't be possible without AI. But then, going back to Niantic, who recently came under fire for its Pokémon Go Adventures Abound cover art as it appears to be AI-generated, something they are yet to confirm or deny, but it has all the telltale signs. A company such as Niantic, which has access to incredible artists and a lofty budget, may have opted to use AI art rather than utilise the real talent it has doesn't particularly sit right with fans or artists.

I find AI a fascinating topic as someone who can genuinely see both sides of the coin, and let's be honest, we are only going to see more of it in the gaming industry, so we shouldn't fear it, but we do need to embrace it in the right way. If you want to hear more on AI, I'll be discussing the best AI tools for developers and how best to use them at a panel at Pocket Gamer Connects Helsinki next week!

September 1

## NetEase go for maximum 'Impact' with new RPG Project Mugen

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82267/netease-go-for-maximum-impact-with-new-rpg-project-mugen/>

Make no mistake, there's a battle raging out there and while David versus Goliath at least has a surprise ending, we'll take a ticket for Goliath versus Goliath every time...



The art of making great games has gotten increasingly refined over the years. And with potential millions - correction - billions at stake it's somehow heartening to know that there's still money to be made by spending hundreds of thousands of man hours and even greater number of dollar bills making something amazing and perfect.

In mobile gaming the perception is that everything must be quick and easy and must tread a well worth proven path. Which is why the likes of Genshin Impact, Hokai: Star Rail and NetEase's new RPG Project Mugen warm this gamer's soul.

These gaming giants have made their own worlds not just inside the game but out in the real world too. While any sane console and PC publisher would balk at the idea of giving away such labours of love for 'free', the proliferation of mobile has made the impossible possible. Mobile games CAN be great, brave and brilliant and when Tencent goes large NetEase are set to go larger.

We can't wait to play the finished product and see that cutting edge pushed that little bit further. Here's to what's next.

## **Paige Cook**

### **Zynga announces Game of Thrones: Legends**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82288/zynga-announces-game-of-thrones-legends/>

Zynga is back at it with another game from the world of Game of Thrones. Firstly, I am a big fan of the books and TV shows, so anytime I see this franchise getting some love, it makes me happy. Zynga's first foray with the IP was a slot casino game, so this RPG puzzle experience seems like it should have more depth to it.

The Game of Thrones IP has been used on mobile in several outings. There was Game of Thrones Beyond the Wall, which was removed from the App Stores earlier this year, but it garnered over a million just in pre-registrations, proving how popular the Game of Thrones name is. There are other titles that are still live, such as Game of Thrones Conquest, which has grossed over \$200 million.

What I'm really focusing on here is the power of IP. There are so many mobile games to choose from in today's market that it can be difficult to have just one stand out, so aligning yourself with a big IP is a great move to instantly get eyes on what you are doing. I know that because Game of Thrones is in the title, I'll be checking Legends out when it releases. This is before I even see if the game is 'my cup of tea'.

In the digital age we live in, we see content crossing over all the time, be it from comic book characters to series, then a series becomes a movie, then it gets a video game adaptation or vice versa. People love a franchise. They love to feel invested in something and consume any content that relates to it.

Mobile Games that take on big IPs can guarantee instant interest. Note that I say interest and not success. Simply having a big name IP as the core of your game isn't enough to make people enjoy it or want to keep coming back and playing it. For me, a big mistake that these types of games often make is they become greedy; they know people are already familiar with characters and content, so they put a price on absolutely everything because they know that everyone will want their favourite character, but that wears thin and isn't good for long term retention.

IPs may be a fast track to gaining players, but a great gameplay loop is what will keep them coming back.

**Aaron Astle**

### **Pokémon Masters highlights fan favourite characters for fourth anniversary**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82271/pokemon-masters-champions-fan-favourite-characters-for-fourth-anniversary/>

This week marks four years of Pokémon Masters EX, and as someone who's been playing for the long-haul, I have to say it's my favourite game in the mega-franchise's mobile lineup. Anniversaries are a time to celebrate, and what better way to celebrate than introducing a new, overpowered iteration of Pokémon's original protagonist Red?

Well... Since this is the third (of four!) anniversaries to feature Red, perhaps there are better ways to celebrate by now. Then again, as someone who hadn't been born yet when Red was hot stuff, maybe the novelty is just lost on me. I found Ash Ketchum to be a much more exciting inclusion last anniversary.

Whatever the case, we have another Red in the gacha for a limited time, and some pretty major new story content. And at least I can take on triple battles with a team of Red's Charizard, Pikachu and Articuno now! That sounds pretty fun actually... I think I'll go do that now...

### **Gaming is a “natural extension” of Netflix's business**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82282/gaming-is-a-natural-extension-of-netflixs-business/>

Netflix's gaming ambitions have become something of a pet subject of mine. The company arguable made streaming film and television what it is today, and since branching into original content has created - or adapted - some of the 21st century's biggest and most critically acclaimed shows, ranging from the zany animated dramedy Bojack Horseman to eighties horror Stranger Things.

However, it's worth noting that the streaming market is getting increasingly crowded. Although several streaming services have exited the market, such as Yahoo Screen, more and more are hitting on the ideal mix of original content and licensed IPs, allowing them to

maintain their position in the market - as such, the introduction of a gaming wing does feel like a natural move for Netflix, especially given the multimedia world we live in - most gaming systems offer the ability to watch Netflix, whether you're a mobile, PC, or console gamer.

It's worth noting, however, the BBC's coverage of the move later in the day seemed to take the stance of "Did you know Netflix make games now?" as if presenting brand new information to viewers. Netflix has been releasing games since 2021, why is it only now that it's gaining attention?

By its own admission, Netflix has focused on building a portfolio and learning the intricacies of the gaming market before it starts making a big splash - in a sense this is similar to its initial entry into the streaming world, focusing on licensed content before it ventured into original IPs. Could it be as simple as Netflix getting more confident with its place in the market and seeking greater awareness? Or is there something else at play? If Netflix had started out creating console and PC titles - something it has in the pipeline - would mainstream news outlets still take over a year to find it worth covering?

August 25

**Lewis Rees**

**Netflix kicks off Netflix Stories brand with Netflix Stories: Love is Blind**

**<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82244/netflix-kicks-off-netflix-stories-brand-with-netflix-stories-love-is-blind/>**

I'm a big fan of interactive novels, and it's a genre that often goes unappreciated. The focus on narrative over gameplay is great for a specific subset of players, but for others it can feel, to an extent, like reading with extra steps.

Some mobile games have taken the genre and run with it, but arguably the genre has never had its big breakout. Interactive films such as *The Quarry*, *Detroit: Become Human*, or *Until Dawn* have proven to be massive hits, but interactive novels have yet to capture the attention of players at large - but all that could be about to change with the reveal of *Netflix: Stories*.

*Netflix Stories: Love is Blind* is a perfect first step into the genre - after all, interactive novels have successfully translated romance into gaming like no other genre with dating sims - but the company has a vast catalogue of first-party IPs which could lend themselves well to the genre, from horror to sci-fi to comedy. In fact, several of the company's titles have already been adapted into games, and others are ripe for adaptations.

In fact, rumours have previously circled that several of the company's hit IPs such as *Squid Game* and *All Of Us Are Dead* are in line for game adaptations. *Stranger Things* has already had several games, and been featured in several others, but among these is a now cancelled Telltale Games series - could we see the story presented as an interactive novel alongside the slate of upcoming spin-offs?

Licensed games already have an in-built audience, and with some of the most popular IPs of the 21st century already owned by Netflix there's certainly a lot to draw on, and the company can potentially leverage the genre to tell any number of stories inspired by their existing properties, ranging from underground hits to international blockbusters. Love is Blind may seem like an odd place to start but it also arguably serves as the ideal launch point, leveraging the established strength of one of the interactive story's most popular subgenres as a proof of concept, but future games within the brand are likely to go bigger. Soon, we could be walking the streets of Hollywood alongside the cast of Bojack Horseman, exploring the Upside Down with the cast of Stranger Things, or fighting for our lives in the Squid Game.

The interactive novel genre may be low on gameplay, but the strong focus on narrative could be a draw all of its own - and with so many fantastic stories to draw from we could be about to be it take off in a big way.

## **Paige Cook**

### **Microsoft's Phil Spencer stresses the importance of mobile in Xbox's future success**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82247/microsofts-phil-spencer-stresses-the-importance-of-mobile-in-xboxs-future-success/>

The acquisition of Activision Blizzard has been quite the drawn out story with its numerous speed bumps, from PlayStation's concerns about Call of Duty to the CMA highlighting cloud gaming.

Yet throughout the whole thing, Phil Spencer has reiterated that the mobile aspect of the deal is key for Microsoft's growth in the industry. Now, I don't entirely buy this narrative. If Microsoft wanted a significant mobile presence, it could achieve that far easier than acquiring Activision Blizzard for a massive sum of \$68 billion. Quite frankly, Microsoft could own a handful of mobile companies for less.

To me, it feels like they're drawing more focus on mobile to downplay the significance of what else is included in the deal. While I don't believe that acquiring King as part of the deal is quite as big a part of the pie as they say it is, there is some truth to the matter regarding overall growth. I think it's less about Microsoft building a bunch of free-to-play games and more about growing its audience across various platforms. They've got console gaming, and Xbox has been very open to gaming on PC, so much so that they have GamePass for PC now, so why not get more people playing on the most popular platform of all - Mobile.

Once the deal is done, which it looks like it will be, I expect that we'll eventually see Xbox attempt to bring its big game experiences to the small screen.

August 18

## **Iwan Morris**

Savvy Games Studio to become Steer Studio in major rebrand

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82208/savvy-games-studio-to-become-steer-studio-in-major-rebrand/>

Wow, what a shift. I mean it's not exactly a 'big' thing but it does suggest to me that Savvy are aware that their reputation and name isn't exactly exciting for the games industry. Although Savvy is an interesting title - it definitely exudes a more corporate aura. I think this may be part of the reason behind the switch to Steer Studio, although personally I'm not fussed on the idea that the name has to have a meaning.

"We've named it Steer because we want to steer the future of gaming" just sounds a bit buzzword-y to me. Especially when you think of how many studios have names that are either quite dry (Bethesda is just named after a place in Maryland) or entirely unique (what is a "Mojang" anyway? Yes I know it means "gadget").

I think they should just say "we've named this 'x' because it sounds cool." But regardless, Steer now looks to stand apart from the Savvy brand as its own entity. I think this is definitely a smart move as it means that people will now look at the studio as its own thing, rather than tying it to Savvy's investments, acquisitions and other boring financial activity.

Of course, for those who are sceptical about Savvy this may just be a sign that the firm is trying to wipe its fingerprints off its subsidiaries. But regardless of if it's a genuine sign of belief in the future of Steer Studio, or a shrewd corporate move, the change is a good idea for finally committing fully to Savvy being a game-first and finance-second group.

## **Lewis Rees**

# **Final Fantasy VII: Ever Crisis gets September 7 release date**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82180/final-fantasy-vii-ever-crisis-gets-september-7-release-date/>

Final Fantasy VII is, arguably, the most beloved RPG, if not the most beloved game of all time. For almost thirty years gamers have experienced the game's universe on a variety of platforms and in a variety of forms, from the original release to the big-budget three-part remake, and from books to the big screen. In fact, there's a decent argument to be made that the series' jump from 2D to 3D is among the most important moments in gaming history, fully cementing the ability of games to provide a cinematic experience.

At this point, the Final Fantasy VII franchise encompasses over a dozen stories across a variety of mediums and platforms, so collecting all of those stories in one place is a great idea - especially given some of the titles are no longer available, and some were only released in Japan. As the world's most accessible gaming platform, mobile is therefore the obvious choice.

Despite mixed early reviews for the game, it's likely that name recognition alone could see Final Fantasy VII: Ever Crisis become a massive hit for Square Enix, while breathing fresh life into some of mobile gaming's lost games.

However, the question regarding the game's gacha elements remains. The Final Fantasy franchise has historically veered away from in-game purchases and lootboxes in its mainstream releases, and as such this may be something of a hard sell for the series' established fanbase - however, it could also open the franchise up to millions of new fans worldwide.

## **Paige Cook**

### **Netflix launches first public cloud gaming test**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82187/netflix-launches-first-public-cloud-gaming-test/>

I have a somewhat rollercoaster outlook on Netflix Games, a subscription model that many already pay for now granting access to games is a great idea. It gives users more bang for their buck and aims to incentivize them to continue renewing their subscriptions. Yet, I still find that so many people don't know that this is something on offer to them.

Netflix is obviously looking to expand the offering with cloud, and rather than using your mobile phone to play these games, they are trying to widen their range for play by making games playable on your TV - using a phone as a controller - and available on PC/Mac. But again, I approach a dip in the coaster because there are already so many ways to play games in so many places. Competition is fierce and people are already so used to the app stores on mobile phones, console gaming, PC gaming and now there are more handheld devices than ever, such as the Steam Deck, Nintendo Switch and ROG ALLY.

So while I think the concept of Netflix games is interesting and has potential, especially given that it comes with the benefit of these games having no ads, I still think there's a long way to go in establishing itself as a place to play video games. I look at Gamepass, a subscription service that offers players a vast library of games, it's great value for money and serves Xbox well, but the core difference is that people are already on the Xbox platform to play video games. If I go around and ask people what they use Netflix for, I doubt many would mention its gaming offering... For now, at least.

I still see Netflix Games as in its era of finding its feet, and for now, I feel like even more so than cloud gaming, controller support, or PC and Mac accessibility, more people simply need to know that video games on Netflix actually exist.

August 11

## **Lewis Rees**

China's attempts to curb video game addiction has been a long saga, and one that shows no signs of slowing down. Despite the increase in game licences being issued, the company's imposition of further restrictions on phone use indicates that the country still isn't quite sure on how to strike a balance between innovation and its own goals.

This research highlights one important factor that the government likely hasn't considered. In the 21st century it's easier than ever for individuals to circumvent the rules in their search for gratification, whether that's using a VPN to access content from another country, illegally streaming or downloading the latest episode of their favourite show before its release in their country or, in this case, playing games for longer than is allowed.

Essentially, this adds another hitch in China's efforts to properly regulate the gaming industry. Regulations are only powerful if people choose to follow them, and it appears that China's gamers are choosing not to comply. It's possible that future regulations will see firmer technological limits put in place in order to ensure the rules are being followed.

The study also found that heavy gaming - more than four hours a day, on more than six days a week - isn't an indicator of health in and of itself. Given China's insistence that its attempts to regulate the industry is in part an effort to promote healthier activities, it appears that it's come to the wrong conclusion on whether this is entirely necessary - like any piece of tech, gaming is only as good or bad as those using it, and its efforts to regulate the so-called "spiritual opium" of gaming may ultimately do more harm to the country's gaming industry than it does good for its consumers.

## **Paige Cook**

**79% of devs are increasingly pressured to release unfinished games**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82129/79-of-devs-are-increasingly-pressured-to-release-unfinished-games/>

The gaming industry is full of highly passionate people, many of whom spend years wishing and working toward finding a job in game development. However, just because workers are eager and want the best for their upcoming release, it should not mean overworking staff or putting them in difficult situations.

Over the past few years, 'crunch' has become a big topic within our industry, something in which we have seen an improvement, but there's still a way to go. Games are often rushed leading up to launch, and they still release unfinished or broken; 79% of developers in this report stated that they felt pressure to release an unfinished game - that number is huge and highlights a significant problem within the industry.

The report also highlights the issue surrounding player feedback, developers want constructive feedback, but often feedback is given over social media, where often more

harm than good comes from it. Rushed releases, long hours and negative player interactions are taking a toll on many developers' mental health. As an industry, we need to be more conscious of this, better at managing it and helping devs navigate the difficulties of dealing with players that show threatening behaviours.

Fortunately, I see some positives, especially from mobile studios. Be it running four-day work weeks, offering mental health help and promoting a better work/life balance. I firmly believe that better games are made when those making them are content, so I hope that when statistics such as this pop up again the numbers are far lower.

### **Iwan Morris**

[Golf Club: Wasteland forced to change name four years after launch | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

As pointed out in the story, I find it quite ironic that this echoes an older incident between King and the creators of Banner Saga, Stoic Studio. Although I, like many people, think that King overreached in that situation, I think it's notable that Golf Club: Wasteland isn't getting the same amount of attention or support. Given the game has been out since 2018, changing the title now due to an IP dispute smacks of Demagog Studios being hit with something big and hard to ignore.

For those who - rightly - criticised King for their perceived overreach in the IP issue, I think there should be an equal amount of energy reserved for Demagog Studios in this case. It doesn't seem fair to me that a game can have an entirely transformative name, be established for close to half a decade and still have to change the title due to the possibility of legal action.

I think people still assume that every mobile studio is some soulless, solely business-focused venture, but in the case of games like Golf Club it demonstrates just why the indie scene on the platform is a difficult proposition. You either restrict yourself to the cutthroat world of mobile, or risk exposing yourself to an entirely different beast if you try to go cross-platform. Hopefully, Demagog Studios can maintain the success they've seen with Golf Club despite the change in name.

August 4

### **Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82097/fireproof-games-prepares-for-the-tenth-anniversary-of-the-room/>

Mobile gaming is often misunderstood by "serious" gamers. Those who care about graphical fidelity, intricate gameplay, or deep storytelling will too often scoff at mobile as a gaming platform under the assumption that every mobile game is a simple free-to-play or hypercasual title.

While some genres, such as horror, have yet to find a significant foothold on mobile devices, it's a proven fact that the platform has successful games from any number of genres, and



that these people are cutting themselves off from a lot of fantastic games by assuming that phones don't offer the same level of gameplay.

The Room series is arguably one of the biggest outliers, and a franchise that succeeds primarily thanks to the platform. The tactile puzzles thrive on a touch screen interface, and mobile is the first platform that comes to mind when we think of touch screen. The series has kicked off a whole new genre of similar titles, such as House of Da Vinci, largely by utilising the unique strengths of mobile gaming. Yes, the franchise has been adapted to other platforms, including VR, but it's mobile we think of first, highlighting something that's too often overlooked - mobile is just as capable of offering "upscale" gaming experiences as consoles or PC titles, and the enduring success of the franchise highlights the fact that consumers are interested in these games.

Where will The Room go next? Well, that's uncertain. It's been three years since the franchise's most recent entry, and five since the release of the last mobile one, but the fact that people are still talking about the series ten years into its lifecycle goes a long way towards showcasing its longevity - and celebrating with such a big event may hint that the story isn't quite over yet.

## **Paige Cook**

### **Mobile games using a subscription model almost triple in a year**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82099/mobile-games-using-a-subscription-model-almost-triple-in-a-year/>

In a mobile market packed full of games, gamers are spoilt for choice when it comes to what they download next. While this is great for players, it does leave some developers fighting to be discovered. Then of course, there are the changes in Apple's app tracking transparency framework that have many developers concerned about their future reach and monetisation.

Enter the subscription model.

Subscriptions are absolutely everywhere. The model has become increasingly popular across the media industry, with the likes of TV streaming services and music platforms. So if it works well in other areas, why not on mobile? This is the question that more developers are asking themselves, and rightly so, since some of the top games in the charts are seeing great success using the model.

However, the thing to remember with subscriptions is that the player needs to see enough incentive to subscribe and continue to do so. Most mobile games that offer the model and do it well grant the player additional content, removing ads and giving premium access. So considering what a games subscription model offers the player is incredibly important to retain that player's sub. It seems clear that subscriptions are here to stay in the mobile space and may become the norm for monetisation and building your game's community in the coming years.

July 28

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/82039/usa-game-ad-revenue-to-reach-130-billion-in-2025/>

Advertising is a massive industry in itself, and one that largely relies on the success of other platforms. Certain ad spaces, such as those during the Superbowl, sell for millions of dollars for their ability to make hundreds of millions of impressions all at once.

Gaming's lack of attention by USA advertisers shows that, perhaps, many within the industry are behind the times, focusing on the tried and tested even as consumers worldwide shift their focus elsewhere. Streaming services, for example, are growing more and more popular, and consumers are eschewing live television as a result. Even without that, it's worth considering that live viewing figures can fluctuate, a show's popularity can decline - and an expensive ad slot can become less effective as a result.

Mobile gaming is, in a sense, evergreen. Its popularity is largely due to its affordability, best epitomised by the free-to-play model, where the game makers don't just make money by selling advertising slots, players can earn in-game bonuses by watching ads.

Once again, gaming is undervalued by those outside the industry, with tired misconceptions about who gamers are leading them to be labelled as low-value users, despite gaming's growing presence on the world stage.

Are we about to hit a tipping point? Possibly. After all, mobile games are being advertised on TV now alongside major brands, so it's possible that this could go both ways, and with more and more advertisers stating their intent to enter the games space, it's clear that those in the know are taking note of the industry, and we could soon see a fresh influx of major brands flocking to advertise their products on a platform they've historically overlooked.

**Iwan Morris**

[India's gaming industry draws the line between 'online' and 'real money' gaming | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

The Indian mobile gaming market has always interested me because of the diversity and vibrancy of it. However, I think I'm also one of the people who was initially rather despondent at the idea of a 28% tax hitting the industry. But it seems that these may have been greatly exaggerated.

There's still a lot of uncertainty but word on the street is many Indian game makers believe that real money gaming companies are trying to conflate their industry with 'proper' video games. Some coverage has been criticised for furthering that, and both clarifications and retractions have been seen across the board.

Lucid Labs CEO and founder Chirag Chopra's quote is especially scathing in regards to this conflation. "The Indian game industry is more than Real Money Games, and believe it or not,

they are here to stay. No matter what they try to tell you on social media, your beloved games will not be taxed 28 percent; that privilege is reserved for Real Money Games.”

However, it does seem that there is still more to be done, and that game makers are now seeking an official line being drawn between real money gaming and video games proper. If done it could put to rest any worries about the rising industry in India, and encourage investors to be more bold.

July 21

**Lewis Rees**

**<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81993/uk-game-makers-agree-to-impose-new-restrictions-on-loot-boxes/>**

Ah, loot boxes. Has any part of the gaming industry caused quite so much controversy? The system lets people pay real money for a chance of gaining new items, whether it's cosmetic items or useful items like weapons, gear or even new characters.

The issue, of course, is that people can pump hundreds, or even thousands of dollars into the mechanic, without getting any substantial benefit. They may receive characters they already own, cosmetics they don't want, or gear that doesn't fit their playstyle. As such, while the mechanic serves to give users an upper hand and can reduce the need to grind, it instead has the potential to turn games into glorified lotteries, with users spending real money without the guarantee of a reward.

This possibility has seen loot boxes face increasing scrutiny throughout the world, including bans in Belgium and the Netherlands. The UK government solution - which amounted to little more than a "figure it out for yourself" - could reflect optimism about the mechanic, or a lack of understanding regarding it. After all, the CMA's reason for blocking Microsoft's acquisition of Activision Blizzard came not due to competition concerns in the mobile or console market, but due to how it could affect cloud gaming. Time and time again the British government has proven to be behind the times when it comes to the gaming space, and its decision to let Ukie handles it seemingly sees the administration sit back and let gaming decide for itself how to regulate the technology.

Luckily, Ukie's guidelines seem to go a long way towards halting some of the more harmful aspects of the mechanic. The guidelines don't go as far as other territories - and due to the government's decisions, aren't legally enforceable - but now responsible game makers utilising loot boxes have to take steps to educating players on everything from odds or the fact that the mechanic is used in-game, as well as implementing an age rating.

Does the move go far enough? In my opinion, not quite - while Ukie's move *is* significant, it lacks the legal authority of government, and so it's possible that some bad actors will circumvent the rules - but given what Ukie was given to work with, it represents a significant move in the right direction.

## **Iwan Morris**

[Hit comic book series Invincible to get new mobile game courtesy of Ubisoft | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

I don't think much needs to be said about Invincible. Sure it isn't exactly what the layman's mind jumps to when they think of "comic book superheroes", but it's definitely hit a new peak of popularity thanks to the Amazon animated series. So it's no surprise that a mobile game is quick to follow. But the reaction has been...telling, where people seem really disappointed that the trailer which was released doesn't lead into some AAA open-world title, but instead into a handheld idle RPG.

I've heard people say this is emblematic of the public being dismissive of mobile games, but I think there's a deeper problem. Which is that idle RPGs are an easy genre to oversaturate, mainly because they seem to be the default for many tie-in games. After all, the design language of the genre is firmly established, and many have been successful...but they're not for everyone either.

I think if Invincible: Guarding the Globe had taken a chance and been set in a different genre, just on mobile, we would've seen some cautious interest. Unfortunately, for those who don't like or want to like idle RPGs, Guarding the Globe is unlikely to make them reconsider their position on mobile titles such as this.

July 14

## **Iwan Morris**

[How Hi-Rez Studios learned from not launching Rogue Company: Elite | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

I admit, I was fairly interested to learn that Rogue Company: Elite wasn't going to make it to a global launch. In-fact I was double-checking after the talk to see if there had been an announcement anywhere, but it seems Hi-Rez preferred to quietly place this project on the shelf. Their talk did a good job of showing why, and how even if you have a good game in a genre as crowded as mobile shooters, you're still going to face problems.

It's especially interesting from the point of view of publishers and developers - and if you were in attendance at Brighton but didn't get to watch it, I highly recommend it - as it breaks down where issues with retention and UA came from. Not only that but the actual mechanics and reasoning behind soft-launching the game in somewhere like Mexico.

While it's not a 1-to-1 comparison either, I think that the story behind why Rogue Company: Elite shut down can be extended to other recent titles that were shuttered, such as Apex Legends Mobile. It gives us an insight behind the scenes where we usually only have a press-release or maybe some comments after the fact to try and give us some sort of clue about what took place. I think not only is this an interesting case-study, but also an example of the value talks at conferences like Develop can confer.

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81972/sony-to-invest-2-billion-into-extended-reality-research/>

I'm a Sony fanboy. While I've gained a healthy amount of interest in mobile gaming since I first began writing for Pocket Gamer, I consider myself, primarily, a console gamer, and Sony has always been at the top of the list when it comes to consoles.

One place where Sony excels over chief competitor Microsoft is in peripherals. Whereas Microsoft has put significant effort into developing its mobile wing with big, flashy acquisitions, Sony has opted for a more slow and steady approach, acting as the proverbial tortoise to Microsoft's hare. The development of Backbone doesn't just act as an alternative to Project Q, it acts as a means to onboard players into playing on their phones, effectively crossing the divide between console and PC like ever before.

The investment in extended reality could also potentially see Sony challenge Apple's Vision Pro - after all, the PlayStation already has its own bespoke VR systems, and this investment could see the company develop a similar system for its developing mobile platform. This could potentially see the ongoing console wars moving onto mobile wholesale. After all, Microsoft claims its acquisition of Activision Blizzard is motivated primarily by its strength on mobile, and should the acquisition be closed it would have a significant advantage in the market.

an AR device for mobile could see PlayStation overtake Microsoft in the mobile space, as well as giving it a significant foothold in AR. After all, the Vision Pro has a significant pricetag of \$3,499 - a hypothetical move by Sony in the space could give it a major advantage over Microsoft.

Paige Cook

**MAG Interactive's Alice Bowman: "Adding a story to your game can add long term player loyalty"**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/comment-and-opinion/81954/mag-interactives-alice-bowman-adding-a-story-narrative-to-your-game-can-add-long-term-player-loyalty/>

Day one of Develop Brighton had a talk hosted by MAG Interactive's Alice Bowman. The discussion covered the idea of adding more story-based content to mobile games and the impact it can have on your title. As someone who loves a good story, be it from a game, TV show or book, it makes sense that adding some narrative to your game could go a long way toward retaining players.

I've played games where I've found it to be rather mediocre, but if there is one character I'm particularly fond of, I'll stick around just to see more of them. Of course, adding a story isn't the answer for every game, and I can see why some developers may see deeper narratives as simply too much work, but a little can go a long way. Mobile gamers may have shorter

play sessions but as pointed out in the talk, the average daily usage for mobile phones in top markets is five hours a day!

So, even if character moments or little drops of the story are given in a snappy and precise way every now and then, it will eventually accumulate to hours of narrative. Mobile can offer interesting characters and storylines as much as any other platform. It's just about presenting it in a way that fits with the fast nature of mobile. In such a competitive market, adding a good story hook to your game could be a great way of bringing players to your game and keeping them invested in future content.

July 7

**Iwan Morris**

**South Korean game regulatory agency investigated for corruption**

[South Korean game regulatory agency investigated for corruption | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

Out of all the stories this week I'm surprised this one has slipped under the radar for so many people. Sure, it wasn't doors being kicked down and files being confiscated, but for an investigation to be triggered into a government body due to a petition started by players of a game is still pretty noteworthy. All too often when playerbases take action it's usually very loud but very ineffective - however the players of Lost Ark seem to have cracked the code and actually gotten something done.

I don't believe that's the only reason of course, the petition reportedly only received a measly 5,000 or-so signatures. However, I think it's more than likely this was used as partial justification for acting on long standing suspicions about GRAC. But for them to find a \$46,000 shortfall is nothing short of stunning, although I think the aspect where it was supposedly used for funding crypto-mining is a bit more speculative, the idea it was skimmed off an internal project budget seems a bit more likely.

I don't think issues like this are unique to the Game Rating and Administration Commission in South Korea. But it seems that action has been a long time coming. It's certainly a lesson to other audiences that they can indeed manage to have action taken, although whether it'll result in a stunning upset such as this again is anybody's guess.

**Paige Cook**

**NetEase sees stock rally of 85% fuelled by new game releases**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81899/netease-sees-stock-rally-of-85-fuelled-by-new-game-releases/>

NetEase has been through quite the whirlwind with the China licensing freeze, which triggered some lows for the company, as seen last year. However, there was a light at the end of the tunnel when authorities began to dish out approvals. Slowly but surely, NetEase has now managed to bounce back.

Shares are rising thanks to these government lifts, but NetEase has also been busy! Last month they hosted NetEase Connect with a showcase of 19 games, some new and others featuring updates for already established titles. NetEase's current success is partly thanks to the successes of recent releases Eggy Party, Racing Master and Justice Mobile, with the latter performing great in China.

It's clear that the limitations from the Chinese market being lifted have everyone at NetEase breathing a sigh of relief. It's also been interesting to see the company pushing for global expansion. Focusing on international game studios ensures that if regulations in China were to reoccur, it's not the be-all and end-all. I'm interested to see what future success NetEase generates from outside of China and if expansion plans continue or slow down now that the Chinese market isn't a regulatory nightmare for the company.

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81894/apple-to-scale-back-production-on-highly-anticipated-vision-pro-headset/>

Apple's Vision Pro is arguably the biggest new tech release since the PS5 and Xbox Series X/S in 2020 and it looks like it's facing a similar problem: supply.

The latest console generation struggled thanks to manufacturing issues brought upon by the COVID-19 epidemic, leading to mass stock shortages as demand heavily outstripped supply - and scalpers bought up massive numbers of the consoles and sold them at significant markups.

With Apple lowering its available stock in year one by 60%, it appears that history could repeat itself. While the Financial Times estimates that Apple will shift 150,000 in the first year, Morgan Stanley predicts sales of more than 850,000, despite the hefty pricetag. Apple is more than a manufacturer, it's a lifestyle in its own right, with fans of Apple products routinely lining up at midnight to get their hands on the latest model of iPhone - many of these people would happily spend their money on the Vision Pro, and as such a cut of over 600 thousand available units may see many walk away disappointed - or see scalpers pounce on the opportunity to profit.

However, some will say that Apple itself is expecting a lukewarm reception for the new device. While AR is certainly not new, the Vision Pro is the most ambitious device of its kind in existence, and as such many consumers may decide to wait for a later model before committing to purchase, letting Apple iron out any kinks in the technology and (potentially) bring down the price.

Notably, the Vision Pro's ambition is a two-way sword. While a successful device will likely shape the development of future devices of its kind, a poor final product could see future AR headsets adversely affected - or potentially open the doors for a competitor to create their own headsets while learning from Apple's mistakes. There's a lot riding on the success of the Vision Pro, and Apple is no doubt keen to ensure that it becomes the first name we think of when we consider AR headsets, as opposed to an embarrassing "what might have been".

June 30

**Iwan Morris**

[Niantic lays off 230 employees and cancels Marvel AR game | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

I remember when Pokemon Go was first released, and how much of an absolute craze it was. I was on holiday with my family and only had a second-hand Apple iPhone with terrible - and expensive - 4G. But for whatever reason me and my sister couldn't get enough of running all over the resort trying to find those colourful little monsters.

Of course, that was years ago - 2016 to be precise - and things have changed since then. The Pandemic saw major changes to how we interacted for the better part of three years, and consequently, Niantic responded by making major changes to their title.

I don't want to blame the shift to a different format specifically, but it does feel like the novelty of AR wore off after a while. Niantic seemed to put far too much weight on that aspect, especially when you remember player vs player trainer battles - a key feature of virtually every Pokemon game and the original card game itself - were only added to the game in 2018.

I disagree with the notion that Pokemon Go was a case of being in the right place at the right time, or that there was some aspect of development that Niantic has missed since. I feel that the real "secret ingredient" was the Pokemon name itself, and the format of capturing adorable critters and battling them.

After all, if we look at the recently announced, released and now cancelled NBA World it's pretty much the same thing, except with training basketball players instead. Niantic never seemed to come up with something new that would push AR forward, instead trying to replicate success with franchises that simply didn't support it.

I don't think this is the end of AR, but if it's not the end of Niantic then it's certainly a massive, blaring warning sign that they need to seriously reconsider the direction their games are taking. More than that it may be a sign to focus on Pokemon Go, and look at the somewhat controversial changes to remote raids that have had many players up in arms.

**Paige Cook**

**YouTube gets into games with new Playables product**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81847/youtube-gets-into-games-with-new-playables-product/>

Youtube is now looking to expand beyond video hosting and include video games for its users. The platform already has a massive tie-in with gaming, given the numerous accounts that have risen to fame playing games for their viewers - but actually being able to play games on the platform itself is a whole different thing.



With other streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon also making moves to incorporate gaming on their platforms, it's understandable why yet another big name also wants in on the action. Overall this speaks massive volumes for gaming when everyone feels it's important that their platform has a gaming offering.

Google had high hopes for Google Stadia, which shut down back in January, but clearly, they aren't ready to call it quits with this new concept of YouTube Playables. Right now, it looks like there's just one game being internally tested, but it makes me wonder what kind of offerings they would put on the platform in the long run. If you're watching YouTube on your PC, you already have a dozen options for gaming, like Steam, and if you're watching from your phone, you can directly play a game on your phone from the app store.

So it seems that the biggest hurdle Playables could face is figuring out a way to convince people it's worth playing from YouTube rather than all of the other accessible options already on offer.

June 23

**Lewis Rees**

[Angry Birds educational games are on the way](#)

There's an episode of the incredibly wholesome sitcom Abbott Elementary where one teacher struggles to engage one of his students, who constantly derails his lessons to talk about Bluey, the star of an Australian kids show. In the end, he succeeds in getting the student to focus not by shutting it down, but by incorporating Bluey into his lessons.

Anyone who's ever been educated in a traditional classroom will know how easy it is for things to get derailed. All it takes is one disruptive student and everything goes out the window, but successfully engaging a child's interests can help make learning fun. As perhaps the world's most famous mobile gaming franchise, Angry Birds seems like a natural choice for educational games, but that doesn't make the move any less inspired. An entire generation has grown up on the franchise, and it's one which has seen everything from TV and movie adaptations to theme park attractions. It's a franchise that's instantly recognisable and, in the core series at least, has obvious potential to educate children on scientific concepts such as velocity and angles.

The move also represents a, quite frankly, amazing opportunity to foster a positive brand name. Gaming has often been considered somewhat frivolous, despite representing billions of dollars of investment and thousands of jobs worldwide. While educational games are by no means some new phenomenon, Angry Birds being brought directly to classrooms arguably represents a big move in taking the genre to the next level, and helping sceptics worldwide recognise the potential of gaming not just as a hobby or distraction, but as an educational tool.

**Paige Cook**

**Indian NGO Prahar calls for ban of Tencent's Undawn**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81784/indian-ngo-prahar-calls-for-ban-of-tencents-undawn/>

Tencent hoped that its latest title Undawn, available through its subsidiary Level Infinite, would mark a comeback in the Indian games market. The post-apocalyptic zombie game shares many of its game design choices with the popular PUBG title and presents new opportunities for the giant.

It's understandable why Tencent would want to be able to expand into the Indian market. India is quickly becoming one of the world's largest mobile gaming markets with its young demographic, and the government has recognised the esports industry, making both markets projected to see significant growth in the coming years. So the release of a new game like Undawn, of course, wants to tap into that market.

Unfortunately for Tencent, within the short time of Undawn's release, some already have concerns. A non-government organisation has asked that the game receive a ban. The NGO states that the title is an insult to India and has references and ties to the Galwan incident. These references refer to uniforms and certain weaponry present in the game and that the game's launch collides with the Galwan incident.

I recently tried Undawn, and the weapons are what you would expect from any shooter or survival game released today. So while the reasoning behind this complaint may seem like a stretch, it does show that there is still a lot of friction between the two. It will be interesting to see if the Indian government considers any of these concerns or if Tencent can finally find its place in the Indian gaming market.

### **Iwan Morris**

[Hero Wars developer Nexters to restructure as GDEV Inc | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

This is a pretty big move on Nexters part, but it's a fairly smart one. After the outbreak of the Ukraine conflict a lot of developers - most prominently for us being Azur Games - made the move out of the country. Unfortunately, they brought a lot of baggage with them due to that lingering association.

By taking on a new name the company distances itself from those rather unpleasant associations and ensures that it can move forward with a fresh identity. It also reflects a possible intention to expand beyond being "just" Nexters and instead being something bigger and better, after all they compare it to Facebook becoming Meta in their press release, so maybe there's something to be taken there?

Regardless of if it's moral conviction or pure pragmatism, Nexters is now something new. Although the development studio itself will still go by the same name, their new company will take its place on the NASDAQ and be traded under that title.

June 16

**Iwan Morris**

[India to enact new laws prohibiting three types of mobile game | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

I think it's safe to say that India has become a majorly interesting market to watch when it comes to mobile gaming. Unfortunately it seems to be suffering from the same rigidity in government thinking that has plagued many countries. For whatever reason it's hard for people to see the benefits of video games, culturally and economically, and since legislation for this industry in India isn't as well established we see moves like this happening.

Although at least two of the suggested "types" of mobile game are those I think we'd all broadly agree with - addictive gameplay and gambling being two sides of the same coin - the incredibly broad applications of titles being "harmful" is a lot more concerning. If we look at the example of tabloid coverage of PUBG: Mobile mentioned in the article, it's clear that there are still people in India who view video games with disdain as potentially negative influences on audiences.

It's undeniable that games should be regulated in some way, as any form of entertainment should be, but for those looking to develop or release their titles in India this new legislation may be concerning for how broadly it could be applied.

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81745/a-us-judge-has-blocked-microsofts-acquisition-of-activision-blizzard/>

Yesterday saw me celebrate a year here at Pocketgamer.biz, and when I think back over that time, Microsoft's ongoing attempt to acquire Activision Blizzard - acquirblizz, as we've come to call it - has been a constant presence. It's a story that's epitomised the gaming industry over the past year and encompasses every aspect of it, and it feels like just as we come close to the ending of the saga, there's another twist in the tale.

The FTC's decision to sue to block the deal in December was the first sign that, despite the criticism it faces, acquirblizz may be in trouble. Now, with a USA judge blocking the deal - albeit temporarily - it's a serious sign in my eyes that the deal may be abandoned. While Microsoft hasn't ruled out cutting the UK out of the deal and removing Activision Blizzard titles from the market, the USA represents an even more lucrative market, and one I can't see Microsoft stepping away from. While the deal could proceed without the UK in the picture, a decision against the deal seems like it could be the straw that broke the camel's back, especially since the deadline for the court case is after the contractual deadline for the merger. It's the opportune time for either Microsoft or Activision Blizzard to step away from the table.

Where will this go? Well, that's uncertain, but that itself is telling. Has there ever been an acquisition where even a year on it's a case of "if" and not "when"? Will this be a success story, or a missed opportunity? Should it complete, would the concerns of competitors like Google and Sony prove to be accurate, or unfounded? We won't know until we get to the end of the story, and this is one that has no signs of ending soon.

**Paige Cook**

## **Ubisoft partners with Level Infinite to launch Assassin's Creed Jade**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81728/ubisoft-partners-with-level-infinite-to-launch-assasins-creed-jade/>

Ubisoft is one of those companies that used to feel like it was always on its A game but in recent years lost some of its magic. Its [financials recently showed that sales were down at least 56.1%](#) and the general outlook from many gamers is that they're growing slightly tired of the studios output.

Given that Ubisoft used to be one of my favourite gaming studios, the idea that they may not bounce back to those former glory days is a sad one. I've long thought that if Ubisoft can't rekindle the fire then they are a prime target for acquisition. However, at the recent Ubisoft Connects event, I saw a glimmer of hope.

The Connects event was a great showcase of what Ubisoft can offer players, of course the primary market they target is console/PC gaming but there was also the announcement of Assassin's Creed Jade. Ubisoft's first open-world Assassin's Creed game on mobile devices. The game is being made in partnership with Level Infinite, which is a division of Tencent and speaking of division, they're also the publishers for Ubisoft's other current big mobile project, The Division Resurgence.

Tencent is a key shareholder for Ubisoft so it makes sense to see the two coming together to push these mobile titles forward. In the past Tencent made promises to promote the Ubisoft catalogue in China so an Assassin's Creed game that is set there could prove popular. With titles like Assassins Creed Mirage going back to its roots, exciting new titles like Avatar: Frontiers of Pandora and a leap onto mobile devices it looks like Ubisoft are preparing for a comeback.

June 9

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81690/netflix-games-announces-five-new-games-coming-to-the-platform-this-summer/>

Netflix has come a long way in the games space. From its early days struggling to engage users, the company has become a veritable juggernaut of the mobile gaming industry, both through signing publishing deals or acquiring developers wholesale. While it's still not at the same level of, say, NetEase or Tencent, Netflix has gone from a niche game maker to a recognisable one in its own right.

This summer sees Netflix expanding its interests outside of its traditional mobile base, bringing games to console and PC as well as phones, as well as making its platform the exclusive home of LEGO Legacy: Heroes Unboxed, which represents a major move towards

raising brand awareness. The company has already come a long way in the games space, and this latest group of announcements represents a big step forward.

The move could also test the power of Netflix's monetisation model. Oxenfree II: Lost Signals is due to release on PC, Nintendo, and PlayStation on the same day, with the PlayStation store listing a price of \$19.99. In contrast, the mobile release will utilise the same monetisation model as the rest of the games on Netflix's service - free, with no ads - and if players can get it for free then, absent of any smart usage of PlayStation's DualSense 5 controller, such as haptic feedback, mobile is likely to become the best way to play the new title.

### **Iwan Morris**

[GameRefinery says the best time to push ATT notifications is the first 6-30 seco | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGBiz](#)

It honestly doesn't surprise me that the best time to push ATT notifications is early on. Speaking from the position of a player myself, I like to know upfront exactly what I'm getting into and what data is required of me. So putting these notifications in during the onboarding process, or the first bit of gameplay helps set a user's expectations.

Having these notifications pushed early on is also pretty much standard, as even Gamerefinery's own research points out - so I feel that if you did see an app show an ATT notification say, a few minutes or even an hour or so down the line, it would stand out quite a bit more.

The follow-up notifications point (13% of the top 200 games using them) is interesting to me. Once an app has established trust and a player has had a chance to "feel it out" so to speak I can see them being a lot more willing to share further information.

I feel this and the recent stuff we've seen regarding Apple's privacy manifests - plus the ongoing grappling with IDFA and user privacy in general - represents mobile game makers doing a lot more work and research into more ethical and "light touch" approaches to gathering user data.

### **Paige Cook**

#### **Apple's Vision Pro reveal shakes up share prices**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81682/apples-vision-pro-reveal-shakes-up-share-prices/>

Apple wrapped up its WWDC show and the long-rumoured mixed-reality headset is now a reality with the reveal of the Vision Pro. There was talk leading up to the event that this would be the next iPhone moment and a potential game changer... Literally.

Concerning the change in stock prices, it's not unusual to see these rise with the anticipation of the show just to drop when reality hits. This was probably to be expected, and let's be honest, it's Apple, so they're hardly strapped for cash. However, Someone who buys the Vision Pro **will** find a significant dent in their wallet as the price tag sits at a massive \$3,499.

Therein lies the first issue with the Vision Pro. While the product is impressive, it's one for early adopters and the most loyal of Apple fans. You're not going to get your everyday person picking up a Vision Pro, and it's not magically going to trigger the mass adoption of mixed-reality headsets.

This leads me to, was the reveal the new iPhone moment? Personally, I don't think so, and I don't think Apple even believes that - not yet at least. I think they're on the right path. The technology is impressive, and while it may not yet be the disruptor the iPhone was, it offers developers new opportunities for creating immersive experiences and Apple is setting the new benchmark for the VR/AR market.

The issue is, until you can get this kind of tech on shelves at an affordable price or even offer some type of contract service as we see with mobile phones, you're not going to see a significant amount of your friends and family having a Vision Pro in the house. This reveal may be a look into the future, but the next iPhone moment isn't going to happen until the masses can say, "I need one of those."

June 2

**Iwan Morris**

[Gwent team sees 30 employees axed after ceasing of updates | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

There's not much to be said about this that can't be said about so many other layoffs. How terrible it is for those having to leave, and questioning whether or not it was the right move by the parent company. I think it should also be asked, does this indicate CD Projekt Red is no longer going to be focusing on mobile?

Gwent was not an unpopular game by any measure of the imagination, although it's hard to compete with the likes of Hearthstone of course. And these are experienced devs, regardless of the somewhat niche genre they were working on. It raises the question of whether it was wise to slash this many employees in the first place.

I feel like the experience would be something CD Projekt Red would want to hold onto if they were still going to focus on mobile. But despite some indication in their financials it seems that this, compounded with the ending of development on Gwent, indicates an overall shift away.

I could be wrong of course, but it's still a possibility in my mind. With the closure of Spokko last year too, it seems the future for CD Projekt Red is not on mobile.

**Lewis Rees**

**Silent Hill: Ascension debuts new trailer**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81637/silent-hill-ascension-debuts-new-trailer/>

I've written before about the unrealised potential of the horror genre on mobile devices. While mobile gaming is by far the most accessible of all gaming platforms thanks to its relative affordability and market reach, it struggles somewhat compared to other platforms in terms of immersiveness, and horror developers have yet to effectively make use of the myriad of features mobile phones have to offer which could result in some truly fantastic examples of the genre.

Silent Hill is one of the most beloved horror IPs in gaming history, and one that's previously experimented with mobile phones, albeit the most recent mobile entry, Silent Hill: Orphan 3, was released in 2010, and as such the technology is somewhat outdated. With Silent Hill itself making a triumphant comeback with four games and a film in the works, it only feels fitting to utilise mobile phones. Rumours have been circling for some time that mobile interactivity was being considered, and with Silent Hill: Ascension we finally have an idea of what shape that could take.

Could this be the genre's big breakout hit on phones? Well, with so many esteemed companies collaborating on the title, and the leveraging of one of gaming's most popular horror franchises, it could well act as a proof of concept. Mobile phones will act as the ideal medium to interact with the game, creating a unique experience on a massive scale, and this could in turn lead to more and more developers creating horror titles specifically for mobile devices.

**Paige Cook**

### **Microsoft and the UK's CMA begin their appeal tribunal on July 24**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81642/microsoft-and-the-uks-cma-begin-their-appeal-tribunal-on-july-24/>

The Activision Blizzard drama continues to unfold as Microsoft is all set to appeal the CMA's decision to block the big deal. There was never any doubt that Microsoft would appeal the decision, and given the main grounds being issues over cloud gaming, I personally can't say I blame them.

Despite hearing about Call of Duty being the primary concern for months, the CMA's decision to bring cloud gaming to the forefront surprised many. However, given the string of recent approvals we have seen, it would seem that other regulators disagree with the severity of these cloud concerns.

So what happens at the appeal? I expect Microsoft will be quick to highlight these other approvals and claim that the CMA has made an error in judgement regarding its potential dominance in the cloud gaming market. It's also possible that Microsoft could highlight potential deals or agreements around the cloud market if the CMA is unwilling to budge. Xbox did something similar to appease the Call of Duty concerns by saying it would support Call of Duty on PlayStation for ten years.

Whether any of this will be enough to have the CMA reconsider, only time will tell, but this certainly isn't the last hurdle for Microsoft as we are still waiting to hear what conclusions the US comes to. For now, it seems this deal is still a long way from the finish line.

May 26

## What is Project Q? Sony's latest handheld console revealed

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81600/what-is-project-q-sonys-latest-handheld-console-revealed/>

Having been at the global launch of Sony's PSP back in the day (and a few more console launches besides) the launch of a new Sony handheld is always going to pique my interest and bring back some memories. But it's perhaps what sets Project Q apart from its forebears rather than what makes it the next in lineage that makes it the most interesting.

What we have here is Sony's first 'dumb' console. A Dual Shock 5 broken in half with an 8" tablet screen jacked into the middle. Sure there are processors, batteries and brains in there but the raw processing required to get your game on is being supplied from elsewhere for the very first time... And it's starting to look like things will never look the same again.

If Sony can deliver slick PS5 streaming to the Project Q, serve up a PlayStation Plus gaming subs service AND maybe a few Q-exclusive games (that make use of the new device's combo of controls and yet-to-be-confirmed touchscreen) then they could have a winner on their hands.

But there are plenty of huge hurdles to overcome first. Let's not forget that you need to own a PS5... And that streaming subscription option? Sounds like they've got a whole Google Stadia-style amount of explanation to do. But perhaps the biggest problem will be one of the oldest. What's the betting they wind up charging too much for it? £199? £299? More? Prepare to be disappointed.

**Iwan Morris**

"It's been a rough night..." Embracer: What went wrong?

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81599/its-been-a-rough-night-embracer-what-went-wrong>



I don't think there's much to say that hasn't already been said about Embracer losing out on this massive \$2bn deal. It tanked their stock price, and already people are circling to commentate on what seems to be an executive cock-up on a massive scale. You have to feel sorry for Lars Wingefor, as it's a situation no-one wants to be put in when they're in charge of one of gaming's biggest companies.

To have the deal fall apart at literally the eleventh hour, the night before the Q4 financials for Embracer were announced by all accounts, is something you'd find in a Hollywood movie script. But instead it now threatens to be the defining moment of Wingefor's career, for all the wrong reasons.

It certainly raises a lot of questions about why the deal fell apart in the first place, by all accounts it was solid enough that Embracer were actively planning to announce it for their Q4 financials. A verbal agreement may not seem like much, but all that means is that there's no legal binding if - as happened here - either party abruptly pulls out. As Daniel notes in this article, if the deal had been announced it would've added a pretty significant silver-lining to what were quite lukewarm financials overall.

For Embracer Group, to then have that thrown back in their face suggests either that management had the complete wrong impression, some other enormous error or that there was severe miscommunication on some level of the deal. It's a shame as well because despite the tepid financials, there were some bright spots, like Dead Island 2 taking the spot of Deep Silver's best selling title so far after a harrowing development cycle.

Regardless, people will be asking questions about Wingefor's leadership because of this. But the most pertinent question would be...who was the deal going to be with? \$2bn is a lot of money, and more importantly what was happening internally with them that would lead to a deal like this falling apart? Speculation is going to be rife, and I reckon it's only a matter of time before someone talks and this story becomes even more interesting...

**Lewis Rees**

## NetEase introduces Canada-based Bad Brain Game Studios

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81597/netease-introduces-canada-based-bad-brain-game-studios/>

Game studios are often in the background when it comes to game development. While every platform has its superstars, those studios that have become household names in their own right such as Square Enix, Naughty Dog, and Zynga, game development remains a technical field, and many don't consider every decision that goes into play in development. Game makers rise to this status through breakout hits or a string of high-quality games which allows them to scale.

The launch of Bad Brain, a new multiplatform studio under the NetEase umbrella, stands out because it appears to be going for that status before any significant information on its first

game has even been announced. We know it's an open world horror/adventure title inspired by cult cinema and... what? Will it be based on an existing IP? Is it another spin off of Dead by Daylight, which is developed in Montreal, and which already partners with NetEase for the mobile version? Time will tell.

NetEase hasn't just launched a new studio, it's shrewdly identified the trends in gaming and adult animation to create an eye-catching announcement video with colourful visuals and a sense of humour, while lampooning those in the games industry who place more emphasis on the bells and whistles of development than on the substance. To paraphrase Brooklyn 99's Charles Boyle, "Games don't need to be clever, they just need to be good". Blockchain implementation or CCG elements can't save a bad game, but they *can* enhance good ones.

As such, Bad Brain have come racing out of the stable with a fresh marketing campaign that immediately sets it apart from others - not a bad start at all. We don't know whether other studios will take this approach in the future, but game makers would do well to take note of Bad Brain's approach to creating a name for itself.

### **Paige Cook**

#### **As Apple prepares to open up, they remind us of what's waiting to get onto iOS**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81571/as-apple-prepares-to-open-up-they-remind-us-of-whats-waiting-to-get-onto-ios/>

Apple emerged mostly victorious in its recent antitrust appeal against Epic Games, but the one case they fell short on could have long-term ramifications for the giant. Apple's store is known for being locked down, and developers who want to call that store their home have to cough up a 30% cut. Well, that may no longer be the case with an open store.

So what better timing for Apple to show just how much work they put into keeping the store and you safe. In a [recent interview we did with AppsFlyer's Adam Smart](#), we touched on the Apple store opening up and in that conversation, it came up that, of course, there are two sides to every argument. From a developer's point of view, it's incredibly frustrating to be giving up 30% of what your creation is worth, but here's Apple saying, "Look at how much we keep you and your potential players safe." Apple is saying they are taking action against users and developers and claim to review over 100 thousand app submissions per week.

There's always been this contrast between Android users, who perhaps want more control over what they can get on their phone and Apple users, who many specifically choose to use that service because everything is under review, so what impact could an open Apple store have? Will developers rejoice at the idea of using alternative payment methods to dodge the 30% cut, or will we see the Apple Store's shiny reputation take a hit if a flood of potentially dangerous and fraudulent apps find themselves on the platform? With WWDC just around the corner, we'll know how Apple intends to adapt its terms to the EU rules sooner rather than later.

May 19

**Iwan Morris**

[BattleGrounds Mobile India to be 'unbanned'](https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81557/battlegrounds-mobile-india-to-be-unbanned/)

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81557/battlegrounds-mobile-india-to-be-unbanned/>

I admit, I'm actually somewhat surprised by this. We don't know what happened behind the scenes in any great detail and neither Krafton nor the Indian government seem eager to spill the beans. However, what we do know is that, pending a three-month review period, BGMI is back. For those three months we can surmise that the Indian government will be keeping a close eye on the title to ensure it's compliant with their legislation. So if it manages to come out on the other side it seems Krafton's persistence has paid off.

I certainly think it didn't set the best precedent, given that BGMI went to great lengths to extricate itself from any connection to the foreign companies that Indian legislators were worried about. Only to then be banned anyway, and I think an unspoken aspect is the frosty reception to the game and the tabloid rumours swirling around it.

That's not to say I was having sleepless nights worrying about Krafton's revenue, only that I don't think it sent the right message. Video games shouldn't be a political football in any country, and it seems fortunate that Krafton's managed to satisfy whomever was not totally on board with them in this situation.

So now what? Now we wait, see how it does, and in particular - as I point out in my coverage - how it competes against home-grown competitors that stepped in to fill the void like the upcoming title Indus.

**Lewis Rees**

## **Saudi Arabia boosts stake in Electronic Arts by 55%**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81528/saudi-arabia-boosts-stake-in-electronic-arts-by-55/>

Saudi Arabia is at the heart of the MENA region, which represents a significant market for mobile gaming. Its investment in gaming companies, through the sovereign wealth fund PIF, should therefore come as no surprise, as the country has long been attempting to diversify from its core economic export, oil.

What makes this deal interesting is that it represents, once again, attempts to diversify away from mobile gaming - the most profitable of all gaming platforms, and the most popular in

Saudi Arabia. While PIF subsidiary Savvy Games Group's [acquisition of mobile gaming giant Scopely](#) proves that the country remains focused on mobile gaming.

Saudi Arabia's increased stake in EA therefore represents something of a hybrid investment. Although the company has created a number of highly successful mobile titles, it has also created many for other platforms, allowing the country to diversify its interests while maximising revenue streams and increasing its profile in the wider gaming arena. Mobile gaming is likely to remain the country's focus for the foreseeable future, but investments in a variety of game makers working on a variety of platforms seem more targeted help consumers worldwide take notice of Saudi Arabia's gaming industry.

## **Paige Cook**

Ubisoft upbeat on Rainbow Six and Division Mobile in full-year financials

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81538/ubisoft-upbeat-on-rainbow-six-and-division-mobile-in-full-year-financials/>

There was a time when Ubisoft seemed king of the hill in the gaming industry. Assassin's Creed was continuously successful, Far Cry was doing well and they had gems such as Prince of Persia. So seeing the company's financial slump feels like quite the fall.

It seems logical that Ubisoft is putting a lot of its hopes into the Assassin's Creed franchise with the latest instalment Mirage appearing to make a return to the more traditional AC games fans fell in love with, but what other options do they have that can help resurrect the business?

Mobile perhaps? Another long-running franchise from Ubisoft is Rainbow Six. Bringing Rainbow Six Siege to mobile will require some adaptation for shorter, snappier gameplay sessions, but it could be a great way to expand the fanbase and encourage competitive mobile play. Similarly, Ubisoft is bringing The Division to Mobile with Resurgence, another title that, if done well, could see Ubisoft finally make a mark in the mobile world.

If Ubisoft is unable to bring back its former glory years, I am left wondering if this one-time giant will be snapped up in the next big acquisition.

May 12th

## **Lewis Rees**

**From CGI ads to working with some of Hollywood's biggest stars, what's next for Merge Mansion?**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/interview/81489/from-cgi-ads-to-working-with-some-of-hollywoods-biggest-stars-whats-next-for-merge-mansion/>

A litmus test for how high profile a game is is where - and how - it's advertised. Like it or not, console and PC titles have historically seen the bulk of attention from serious gamers, and so they're more likely to turn up in more high-profile ads. For a recent example, just look at The Last of Us, a franchise advertised not just on YouTube or in the commercial breaks for the TV adaptation, but even in cinemas.

In contrast, mobile games have historically been advertised largely on the web or on mobile devices, which does tend to give it a niche feeling, despite being far from a niche market, but with the recent series of Merge Mansion ads, it looks like we're seeing a revolution in how mobile games are advertised. This isn't just the occasional TV ad with flashy graphics or playable ads in other games - this is a narrative driven campaign starring one of the biggest and most beloved Hollywood stars of today.

The previous ads starring Oscar winning actress Kathy Bates may have lent the game a degree of prestige, but Pedro Pascal is a juggernaut of the industry, currently starring in some of the biggest series' on the planet following successful stints. He's immediately recognisable and has the mass-market appeal to show gamers who may otherwise overlook mobile gaming that it's far from console/PC's littler sibling, but a massive industry in its own right.

Will we see other games follow in Merge Mansion's footsteps? Perhaps. Other mobile games, such as Raid: Shadow Legends, have done big budget ads with established figures such as Jeff Goldblum and Ronda Rousey, while games such as Royal Match are turning to Cameo to get the likes of Kate Flannery and Tom Felton to create lower-budget ads that immediately capture the attention of fans. Mobile gaming advertising continues to evolve, and given how effective Metacore's approach has proven, other game makers may well be blowing up the phones of everyone from Hollywood stars to musical legends in their attempts to bring their products to the attention of new audiences.

**Iwan Morris**

### **Riot Games gets new CEO with leadership shake-up**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81500/riot-games-gets-new-ceo-with-leadership-shake-up/>

Riot Games has lost out big-time in the mobile market, despite the launch of League of Legends: Wild Rift. Initially reluctant to pursue a mobile version of League of Legends, they now face an uphill battle in the mobile gaming market where they're not the biggest name.

Honor of Kings shows how companies can be outpaced in mobile if they're reluctant to pursue it. Especially for a genre like MOBA which really isn't graphics or CPU-intensive and can be adapted to multiple platforms. It may go some way to explain why they're so litigious against other companies now, as they've lost out once and don't want to do so again.

Still, with series like Arcane and Project L, it may be that the easiest way to push themselves back into the spotlight is to continue to appeal to a wider audience. Not only that but Dylan Jadeja will still need to restore trust from both the public and players by continuing to manage Riot's internal culture.

It's not the worst position to be in as a CEO but it does show that there's some significant challenges being faced by Jadeja right out of the gate.

## **Paige Cook**

### **Earning from emotes: Kinetix Emote Infrastructure makes emoting easy**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81485/earning-from-emotes-kinetix-emote-infrastructure-makes-emoting-easy/>

The obvious stand out here may be that Kinetix is looking at text to emote AI integration that will allow for the easy creation of new emotes, players themselves could write out what they want and voilà it's in game. With the current buzz around artificial intelligence this does seem like a logical step for these tools.

But even without the fanciness of AI, looking at a company that has raised millions for the creation of emotes makes me reflect on how much the gaming industry has changed. I remember playing games where an emote was a simple gimmick, nothing more than a thumbs up from your character that you perhaps pressed once by accident and never touched again.

However with the rise of live service games and user generated content the industry and what players want has changed. Something such as emotes that were once brushed aside is now a lucrative in game asset, you've got games such as Fornite or Overwatch that have players desperate to own certain emotes and having those emotes earns you bragging rights with your friends. It's interesting to see content that years ago would have been looked over and certainly not something a user would pay for are now able to provide games with huge amounts of revenue.

May 5

## **Iwan Morris**

[Fortnite is back on iOS | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGBiz](#)

I found this a particularly interesting story mainly because of the angle of, well, Fortnite once again bypassing Apple's store ban. I'm all for it, in a way because it means that people do have alternate means of playing a game on their platform of choice while Apple can still maintain its blockade on Epic Games' battle royale title.

The whole issue of who is in the wrong, legally and ethically in the Epic v Apple saga has kind of passed us by. I think now the more interesting and important issue is to examine what happens around it. I don't expect Apple to decide suddenly that cloud gaming services

on their ecosystem have to abide by their app store rules for games they've banned, but it's not totally impossible either - especially if there's some sort of legal quandary around transactions within these games.

At the same time it also raises the question of whether or not Apple's approach really is outdated in trying to keep such a stranglehold on their ecosystem. Every year more and more people are adopting phones and services by other manufacturers like Huawei and Android, and as much as I respect people who like Apple's design philosophy, for someone my age it just seems a little quaint for lack of a better term.

Then again, Epic didn't exactly think before leaping in headfirst, and did take an adversarial stance on an issue in an attempt to sling some petty insults (remember that ad parodying Apple's own "1984" advertisement?).

But more to the point, given that we've had things like the Activision Blizzard deal being blocked over cloud gaming of all things...are we seeing this technology take the lead - if not in a technical sense then in a legislative and platform rules sense? I think it's a question that is going to come to a head sooner or later.

### **Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81454/magmic-uses-chatgpt-to-power-hasbros-scattergories/>

AI is a handy tool for developers, but one that I believe needs to be approached with caution.

While I'm supportive of the technology in some aspects, such as a tool to assist with some aspects of development, I'm somewhat concerned about the potential of artificial intelligence to replace some jobs entirely, especially in creative fields. For example, I may use Midjourney to create a portrait of my Dungeons and Dragons characters, but it's another thing entirely to then sell those portraits for profit. ChatGPT might have its uses, but should one of those uses involve game development, or really any artistic field? In ten years, will Hollywood studios or book publishers or game developers decide to cut out the middleman by using the program (or others like it) to create a narrative to their specifications? Will creativity and artistic merit be reduced, in part, to who has the best AI program to churn out stories?

The use of the program in Scattergories is interesting, since part of the game's appeal is in its randomness, and the program can create endless prompts which act as a springboard for players. It's a good example of how AI can be used as a tool, and regardless of your opinions on the use of AI in creative fields it'll be interesting to see how this plays out, and the effect this has on the game's performance.

April 28th

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81398/dead-by-daylight-mobile-announces-nights-of-terror-tournament/>

Asymmetrical PVP horror games have exploded in the past few years, and Dead by Daylight is arguably the biggest game of its kind. Whereas other games have seen success with more complex gameplay mechanics, Dead by Daylight's simplicity means that a variety of killers can slip easily into the world, and this has seen some of the biggest names in horror, from Stranger Things' Demogorgon to A Nightmare on Elm Street's Freddy Krueger join the game's growing roster.

The mobile version already stands out from other platforms in a number of ways. On top of unique cosmetics and kill animations, the recent Next Era of Horror update introduced a number of features such as seasonal leaderboards, a dedicated in-game chat system, and even a relic system which shakes up the core gameplay. The new Nights of Terror tournament, directly implemented in the game client, is just the latest new mobile exclusive feature, and perhaps the most interesting.

Dead by Daylight isn't a newcomer in the world of esports, however it's never (to my knowledge) hosted a competition such as this directly into the game client and once again mobile is pulling ahead.

What does this mean for Dead by Daylight? Well, it's possible that the mobile version is being used as a testing ground for these new features before the developers tackle the task of implementing them into the "core" game, but for now the mobile version has another feather in its cap, making competitive play not only more rewarding than ever before, but more accessible.

**Iwan Morris**

[The UK's Competition and Markets Authority blocks the Microsoft Activision Blizzard | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

Well this is certainly a turn-up for the books isn't it? Now the UK has all eyes on it, for better or for worse. I've definitely seen the sentiment that this is really bad for business, and an unnecessary intervention for what is - frankly - a very small part of a massive business entity.

Cloud gaming is one of those things that I've come around to the more familiar I get with it. It's not really for me, I like being able to play my games without having to worry about an internet connection, but I can see the appeal and if it gets more people to play, all the better for it.

However, Activision Blizzard is not exactly the big thing in cloud gaming. Neither has Call of Duty come to that. And when King has been stressed as the biggest part of this deal and rakes in so much cash, you'd think it'd be like shooting fish in a barrel if the CMA did want a reason to halt the deal.



I feel there may be an issue of misunderstanding, or less game-literate people in the CMA only hearing the marketing-speak of “play any game, anywhere, any time” and having it set off alarm bells. Despite there being many limitations and a relatively small user base for the tech right now.

Right now the main emotions seem to be frustration from proponents of the deal and amusement from opponents. Many people point out how comical it is that cloud gaming of all things may scupper the biggest acquisition, if not in terms of money then significance, in years. But hey, stranger things have happened in the gaming market, but it does raise questions about whether this really is the death knell or just a possible stumbling block.

**Paige Cook**

**Apple emerges victorious in antitrust appeal against Epic Games**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81378/apple-emerges-victorious-in-antitrust-appeal-against-epic-games/>

Winning nine out of ten claims is an absolute result for Apple right? Well there's a downside. Game developers, particularly indie devs often find the world of the Apple app store difficult given the 30% cut that the platform takes. Developers have previously attempted to direct players to third party sources to take payments instead which was met with a swift block from Apple.

In doing so the court now claims this was a violation of California's anti-steering laws... So what does that mean? It means that the one case they lost could turn out to be one of the most critical. If developers are able to have their games on the app store but then direct those players to a third-party webpage to take in-game payments the 30% bite that Apple takes could be avoided.

Losing out on a 30% cut is no small amount and so having an alternative payment method would go a long way for many developers to ensure that they are reaping the real rewards of their product. At the end of the day this is Apple, they're always going to hold a dominant position so it would be great to see them reevaluate the terms of the fee but the likelihood is we'll see some kind of appeal on the decision and the lawsuit will continue to be dragged out.

April 21st

Daniel Griffiths

It's the big one. The night that the mobile games industry gets to kick back for once and share the love that powers the most vibrant and creative gaming space there is. The Mobile Games Awards last night were once again a shining showcase of all the great and the good and a beacon of positivity in what's been an annual season of uncertainty.

But look beneath the surface figures and there's an obvious trend that's only on the up. Not only in terms of raw numbers, downloads, earnings and all the other metrics we sweat about

but also in the ambition, new ideas and drive behind the scenes to make all our dreams happen. Last night proved that while 2022 is technically 'down' the mobile games industry is actually anything but.

Long term trends only show stability and potential and worriers simply need to forget the reality-altering distortion field of Covid lockdown and keep their eyes on what's really happening. To all the folks on board, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Now let's get to business and enjoy the ride.

### **Iwan Morris**

[Aquiris to become Epic Games Brasil | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

Aquiris to become Epic Games Brasil

This really interested me, mainly due to the fact that it shows an increased attention on the video game business in Brazil. The country's always had a vibrant pop-culture presence worldwide, but very little of that has translated into supporting the game industry there. So Epic putting their money into Aquiris to bring it into their family is an important step.

Of course, it may be a little disappointing to some that they're relegated to supporting Fortnite, but at the same time this is inarguably Epic's biggest cash cow and they need all the supporting studios they can on it. Not only that but Aquiris existing mobile experience will hopefully translate well to this sort of work - and it doesn't discount them continuing to support their own games in the meantime or developing new titles.

A lot like Turkiye, I think Brazil is a country that will really reach its full potential if it can make game development an appealing and practical career. With outside investment flowing in, becoming a developer or starting a publishing company becomes not just feasible, but lucrative. Especially for mobile, with such a massive audience in LatAm, it's another potential goldmine for companies inside and outside.

### **Paige Cook**

Sega buys Rovio for €706 million

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81322/sega-buys-rovio-for-706-million/>

While M&A deals seemed to be starting slowly at the beginning of the year, we are now finally seeing a turnaround. We had Savvy acquiring Scopely, and now Sega is set to buy Rovio for \$775 million. The price is lower than the initial 1 billion that was rumoured but still more than the Playtika offer.

It's no surprise to me seeing Rovio being acquired, but Sega wasn't the name I expected. Despite that, it actually makes a lot of sense. The obvious standout is the fact that both share big IPs that have seen major success, not just within games but outside with movies and merchandise. The multimedia angle is something that will surely generate a healthy revenue, but I also think the major win here is the acquisition of talent. Rovio has experience in mobile and live ops, something that Sega simply hasn't mastered...Yet.

The deal makes a lot of sense for Sega but also Rovio, who has struggled to reignite the Angry Birds magic, but now there's potential to bring those birdies over to console or PC. Overall the deal feels like a good fit, but time will tell if that's the case. The next big question is, who's next?

April 14

**Daniel Griffiths**

## **Gaming app installs are up 10% compared to 2022**

Is it over yet? Green shoots of hope and all that? And yet pinning the blame on 2022 as 'a bad year' is actually viewing this whole crazy business from completely the wrong perspective.

Sure 2022 was 'down' but that's just the ghost of Covid coming back from the dead to give us one more nip on the ankle. 2022 'down' was purely because 2021 was so 'up' that folks (both making games and consuming them) went a little stir crazy and thought the ascending bar chart dream could live on forever.

Perhaps someone somewhere really thought that being trapped under lock and key really was 'the new normal'? Fact is that - mercifully - normality has (by and large) returned and anyone who banked on an unending spiral of captive consumers deserved to get their fingers burnt. And that's just what happened in 2022.

So it's great to see that 2023 is getting to where we really should be. Let's forget awful 2020, the uncertainty of 2021 and erase 2022 as the year when we REALLY lost our minds. Instead let's cross fingers, touch wood and watch those graphs slide up predictably upwards once more. But not too fast. And not too slow. But just right this time, eh?

**Iwan Morris**

**NetEase's cutesy battle royale, Eggy Party, to launch in the Philippines**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81284/neteases-cutesy-battle-royale-eggy-party-to-launch-in-the-philippines/>

I do think part of the bad rap that mobile gets from the rest of the gaming world (however little that may affect the daily operations of the industry) is the huge number of clones that

are on the market. Games like Survivor.io and Stumble Guys are great all on their own, but they take a huge amount of inspiration from games like Vampire Survivors and Stumble Guys.

In this vein it's no surprise that NetEase are hopping onto the "Cutesy gameshow-style battle royale" bandwagon, a little bit late, with Eggy Party. Aside from the unusual egg-theming it seems a pretty simple riff on the "Guys" genre (Accident-prone-guys genre?). With the same kinds of minigames and character customisation.

Aside from the discussion about whether this is a timely game to release after Fall Guys has established itself on console and PC, while Stumble Guys dominates mobile, it also raises the possibility NetEase may be sticking their foot in it again. It [wouldn't be the first time that the company has veered too close to existing properties in its titles](#), although with Stumble Guys being the most visible it, Eggy Party may fly under the radar.

Aiming the game squarely at China may be a good idea too, as it seems the kind of inoffensive, socially-oriented fun that could establish itself well in that market. Could be that NetEase have a hit on their hands, or another albatross around the neck.

**Lewis Rees**

## Pop star Jay Chou sues NetEase for copyright infringement

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81301/pop-star-jay-chou-sues-netease-for-copyright-infringement/>

NetEase being accused of copyright infringement is nothing new. Whether there's any substance, some of the biggest companies and names across industries have faced such claims, whether it's artists accusing others of plagiarism or seeing their work used without their consent.

This isn't the first time NetEase has been accused of infringing on someone else's intellectual property in recent years. It isn't even the first time they've been accused of infringing on Jay Chou's property. They say that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, but as one of the world's biggest mobile game makers the company is far from insane. Perhaps the recent struggles faced by the Chinese games industry has led the company to make risky decisions, prioritising short-term profits on the assumption that it can regain its footing in the future? After all, Jay Chou is one of Taiwan's biggest music artists, with over 30 million records sold and numerous awards over his career.

In a sense, it appears that NetEase is seeking refuge in audacity - if you're going to use someone's music without their consent, a massive name like Chou is a bold choice, while

the established bad blood between the two avoids the risk of NetEase making new enemies. The previous lawsuit could also be used as precedent, so Chou could easily emerge as the winner of this latest bout.

## **Paige Cook**

### **92% of gamers are exclusively using phones**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81293/92-of-gamers-are-exclusively-using-phones/>

A massive 3,7 billion people are considered gamers, almost half of the world's population. The figures are huge, with 92% of gamers playing on mobile. Yet, I still find so much stigma attached to the mobile gaming platform.

You know the general talk of "Gaming on mobile isn't actually gaming," but clearly, mobile has the numbers. When I ask, "Why isn't mobile considered gaming?" I often hear that "They are just a cash grab." Well, to that, I say £70 for a console/PC game that then releases separate paid for DLCs, possibly containing microtransactions, loot boxes, or battle passes. Are those things not intended to take more of your money?

Sure, you can argue that games made for PC and Console may be a bigger affair or cost more to make, but mobile gaming is intended to be easily accessible and simple to pick up and play. These games aren't all trying to be big and flashy but rather something you have fun playing in smaller doses and want to return to.

Mobile games that balance fair gameplay with the incentive of 'pay to get things done faster' isn't just a mobile concept. Look at GTA Online, one of the biggest gaming franchises in the world. Releasing back in 2013 it now has a similar concept to many mobile games, people keep coming back for new events or updates, and when they can't get the new shiny car without playing for hours and hours, they simply spend their real money to get in-game currency. Don't even get me started on one of the biggest games in the industry, where people are spending a fortune just on cosmetic items.

The cash grab argument is wearing thin, and so too is mobile gaming not being capable of producing high quality products. We've come a long way from playing Snakes on an old Nokia and I'm excited to see what games the 92% will be playing on their mobile phones in the years to come.

April 6th (Schedule for the 7th)

**Iwan Morris**

[BLACKPINK The Game coming from developer Takeone | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

I used to share a flat with people in university who were into Kpop, and whilst I never really got the appeal I did appreciate that the whole industry knew how to exude glitz and glamour. There is obviously a downside to this with stars having their reputations and public appearances so tightly controlled, but the upside is that South Korea has star-making potential like no other.

No surprise then that when pop supergroup BTS announced a hiatus in order to attend their mandatory military service, alarm bells started ringing all across the Korean music industry. The hiatus was projected to cost the Korean economy - not just the music industry, but the actual country's economy - [somewhere in the region of billions](#).

It's no surprise then that companies are trying to boost the global recognition of Korea's many other pop groups. That's not to downplay Blackpink's success either, they're arguably the most popular girl-group in the world. But BTS is the one Kpop band your mum probably knows.

Takeone previously worked on BTS branded games like BTS World and BTS Universe, so tackling the task of bringing Blackpink to mobiles is something they're well-equipped for. But will it measure up to the same success their previous titles had?

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81237/nuverses-dragonheir-to-partner-with-dungeons-and-dragons/>

Dungeons and Dragons celebrates its fiftieth anniversary next year, and it's arguably never been bigger. What was once the subject of derision is now capturing the attention of audiences worldwide thanks to its inclusion in some of the 21st century's biggest and most acclaimed TV shows, such as Community and Stranger Things, as well as the recent release of the film Dungeons and Dragons: Honour Among Thieves.

Dragonheir will be released later this year, and capitalising on the success of Dungeons and Dragons with this crossover is a smart move which can boost its profile, as well as introduce legions of new players to the Dungeons and Dragons universe.

The crossover also indicates that developer SGRA Studio and publisher Nuverse see a lot of potential in Dragonheir, given their willingness to announce the crossover before the game's release. With Nuverse's Marvel Snap being one of the biggest hits of 2022, it's possible that other licence holders will be keeping a close eye on the success of this new collaboration, with a view to launch their own collaborations in the future.

**Paige Cook**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81231/35-to-46-of-gamers-will-accept-misleading-advertising/>

Most mobile gamers have experienced misleading game advertisements. Sometimes they simply make a game look better than it actually is, and other times it's an entirely different game. It's clear why this can be frustrating for players and raises questions on whether this type of false advertisement should have more effective regulations.

While the report shows that most players find these ads more interesting than the actual game, 35 to 46% of gamers would still stick around after seeing that the game isn't what they thought and judge the true gameplay experience.

It's important to remember how competitive the mobile gaming market is. With thousands of games accessible to players at the click of a button, having an ad that makes your game look flashier than it is likely means more downloads. For this reason, I think false ads will stick around, but are they worth it in the long run? It may be a successful way of marketing your game, but does it create long-term players or ones willing to make in-app purchases? And does it create distrust between the brand and the player, impacting future releases?

Insert Friday 31st March words here:

**Iwan Morris**

[Roblox's new advertising preempts legislation but still sees criticism | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

Again, this is one of those times where I need to reiterate my age and the world I grew up in. When I was younger, Roblox was nothing more than that weird, Minecraftish - although it actually predates that game - MMO you could play in a browser that had some mildly diverting games. If you told me that, in ten years time it would be one of the biggest metaverse platforms in the world and would also see criticism for the way it served ads to players, I'd probably think you were lying.

And it seems I wasn't just out of the loop either. Roblox's rise has been meteoric and it has accelerated to being a metaverse platform on par with Fortnite. I think a lot of that is down to user freedom and the variety of games on offer. But with that large youth audience comes the people looking to prey on them, in a variety of ways, but advertising is one of them.

I think from an ethical standpoint you really shouldn't be exposing kids to advertising or microtransaction-ridden gameplay, full stop. It doesn't help someone become a smart consumer and runs the risk of them making poor decisions later in life too. However, it shouldn't just be ethical but legal considerations that are taken into account.

Roblox was always like the wild west to me, it was born well before games like this were anything but novelties to the general public. Which means that it now has to rapidly accelerate its adoption of better ethical practices to keep up with potential legislation. One of the most interesting talks at PGC London 2023 was the one which covered this legislation and best practices.

I think Roblox is a more mature platform in terms of how long it's been around so I don't think we're going to have anyone worrying about being held accountable. But it's if they can actually control what is by now a monolithic platform.

### **Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/asia/news/81186/netease-games-enters-the-world-of-animation-with-anici-anime/>

Arguably, we're in the golden age of game adaptations. Outside of global smash hit *The Last of Us* the past few years have seen films the likes of *Uncharted* and *Detective Pikachu*, while more adaptations - such as *Dead by Daylight*, *Ghost of Tsushima*, and *Horizon Zero Dawn* - all have their own adaptations on the horizon.

Interestingly, many of these titles are being created, in part, by the game developers. PlayStation Pictures alone worked on several of the listed adaptations, with a slate of further titles in-line for the same treatment. The world is taking note of the vast range of narratives in the world of gaming, and giving the original developers significant input in the transition.

Despite this, mobile gaming is still something of an outlier. A few notable exceptions notwithstanding, we've yet to see the platform get the same level of inclusion in the worlds of film or television, but this could all change with NetEase's new moves into the world of anime. With a slate of mobile titles across genres, it's arguably perfectly poised to create titles based on mobile games, or else go in the opposite direction and create more mobile games based on anime, while simultaneously cutting down significantly on any licensing costs - and taking home a larger chunk of the profits.

This move also represents the next step in NetEase's attempts to diversify its revenue streams. The past few years have been tumultuous for the Chinese gaming industry, with more and more game makers taking steps to expand overseas and explore new sectors. NetEase has already made acquisitions and investments in console and PC developers, and by breaking into a new sector entirely it's well poised to make waves in Japan's notoriously difficult mobile gaming scene.

### **Paige Cook**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81197/ubisoft-clarify-the-use-of-ai-script-writing-ghostwriter/>

AI is undoubtedly the buzzword of 2023, so it's unsurprising that we already see game studios exploring these new possibilities. I see AI as a double-edged sword. While the technology is impressive and could be used to streamline processes, there's always the concern that real-life creatives will suffer at its digital hands.

In this case, Ubisoft is aware of these concerns and has instantly tried to reassure writers that AI won't be writing scripts and taking their jobs but instead aiding with more mundane tasks. They even go as far as to say that the Ghostwriter was made at the request of Ubisoft writers.



From a business perspective, it's easy to see the appeal of AI, it can potentially cut costs and save time in an increasingly competitive market. Studios aren't going to ignore AI, so it needs to be implemented in a way that still sees real people at the forefront of the development process, with a high quality being maintained across projects.

As it stands, the idea of AI writing simple NPC "barks" could work. It means writers have more time to work on complex dialogue and can use AI to help with their workload. My concern, however, is how long this harmony will last. When do studios start giving AI more responsibilities and real writers less creative freedom? And when do writers feel that AI isn't helping with their job but coming to take it?

24th March:

**Daniel Griffiths**

### [Unity take the next step, teasing AI development tools in new video](#)

It seems too good to be true, and - of course - it is... For now... Unity's AI teaser gives a promising glimpse into how the game-making tools giant would like to see its eventual quest for ease-of-use end up. The endgame for Unity appears to be to become the powerhouse behind an AI-driven entertainment engine that magically manifests whatever a game developer requires.

Don't waste time creating repetitive content, tweaking things that don't work and banging your head against your office cubicle. Just tell Unity what you want and it'll do the hard stuff (and the no-brainer obvious stuff) without you lifting a further finger.

And you don't need to be too head-in-the-clouds to imagine an even further future scenario where the game developer is cut out of the equation altogether and it's the user that's calling the shots. "Make me a version of Final Fantasy VII only without the bit where [edit: spoilers]" Medium term the results can only be good. More and better games made faster. Longer term? With the heroes taken down from their lofty pillars replaced by a vast level playing field stretching as far as the eye can see, with all the players playing the same game? Time will tell.

**Iwan Morris**

[Fishing Clash to cease distribution in China as NetEase closes subsidiary studio | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

This was an interesting story for me because of how it relates to the Chinese market and to the deal between NetEase and Blizzard. Fishing Clash was not some massively popular title, by the developer's own admission, and even with the game being abruptly canned it seems

revenue was on a downward trend anyway. However, with how unexpected it is, there's no surprise that it attributes the shuttering of Shanghai Online Games to an unspecified publishing deal between NetEase and another party.

Until I'm corrected I'm going to assume that in actuality this is Blizzard, and would make sense. After all, they had a very public breakup with NetEase before coming crawling back when a new deal didn't seem forthcoming. NetEase and Tencent as well as other Chinese companies are probably very wary that a lot of Western companies may be trying to "cut them loose" so to speak.

After all, China is no longer a secondary market, and even with a slump in growth due to the Covid pandemic and legislation, it's still a massively populous country with a huge mobile user base. It's no surprise then that companies like Blizzard and Microsoft - who insinuated CoD: Mobile would be axed when Warzone was released under their leadership - might want to take the lead and do things more their way instead of working with the mobile giants already in the region.

I know, rather seismic predictions for a game about fishing, right? But it's only one of many knock-on effects caused by the deal. And indicates that there's growing caution towards Western imports even as licences are agreed for them.

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81133/loot-boxes-not-gambling-says-canadian-judge/>

Loot boxes remain a controversial mechanic in the games space. Unlike simply purchasing a cosmetic, item, or character, implementing chance mechanics means that players can easily spend far more money trying to get what they want. While the mechanics have had a proven effect on revenue, critics have likened the system to gambling.

A Canadian judge declaring that loot boxes don't constitute gambling is interesting for a few reasons. Firstly, this puts Canada at odds with several territories, such as Belgium and the Netherlands, which have imposed strict restrictions on the use of loot boxes, if not banned them entirely.

Secondly, it implies a certain reluctance to acknowledge the power of gaming. Despite being the most profitable branch of the entertainment industry, gaming has historically been considered somewhat frivolous by many regulators. While they may acknowledge the fact that it's a popular hobby and a thriving industry, they don't consider the affect gaming can have on consumers. While the rationale behind the judge's decision - that EA only sells the loot boxes on its own site for virtual currency - has some merit, the fact remains that it still implements an element of chance, and that players can purchase in-game currency with real money to take part.

Whether or not loot boxes constitute gambling remains a topic of debate, with both advocates and detractors among consumers and regulatory bodies worldwide. It's likely we'll see more and more countries come out against the systems, but has there ever been a court which has so definitively come down on the side of developers utilising the technology?

Where does this leave loot boxes? Well, time will tell, but advocates may take this decision as evidence of a positive future.

17th of March

**Iwan Morris**

[Honor of Kings becomes Brazil's most successful free mobile game | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

To me, this was a really fascinating story. I had no idea before I started working in covering the mobile game industry just how big of a game Honor of Kings is. So I knew instantly that when they announced it was finally coming to Brazil - after delays due to Covid - that it was going to either be a massive success or a terrible failure.

Seems it was a success, and judging by the effort that went into hiring famous voice actors and ensuring the infrastructure was stable for the Brazilian market, Tencent and TiMi were hoping it would be as well. Whereas some of the other games they brought in, like Street Fighter: Duel have had a muted reception that can be pretty much summed up as "Just another gacha," Honor of Kings seems to really have potential to eclipse League of Legends outside of China, at least in some countries.

It also shows just how diverse the Brazilian and broader LatAm market is. It's a huge area and you have different challenges in each country, which I think is why they brought Honor of Kings there first. It shows that they can plan for the most challenging but also most rewarding market, and hopefully end up repeating that success in other areas of the globe too.

It'll definitely be interesting to follow, and honestly more competition in a genre that's been dominated by League (who remembers when Heroes of the Storm was the next big esports title?) would be healthy.

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81087/dead-by-daylight-mobile-launches-the-next-era-of-horror-with-a-horror-icon/>

Dead by Daylight is arguably the biggest live-service horror game on the planet at the moment. The game is entering its seventh year and since launch has seen crossovers with some of the biggest names in the genre, whether that's in film, gaming, or even literature.

The core gameplay loop has remained relatively unchanged since launch. Killers hunt down survivors, survivors fix generators to power the exit gates and escape. Variety comes from the range of killers and perks available, as opposed to new objectives.

The mobile version has, for a long time, been playing catch-up. The Next Era of Horror update introduces the Sadako Rising chapter, which was first released for other platforms in March 2022, and several characters have yet to be released on mobile devices. However, it

appears that Behaviour and NetEase may be using the mobile version to experiment with the core gameplay loop.

Dead by Daylight Mobile already had unique kill animations and cosmetics, but the introduction of long-requested features still absent from either the console or PC versions, notably in-game chat, sees the mobile version pull ahead of other platforms, while the addition of the relic system could shake up the game like never before.

Are Behaviour and NetEase seeing what works before taking the changes to other platforms? Perhaps. A movie adaptation was announced earlier this month, which could bring the game to the attention of new audiences. This is arguably the perfect time to shake up the game like never before, and mobile could well be leading the way.

## 10th of March

### Iwan Morris

[Playtika takes potshots at Candy Crush with new Best Fiends ad campaign | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

I found this to be a really interesting story because, on the face of it, it seems like a bit of an outrageous move. I mean, Best Fiends is a good game, but a Candy Crush killer? It's a bit like when games were marketing themselves in the 90s as "Doom Killers". Nothing can replace the original...or can it?

Candy Crush Saga is immensely popular, and has been since I was in high-school. Which is almost a decade now. And that amount of time can slowly erode the playerbase of even the most popular game. Having hardcore fans is great for a cult classic title, but not necessarily for a live service, and when you think about it that way Playtika taking shots at King doesn't seem so brazen.

I don't think the ad creative is anything to write home about, although the outrageous subject matter is sure to get people talking. But in many ways, the more I think about it the more bold the ad seems. "Download free, play sugar free", and many of the veiled references to Candy Crush in their statements show a clear throughline of thought that went into this campaign.

Is it going to be successful? For Playtika, it may need to be, and it may be cold comfort to the original developers but the Israeli-based publisher could absolutely use a hit in 2023.

### Lewis Rees

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/81028/gameloft-shutters-budapest-studio-amid-shif-away-from-mobile/>

Although I have an appreciation for mobile games, and that appreciation has grown since beginning my job here at Pocketgamer.biz, I'm primarily a console gamer. When I was growing up, any phone with a game was high tech, but didn't offer the same parity of experience as the PS1.

That gap is, slowly but steadily, decreasing. Consoles, and even PC to an extent, are dominated by more infrequent, but greater, jumps in quality, whether that's a leap in visual quality or the introduction of haptic feedback. Mobile may dominate in terms of revenue, but to the layman console and PC games often dominate gaming discussions, and developers often see a greater level of renown and award recognition.

This shift to console and PC development by Gameloft can easily be read as an attempt to capitalise on the recent success of Disney Dreamlight Valley, but why cut off such significant revenue streams by narrowing your focus? Notably, Dreamlight Valley utilises the same free-to-play model that the Budapest studio specialised in.

Will Gameloft regret its decision in the future? That remains to be seen. Downsizing has been an ongoing trend in the industry as developers deal with the contraction of the market following the Covid boom, and perhaps it decided to focus on what it thought of as more "disposable". Mobile gaming may rule in terms of revenue, but in the greater gaming ecosystem many still see the platform as less serious, which is a stigma that grows more ridiculous with each passing year, and one that may take some time yet to overcome.

### **3rd March**

Daniel Griffiths

Xbox's Phil Spencer talks Microsoft's moves on mobile, plus Activision Blizzard and AI

You have to laugh, don't you? How tortuous can this whole thing get? How confused, multi-angled and ass-backwards does the story have to get before someone cuts through and makes it make sense.

But mercifully the clouds parted this week and someone actually said what we've all been thinking. Step up Microsoft's chief Bruce Campbell lookalike, Phil Spencer, a man who speaks his mind and - frankly - should have been handed the mic months ago on this particular debate.

You've got to love Bruce's, sorry, Phil's bold admission that "it's painfully obvious, is that we don't really have any capability on mobile" but that's the truth and that's the reason why Microsoft are buying Blizzard.

The words – finally actually spoken out loud words from an important Microsoft figurehead – combined with them signing deals with any and all takers for Call of Duty (except Sony who still have an axe to grind in the aquiblizz mill) FINALLY clearly spell out Microsoft's intentions and – to my mind – make the whole 'stop the takeover' argument completely moot.

The only gnarly aspect of this wholly accurate dissection is the fact that it's taken them a year to get there.

Lewis Rees

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80976/sony-reportedly-eyeing-up-acquisition-of-take-two-interactive/>

Sony has made waves in the mobile space for its frequent, and loud, attempts to scupper Microsoft's acquisition of Activision Blizzard, so in some ways the news that the company is itself eyeing up its own acquisition may seem hypocritical.

One big factor in this? Grand Theft Auto. The franchise sits just 30 million copies behind Call of Duty in terms of sales, with Grand Theft Auto V being the second highest-grossing video game of all time, helped in part by the numerous rereleases the game has seen since its original release in 2013. With a new Grand Theft Auto game on the horizon, this arguably makes Take-Two Interactive a prime acquisition target.

This acquisition would also give PlayStation ownership of Zynga, just as its own ambitions in mobile gaming are reaching the next level.

This deal could, arguably, result in a cold war type situation, which might make Microsoft's deal with Activision Blizzard easier for Sony to stomach. Should Microsoft decide to make Call of Duty an Xbox exclusive in the future, something many analysts and regulators have noted as a possibility, Sony could return in kind by doing the same with Grand Theft Auto. With both companies at risk of losing access to the other's properties, this deal could force them to maintain availability of their own.

Is the deal hypocritical? Well, that depends on Sony's intent. Zynga is likely to be identified as a prime driver of the deal should it be officially announced, but if it makes any moves to restrict GTA, or any other popular properties under the Take-Two umbrella, Sony could face the same regulatory barriers it's helped build in Microsoft's path.

Iwan Morris

["Hypercasual isn't dead, it's just overworked" - Kwalee pivots to hybridcasual | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

To me, this seems like a pretty clear response to Alex Shea's comment that "[Hypercasual is dead.](#)" And whilst he wasn't saying it was an absolute, like "Oh, the entire genre is gone and buried," Kwalee are still saying that it will remain a relatively significant part of their portfolio. However, the fact that they're diversifying - to me at least - indicates that they want to try and preempt any major drops in revenue from hypercasual.

I think it's a pretty obvious decision. I mean hypercasual's whole selling point is being short and relatively disposable right? But these games don't just disappear over time, despite concerns about game preservation. These games will stay around for ages, so you're going to be continuously fighting against thousands if not millions of similar games, maybe even your own titles.

Indeed, as Alex Shea observed, Voodoo's most popular games in 2022 were existing titles and not newly developed ones. This isn't the only factor of course, rising CPI is one. As if you've got low retention and player time, the cost of CPI rising even slightly is a major problem.

Therefore, it's better to start creating games with deeper mechanics, progression and core gameplay loops that people want to return to. Developing a loyal audience is what all studios, developers and other media businesses aspire to, a group of people who'll provide revenue no matter what you give them - to a point at least. If people don't recognise your name but only "Hypercasual Game #40004", then you're playing a losing game.

## February 23rd

Daniel Griffiths

It's a knotty one. While it's hard not to cast minds back to AI-gone-crazy disasters such as the Butlerian Jihad of Frank Herbert's dune, claustrophobic 70s computer-gone-powercrazy thriller The Forbin Project or, more recently (and most famously) Terminator's all-seeing, all conquering Skynet, the current upswing of AI is - right now, at least - offering all of us creative superpowers that, in the right hands, can make amazing things happen.

Now we can all write poetry, paint a landscape or capture the perfect image. And game developers - no matter how small or un-bankrolled - can create assets that rival the big guys, allowing them to put all their energy, money and manpower into creativity, rule-breaking and ceiling smashing.

Kwalee's all-in on AI at such an early stage is therefore admirable. With years of experience at the sharp end of budgets and deadlines behind them, AI only opens doors and makes better games for these old pros. This is no shortcut, this is gearing up with bigger and better creative weapons and using them to make an even bigger blast.

We hope that AI continues to be a force for good and the pessimist's industry armageddon remains science fiction.

## Iwan Morris

[Rovio Classics: Angry Birds to be delisted | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

For me, it often feels like I have an outsider perspective on some parts of the mobile game industry. That sort of perspective is extremely beneficial, but you don't really need it to see that Rovio has made a major PR blunder. By essentially implying [that their remake of the original Angry Birds was cannibalising sales from their newer titles](#), they made it seem as if there had been a noticeable dip in quality since their flagship title.

Now, regardless of if you think that's true (some speculate that [the quality of the remake may've been an issue itself](#)) that's the message they're sending. Anticipating that this might

have been a problem should've been something caught in the concept stage, especially as this was made in response to overwhelming demand from nostalgic fans that wanted to play the original.

Personally, I think Rovio should've stayed the course. One year is a relatively short time, even though it can feel like an eternity when scrutinising sales and other data. But the fact is that sooner or later, without new content people would've gotten bored of the original Angry Birds. The sort of people who only want to pay \$1 for a mobile game are not the audience Rovio wants nor needs in any case. Fixing the game if it were of poor quality is another matter, but doing that could've been an easy PR win itself.

Of course, adding IAP would've been another answer, but charging for something that used to be free is never a good look either. Maybe integrating it into Angry Birds 2 as an unlockable feature? That \$1 price-tag would've looked exceptionally good for unlocking a whole new game's worth of levels, and when players bounced off the game it would only be a short step into the rest of the Angry Birds catalogue.

But delisting it and then admitting it was due to the "impact on our wider game portfolio" is not a good look at all, no matter how justified it may be. Whether Rovio reverses course or keeps on going, the sooner this blows over for them the better.

Lewis Rees

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80889/blumhouse-gets-set-to-shock-with-new-gaming-arm/>

Horror may well be my favourite genre of all and, while it may have something of a reputation of being less serious some others, it's telling that some of the most beloved games out there (Silent Hill 2, Resident Evil 4, The Last of Us) are horror titles. However, it's a genre that's routinely struggled on mobile platforms. Good horror relies on immersion, which is arguably one of mobile gaming's biggest barriers.

Blumhouse opening a game studio is news on its own. While there's no shortage of games either based on horror films (Friday the 13th, The Evil Dead, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre) or which feature characters from horror films (Dead by Daylight), one of the most renowned names in horror cinema moving into gaming on its own is big news, made even more notable by the decision to develop mobile titles alongside console and PC offerings.

[As I've said before](#), many horror games on mobile devices fall short by attempting to emulate the experience of another platform, rather than focusing on what mobile games can do better. Bluetooth, AR, text interaction, there are a variety of tools available to mobile platforms where others can't quite catch up, which could make Blumhouse the ideal company to really help horror find a place on mobile.

Blumhouse a company that's repeatedly shown a willingness to play with format, and isn't afraid to take risks in terms of both story and presentation. While the company has occasionally fallen flat (such as with the much maligned Fantasy Island, a prequel to the seventies sitcom of the same name) this willingness to experiment instead of focusing on what works could see the company finally do what, arguably, no studio has managed yet,



and create a horror which excels on mobile devices by utilising the unique features of the platform.

## February 17

Iwan Morris

[Tencent to release Chinese exclusive Honor of Kings in Brazil | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

I think this trend is absolutely one to watch - and not much needs to be said about why - the fact that Tencent is bringing formerly Chinese-exclusive games to the West is certainly a big gamble. You only need to look as far as the derisive comments their Street Fighter: Duel trailer received from players to understand why it isn't just a case of bringing an already successful game to other markets and making even more money.

China is a very different market to America or Europe. And if Finland is the development home of mobile games, then China is the biggest consumer by far. But this is in spite of, not because of, the government and its regulatory crackdowns. There's a great video by a channel on Youtube - which talks about Chinese film history and the contemporary industry - which goes into detail about horror movies in China that gives a great idea of why Chinese regulators can be so stifling for businesses.

He noted that because regulations for film change so often and with such little warning, horror movies - which are the most likely to fall foul of laws against sensitive subjects - have to be pushed out at a rapid rate. Which leads to them being considered trashy and exploitative at best. This is the same sort of regulatory opaqueness we're seeing hit the Chinese game industry. Which is a shame when you consider how successful and dominant China has been in the mobile game scene.

I think these titles coming to other markets is a sign that Tencent and companies like it are trying their hardest to diversify their revenue streams. If they can capture even a tenth of what they make domestically from other markets, it'll make the effect from a potential new regulatory crackdown less severe. I don't think regulation is bad, but when it comes suddenly, without warning or consideration for those affected, it can do more harm than good.

Lewis Rees

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80854/machine-zone-announces-new-final-fantasy-mobile-game/>

Final Fantasy is one of the biggest game franchises in history, and one that holds a special place in my heart. The franchise was arguably the first that made consumers worldwide take note of the potential of gaming as a storytelling medium.

Mobile gaming, for all its success in terms of revenue, has somewhat struggled to generate the same level of enthusiasm from players as other platforms. Casual games may dominate in terms of downloads and revenue, but many more “serious” gamers have a skewed perception that this represents mobile gaming as a whole, and that developers on the platform are solely creating games with weak storylines (if any) and simple gameplay loops.

Arguably, mobile gaming has yet to break this perception. While some console games have been ported to mobile phones, they’ve yet to inspire the same level of enthusiasm. Similarly, many mobile spin-offs of established games franchises have focused on offering what developers see as “mobile” experiences, such as endless runners.

Final Fantasy has already seen numerous games released on mobile platforms, and it’s possible that the franchise could repeat history and make players worldwide take note of the potential of mobile gaming, doing away with the idea that developers need to work on a “legitimate” platform to release a “legitimate” game. After all, it took seven games and ten years for Final Fantasy to take off worldwide, and this time around the brand is world-renowned, letting the company utilise that name recognition to drive sales.

## **10th February**

Daniel Griffiths

### [The Horizon franchise is reportedly eyeing a mobile debut](#)

Well, well, well. What goes around comes around. Consoles and hi-spec PCs have had it too good for too long. All that raw processing horse-power. All those £60 games (perhaps even £70 for the upcoming next instalment in the Zelda series, if rumours are to be believed). And they create gaming franchises that couldn't possibly exist anywhere else and which wouldn't find an audience even if they did...

And all the while the smart money moves to mobile – home of the biggest gaming audience and the potential to make the most revenue. So the notion that one of the biggest, most ambitious, most 'flagship' of high-profile 'next gen' franchises could be heading to mobile doesn't come as any kind of surprise. It's more the fact that after bragging about the heavyweight nature of such a 'proper' game, that they've the nerve to come knocking in the first place.

Well, mobile's door is always open and big names are always welcome inside. Just a warning. The rules are rather different here, but if you get it right you can win big. Who's next for taking their games to the real next generation?

## **Iwan Morris**

### [Xsolla to partner with Mastercard for mobile payment support | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

I think the thing that struck me the most about the flurry of Xsolla announcements this week was that it was, well, a flurry. Clearly they've got big plans for 2023 and it's all based on bringing big money into mobile. Cloud gaming is big business and Mastercard are of course one of the biggest payment processors and credit card companies on the planet. I still talk to people about mobile gaming and see surprise when I mention how much money is involved

in it, so it doesn't surprise me that Xsolla thinks there's still niches to be exploited and solutions to be offered.

I think it also speaks to there being a potentially larger and more diverse number of developers and publishers coming to the mobile platform. Solutions like these are, to my knowledge, more likely to be developed in-house or already be in place in larger companies. Therefore Xsolla will most likely benefit, and benefit from, smaller studios looking to navigate the world of payments and monetisation.

The specific purpose of the partnership to help simplify and streamline payments is also interesting. Because I know older individuals can often find using smartphones and other devices difficult, but many still enjoy puzzle games and other genres. Not only that, but payment protection to prevent children from making purchases has been a hot topic recently, so clearly Xsolla and Mastercard want to get out in front and introduce their own means of safeguarding family finances.

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80785/eu-issues-microsoft-with-antitrust-warning/>

Acquisitions are always a big deal, but Microsoft's attempted acquisition of Activision Blizzard stands out, not just due to the scale but how it can affect others. While the deal has been approved in some markets, many others have launched investigations, with the FTC deciding in December to sue in an attempt to block the deal. Now, with the EU formally issuing Microsoft with a warning, the question of whether or not the deal is viable becomes more and more pressing, especially as the UK's competition and markets authority (CMA) also voiced its opposition to the deal this week. Now, with three key markets seemingly in agreement about the possible anticompetitive prospects of the deal, Microsoft Blizzard face a battle on three fronts.

Microsoft and Activision Blizzard both seem to remain committed to the deal, but it's possible that this optimism has its limits. With the FTC's court case with Microsoft regarding the deal likely forcing the deal to be abandoned, at least temporarily, it's possible that the company may get cold feet.

While some concern from competitors may have been expected, it's unlikely that either company could have foreseen the level of scrutiny legislators have put the acquisition under, and with the UK and EU both agreeing with the USA that the deal could have negative impact of both consumers and competitors, it's possible that Microsoft will need to make more significant concessions to keep everyone happy, and may decide to utilise this forced pause in proceedings as an opportunity to step away from the table.

**Iwan Morris**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80742/amazon-have-reportedly-purchased-tomb-raider-franchise-embracer-group-for-600-million/>

The past few years have seen a sharp upswing in game adaptations that haven't just been okay- they've been... well. Good. The Last of Us may have finally cemented the potential for game adaptations to a wider audience but we've seen well-received adaptations of the likes of Detective Pikachu, Cyberpunk 2077, and there are more on the way.

As one of the biggest franchises in gaming history, Tomb Raider has already seen multiple attempts at translating Lara Croft's adventures into a new medium, with varying degrees of success, but this rumoured acquisition could just signal the biggest, and best, adaptation yet. Amazon's position in streaming can't be understated, and with a TV series already announced as being in the works, it may be hoping that it has a big hit on its hands.

The beauty of Tomb Raider as a franchise, at least in terms of adaptations, is that there's plenty of material to draw from, and Lara can just as easily stray from the established path. As such, the series could do just as well as an adventure of the week show as it could with a single, series long adventure. The Last of Us may see success as a (mostly) faithful retelling of the series, but the Tomb Raider series could experiment with new storylines just as easily as established ones, whether she's hunting for El Dorado or exploring Atlantis. There's plenty to explore, and we have one of gaming's most beloved heroines to lead us.

Of course, this does raise some questions about the franchise itself, which was acquired by Embracer Group in 2022. In its history the series has changed hands several times, and while this acquisition is exciting, it's worth noting that Amazon has yet to make a sizable impact in the games space. If these rumours are true, then this acquisition could see the company finally break into the sector in a big way, as well as getting around licensing issues which could otherwise impact future adaptations.

However, the rumoured acquisition could cause some issues elsewhere, such as the release of Tomb Raider Reloaded later this month, announced the very next day. While it's unlikely that issues like this weren't taken into account in the case that these rumours prove to be true, it's possible that the long-delayed game could see issues in the future.

### **Iwan Morris**

[Aarni Lanakangas talks "Shifting genres while keeping your core identity" | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGBiz](#)

I really enjoyed Aarni's talk when I saw it at PGC London, especially listening to their discussion about moving genres and how they viewed it. I do like talking about the business side of stuff, but too often it gets mired in money, advertising and other very dry topics. I think his talk was a good example of how you can discuss the artistic rationale whilst showing how it relates to business.

As for the content, it was really interesting seeing the progression from a game like Hills of Steel, which has a massive influence from flash games in my mind, to something like Hills of Steel 2 with its own unique art-style. Then onto Hills of Steel: Commander, I did like how they specifically geared the overview of the player's base to be a moment of calm, I think overwhelming a player with visual info on a lot of games is a real mood-killer. It makes you feel like you don't have time to prepare for the next bit of gameplay.

As for keeping identity, it did heavily remind me of how Command & Conquer tried that with Renegade. That game was definitely interesting to look at from a historical angle. Especially how they tried to adapt exaggerated RTS units and buildings into a more ground-level FPS perspective. Whilst Hills of Steel isn't making that big of a leap it's definitely a difference in looks and feel.

Shifting genres is a massive risk, but I especially admire the choice to change what they've done in terms of game design philosophy. I find 'golden rules' tend to be stuff you can break when you're confident enough. When you've mastered the basics it's always good to stretch and bend what's considered to be accepted wisdom. After all, making a game for yourself sounds like an easy recipe for disaster, but passion projects exist for a reason.

I'm hoping in the future I'll see more developers talk about topics like this in-depth. It was really informative for someone like me who looks at stuff from the perspective of a player very often.

Respawn Studio, the EA subsidiary responsible for the development of Apex Legends, stated that "we aim to provide players with games that are consistently outstanding. Following a strong start, the content pipeline for Apex Legends Mobile has begun to fall short of that bar for quality, quantity, and cadence."

"Although disappointing, we are proud of the game we launched, are grateful for the support of the Apex Legends community, and are confident that this is the right decision for players."

Apex Legends Mobile will officially be shut down on May 1, however the game will be pulled from storefronts and real money IAP's will be disabled from today. EA will not be offering refunds of any real money purchases made previously.

EA also announced that it is ending the development of Battlefield Mobile. The company stated that "as the industry has evolved and our strategy to create a deeply connected Battlefield ecosystem has taken shape, we decided to pivot from the current direction to deliver our vision for the franchise and to meet the expectations of our players."

Alongside the cancellation of Battlefield Mobile, EA announced that the game's developer [Industrial Toys](#) will be shut down. At present, it's unclear whether this decision will see employees lose their jobs, or if they will be offered other positions within the organisation.

27th of January

### **Iwan Morris**

[Brainamics measures your player's brainwaves so you can make better games | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

The booth for Brainamics was one that caught my eye during our set-up for PGC London 2023. I looked at it and thought it looked comically sinister, with this big white plastic headset covered in plugs and someone holding a controller. But by the time I'd finished my chat with CEO Philipp Zent about the tech, I'd been swayed.

The noninvasive nature of it is one thing, that and the very 'space age' idea of it all. 'You can study your players' brainwaves to know how they feel about your game' sounds like something out of a comic book after all. But it's got broadly positive potential for the gaming industry. Even if 'scanning a person's brain' can be a difficult idea to sway someone on.

The idea that 'players don't know what they want' is something many designers struggle with. What someone says in a focus group or on a survey can differ to what they actually connect with. Being able to bypass the nature of people to obfuscate their true feelings means you can more easily understand why your game is good, bad, boring or otherwise.

I think the biggest 'risks' aren't any brain-frying accidents, but rather that this might be a temptation to further dilute the art of game design into a science. Trying desperately to hit checkmarks and have the maximum 'positive' reactions instead of trying to balance highs and lows, payoffs and patience, to create the best reaction during the game.

Hopefully, developers and publishers will look at this as a way to better understand players as people. Not a way to refine them down to a set of statistics more so than they are already.

### **Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80719/dataai-reveal-the-global-trends-and-tips-you-need-for-success-in-2023/>

Pocket Gamer Connects London kicked off the year's conferences with a bang, and our biggest conference to date came at what could arguably be called a turning point for the mobile gaming industry. 2022 saw the market decline for the first time in its history following a period of unprecedented growth, regulatory changes saw game makers struggle to adapt, and the world's biggest market, China, imposed sweeping restrictions on play time.

Data.ai's predicted trends for 2023, backed up by analysing the performance of various games and genres over the past several years, can not only guide game makers through the coming year, but potentially further. More creative and data-driven UA policies may be becoming more popular due to IDFA changes, but it also makes good business in a world where people are growing increasingly concerned with privacy. Games based on existing IPs may have previously been seen as a risky prospect, but adapting existing franchises into mobile game form can help game makers alleviate the increased difficulty of user acquisition

in the new landscape. Finally, spreading focus can help game makers expand their market reach and global brand.

Of course, if there's anything the past few years has taught us it's that the market, despite its resilience as a whole, isn't immune from turbulence. As such, it's possible that things could change significantly, and the landscape in a year, or even six months, could look drastically different than it does today. However, game makers would be wise to take note of Data.ai's report, and think about how they can apply those predictions to their business models.

## **Daniel Griffiths**

### **Matchmade's Jiri Kupiainen gives us 10 weeks to save the games industry at PG Connects London**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80705/matchmades-jiri-kupiainen-give-us-10-weeks-to-save-the-games-industry-at-pocket-gamer-connects-london/>

It's all too easy to wring your hands and say "oh dear" on topics such as climate change but putting your money where your mouth is and doing something about it is the admirable alternative option. And if I owned an airline round about now, after Jiri Kupiainen's talk at Pocket Gamer Connects London, I'd be worried about filling my next plane.

Fact is – as Kupiainen ably spelt out at PGC – most in-person trans-continental meet-ups aren't really to get the job done, but more to flatter the egos of everyone involved. And this from a guy that – self confession – had already used up his lifetime quota of CO2 generation many, many times doing just that.

Sure, we're all sick to death of getting our bookshelves 'just so' and getting expert at hiding that lovebite/spot/tattoo in video calls, but the answer isn't to hop on the first plane out of here to show how 'boss' you are.

Kupiainen's take is to take it lo-tech. His road trips with his team look like great fun and an opportunity to spend time and make connections with his people in ways that VCs and rushed globe-hopping could never equal.

Right now, alongside GamesForest.Club's Maria Wagner the two are sustainably travelling around Europe to spread the message and show what can be done, bringing an end to needless air travel and promoting genuine connection over wasteful bravado.

We'll be following their travels right here on PocketGamer.biz. Be sure to subscribe to their YouTube channel to see they're journey and the industry leaders they're visiting right here.

## **Entries for January 20**

Daniel Griffiths

In a time of financial uncertainty it can feel like everything that used to make sense, just got a little weird. Take for example Google, who – like most of tech – is feeling the pinch to the degree that they just offed 12,000 workers. Yet rather than feel the wrath of the stock market, their share price actually went up. So when you want to impress, you expand and spend and employ more people... Share price goes up... And when the city get's apprehensive about your future profits?... You let 5% of that new workforce go in 'economising' measures. And... Your share price goes up again. It's a win win.

And so this week we have the 'troubled' Playtika (who've had their own bout of cost cutting in recent times) making ever stronger moves to buy the equally 'troubled' Rovio the creators and owners of the hugely popular Angry Birds franchise which... is pretty much the entire company at this point. Company with dwindling future prospects buys company with dwindling future prospects? So does this spend-to-save recession magic work every time? Do two wrongs make a right? So long as the share price goes up, who cares?

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80650/apology-not-accepted-netease-refuses-to-take-activision-blizzard-back/>

Activision Blizzard's decision to walk away from a deal with NetEase came, quite frankly, as a surprise. The two companies have had a deal in place for some time, and helped bring some of the world's most popular and profitable games, mobile or otherwise, to China. As such, you'd expect NetEase to pull out all the stops in order to make a deal possible.

Likewise, Activision Blizzard's decision to walk away from the table without a solid back-up plan in place doesn't just mean Chinese consumers lose access to a slate of popular titles, but the company itself loses a significant revenue stream while it searches for a new partner.

Ultimately, we don't know the original conditions of the deal which the two companies attempted to negotiate. Perhaps Activision Blizzard demanded more than NetEase were willing to pay, or perhaps NetEase demanded a larger cut of the profits. In either case, Blizzard stepped away from the deal... only to try and renegotiate the deal last week, extending the partnership for another six months.

NetEase have refused to renew the deal, for reasons that remain unclear. Perhaps it wasn't satisfied with a six month extension, taking a "You've made your bed, now lie in it" approach? Likewise, it appears that walking away from an existing partnership without firm plans in place has proven, once again, to be a bad move. While Activision Blizzard are in the final stages of negotiation with a new partner, the current deal is currently due to end on January 23, with the affected games being taken off the Chinese market on the 24th. While a last minute Hail Mary is certainly possible, it's likely that Blizzard would need to make significant concessions, perhaps including a longer extension of the existing deal, to make that possible. The most likely option, at least as I see it, is that the deal will lapse as



expected, and Activision Blizzard's titles will be unavailable for Chinese consumers until a new deal is finalised and the necessary framework is in place.

**Iwan morris**

[Deleted Facebook post: Tencent will bring new PUBG Mobile Super League to South- | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

I'm sure people are tired of hearing about Blizzard this week, but once again the comparison Mark Cai made between the Overwatch League and this rumoured PUBG Mobile eSports franchise is very, very apt. I've often expressed how frustrated I am about the missed potential of Overwatch, from a story and a game perspective. Many have observed that the game balance seems to be eSports first and game second, what with the closed franchise nature of the Overwatch League, this can make this supposed showcase of the world's best players feel very artificial.

In contrast Tencent, the perpetual gaming boogieman, are opening up at least some slots for qualifying teams judging by the rumour. If that turns out to be true it'd be a dramatically more player-friendly approach to the eSports format than former favourites Blizzard have done. Part of this is probably down to the vast amount of eSports fans and PUBG Mobile players.

Judging by many estimates on player count, PUBG Mobile may by some estimates outclass Overwatch by a significant margin. When it first came out, Overwatch was a bona fide cultural phenomenon and marketed as the new 'blockbuster' from Blizzard. PUBG has often been seen as the runner-up meanwhile, as Fortnite overtakes it in battle-royale dominance.

Now however, Overwatch has slowly receded into the background. No longer prominent but part of the background noise of eSports and online shooters. PUBG Mobile could stand to ascend and reach a new peak, something that would allow it to establish dominance on a platform that has a massive reach in South-East Asia. That of mobile.

### **Entries for January 13**

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80594/saudi-arabias-pif-increases-its-stake-in-nintendo-to-6/>

I have somewhat mixed feelings about countries, or government-owned funds, investing in the games industry.

While I absolutely support countries funding development, I believe that investing directly into certain companies can be a somewhat risky move from the view of both consumers and existing shareholders. The reason for this is that it gives these countries a more direct say in the direction the company goes in future game development, which can result in characters, storylines, or settings being altered to fit that country's social ideals and policies.

Saudi Arabia is a country which has strict censorship laws in contrast to numerous other countries. Even Japan, while more conservative in some ways than Western countries, features a sizable part of the media devoted to LGBT+ characters (for example)

encompassing games, manga, anime, and live action films, all of which are strictly banned in Saudi Arabia.

By owning 6 percent of Nintendo, the country has a certain amount of sway in the direction the company takes in the future which could see games being adapted to more directly reflect Saudi Arabian values from the outset, as opposed to being censored for release within the country. This could potentially result in Nintendo developers imposing new restrictions in order to avoid controversy, or at the very least the PIF protesting against the inclusion of content Saudi Arabian may find objectionable.

Shareholders have seemingly voiced their displeasure with the investment, with shares in Nintendo falling 1.8 percent following the announcement. This perhaps signifies increasing concern with the PIF's potential to influence Nintendo's decision-making progress in the future, even as content which may irk the country's regulators becomes increasingly commonplace, and accepted, in the games space.

### **Iwan Morris**

[eSports sponsorships are falling, but mobile could weather the storm | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

When I wrote about this story, I was going off the very intriguing notion that Bloomberg put forward in their article, which seemingly predicted a lot of doom and gloom for the eSports scene. As I laid out, I think the reason a lot of 'big' sponsors from businesses such as car manufacturing are stepping back is because the eSports crowd is much different than their regular sports viewers.

Their main audience is the middle-class, people for whom a new car is a serious proposition. But if you're an eSports follower you're likely to be young, technologically savvy and from an urban area. When you want more gaming equipment, a new browser extension or peripherals the last thing on your mind will be a Hyundai.

Of course, the point about FTX is an excellent one. Samuel Bankman-Fried has become everyone's punching bag recently, from those angry about his damage to the crypto economy at such a crucial time, to those engaging in schadenfreude about 'cryptobros' losing out. However, for those whose livelihoods in eSports depended on FTX's sponsorships, it's not a laughing matter.

This is why I pointed to the Snapdragon Pro Series as being an excellent example of eSports sponsorships that understand the very basics of their audience. You watch mobile eSports, therefore you'd want a powerful, gaming capable phone, right? Seems a basic idea, but it touches on the most obvious aspect of advertising, which is understanding your audience.

### **Daniel Griffiths**

# Ubisoft for sale? The games giant is rumoured to be actively pursuing acquisition

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80601/ubisoft-is-reportedly-eyeing-up-an-acquisition-by-a-nother-company/>

Really? One bad year and you're looking for a way out? Come on Ubisoft, you're one of the good guys. You literally are better than this. My gaming loves lineage is long and the Ubisoft brand crops up more times than most. Times were when a publisher's name on the box meant as much as the dev studio involved and Ubisoft played the game to perfection, carefully selecting new property to invest in, nurturing new talent and putting their money where their mouth is.

The risks were immense of course. Springing million here and there in the hope on bagging a hit from a new franchise, or recognising an indie-games talent and giving them the budget to go Triple A isn't for the feint of heart. But Ubisoft got it right more often than not.

Of course they're no stranger to the buy-out game themselves, hoovering up brands and big names but always ploughing the profits back to to ensure that they were always outputting their fare share of genuine new power franchises.

So is it really all about the money? You have one stinker and it's time to get swallowed up and throw in the towel? How long before there are five publishers on the planet (most likely owned by the hardware or delivery system required to play their games)? We hope is isn't so and that Ubisoft can find a way to stay strong and keep on.

## Entries for January 6 2023

**Lewis Rees**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80532/are-the-ftc-and-microsoft-talks-at-a-standstill/>

The Microsoft/Activision Blizzard acquisition - or Acqivision as we like to call it - dominated the mobile news cycle last year, and it's one that's still ongoing. If anything, things are heating up with the revelation that the FTC was suing to block the deal.

The crux of the issue is how the deal could affect competitors. A specific point of contention is the possibility that Microsoft will make the hugely successful Call of Duty franchise an Xbox exclusive - something which the company has repeatedly denied, despite previous

refusals to sign any form of binding contract confirming their intention to maintain the franchise's availability of Sony consoles.

Although the FTC claim that no substantive talks have taken place, there may be more to the story than it claims - notably, Microsoft indicated its willingness to sign a consent decree confirming its intention to continue publishing Call of Duty games for the PlayStation for at least the next ten years. While this does signify a major step by Microsoft to address the concerns of regulators, and adds credence to its repeated claims that the primary reason for the acquisition is Activision Blizzard's strength on mobile platforms, it appears that it's fallen short of the FTC's expectations.

However, this does result in an uphill battle for the FTC if they hope to successfully block the deal, as it does represent a major concession on Microsoft's part, despite the FTC's concerns that these concessions don't go far enough.

Where will the acquisition go? That remains uncertain. Despite the growing list of countries approving the deal, the fact remains that several others are actively investigating the deal and how it could affect competitors. Just one major market deciding to block the merger could negatively affect its prospects and, while the FTC's prospects of winning the case have decreased somewhat, it's still possible that the judge will find in its favour.

### **Iwan Morris**

[Vampire Survivors developer takes new approach to monetisation | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

I think the view of developer poncle, about the subject of 'predatory monetisation' is a very legitimate one. It's fair to say many monetisation methods are not necessarily player-friendly, in my opinion. In my experience as well, it consistently drives all but the most dedicated players off, hence phenomena such as the gacha 'whale' who spend huge amounts, making up for low spend elsewhere.

But at the same time I sympathise with developers and studios who take more aggressive approaches to monetisation. Mobile gaming is a hyper-competitive world, and instant gratification means that anything but free-to-play and often casual games can end up falling by the wayside. Vampire Survivors is likely to be successful, but it already built up a loyal following on PC and console, so it's unsurprising that the fanbase will follow it to mobile.

Ultimately, it comes down to an issue of the platform. Mobile is a zero-sum game where you are either massively successful or fall by the wayside. More than anything it's a business and stable employment for many people, where you need to constantly think about making money to keep the lights on.

PC and console meanwhile have the luxury of an audience for whom this is their primary entertainment. They want to sit down and focus, and that means spending on a game is limited but dedicated. Someone may balk at spending sixty pounds on a gacha game, but happily do so for a console game.

As indie devs and publishers bring their games to mobile, I think it'll prove and provide an incentive for companies to emulate them. It may be many years before premium mobile games are once more a prominent feature of app stores, but if not, then light-touch monetisation may be the next best thing for self-publishers.

## **Daniel Griffiths**

It's the start of a new year and time to get the crystal ball out once again... And while there's always an element of sticking your finger in the air and predicting which way the wind will blow (for an entire year), reading our 10 predictions for 2023 is more like hoovering up a 'to do' list than swallowing a screenful of conjecture.

No-one could have predicted the almighty ripples that pandemic wave made through 2021 with booms and busts in equal measure and today's era of 'normalisation' still managing to catch many on the hop. By comparison 2023 [crosses fingers] will be far plainer sailing.

The buzz around new trends and opportunities really feel like they're beginning to stick and – for once – the road ahead seems achievable. And a place I genuinely want to be moving towards.

The increased prioritization of mobile development feels like a no brainer at this moment. Ignoring a mobile element in your multiplatform strategy for 2023 is now officially a sackable offence. The rise of new global markets and talent look sure to ignite something new. And a move away from hypercasual quick bucks to midcore gaming paints a scene becoming less about low-powered quick thrills and more about genuine long lasting entertainment value.

AI looks all set to boost a wave of new games and developers meanwhile new App Store legislation is going to open the doors to all comers and share the love more widely.

These are all just predictions at this early stage of course, but we're going to stick our neck out and bank on 2023 looking, feeling and playing very differently to 2022. We wish the best of luck to all the makers and players. Let's make it a good one.

## **Entries for December 23rd**

### **Lewis Rees**

#### **An estimated 2.3 million online teenage gamers have been exposed to white supremacist ideology**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80488/an-estimated-23-million-teenaged-players-have-been-exposed-to-white-supremacist-ideology-in-online-games/>

Gaming is a form of entertainment unlike any other, and just one way the industry stands out is a focus on connection. Many of the world's most popular gaming franchises have strong

multiplayer components, and the rise of online gaming has seen people communicate and make connections with others all around the world.

Unfortunately, there's a disturbing downside to this connection, which is highlighted in this article: people can utilise in-game communication features for a variety of reasons, including unsavoury ones. In this case, players are using it to spread hateful ideologies to others worldwide, with millions of players worldwide being exposed to these messages.

This movement from the US senate signals a positive change, even in its early stages, as politicians are stepping in to help ensure that not only do publishers curb harassment, but help prevent people, especially vulnerable players, from being exposed to hate speech or prejudiced ideals.

Will this solve the problem? Absolutely not. People will always find ways to spread their ideologies, for better or worse. However, it will make it more difficult for people to either target or recruit others, which is always something to celebrate.

### **Iwan Morris**

[Crash Bandicoot: On the Run, to shutter in 2023 | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

Whilst this is outwardly quite a minor story, after all mobile games being pulled isn't exactly big news, I think there's still more that we can pull out from this. King are obviously a part of Activision-Blizzard, and this game itself relies on other Activision properties. Since the acquisition was announced earlier this year, I have a feeling that they weren't expecting as many problems as were faced from regulator scrutiny, lawsuits etc.

Crash's social media channels have been radio-silent since February, with the most recent post being the announcement of the game's shuttering. Many people in the comments expressed shock and anger at how abrupt it seemed, and how they perceived they had been let down by the lack of content for what was essentially a very new game.

This, to me, points at possible turmoil behind the scenes. As people within King are still unsure of what the acquisition will bring, and as it sits in limbo, projects are being shuffled or in this case cancelled as a result. It may hint that they were hoping this acquisition would go through a lot sooner than it did, which was perhaps a naive assumption on their part.

In any case, despite the potential of Crash Bandicoot: On the Run it seems it's going to join a number of other live-service games in being shuttered and removed. A problem of preservation as much as an issue of strategic oversight, if this game was set to go on the chopping block so soon after launch.

### **Entries for December 16th**

#### **Lewis Rees**

Gayming Awards unveils nominees for 2023 ceremony

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80413/gayming-awards-unveils-nominees-for-2023-ceremony/>

Queer representation is a pet topic for me, so I was excited to see the announcement of this year's gaming awards. While there were some notable names that aren't up for contention for awards (The Quarry failed to garner any nominations despite featuring two queer characters with an optional – if unexplored – relationship, and while Horizon: Forbidden West was nominated for the Readers Award, it failed to receive any nominations for its characters despite featuring queer women in numerous important roles including, albeit implicitly, the heroine.

The biggest omission, however, was the lack of mobile representation – but was this an omission? I struggle to think of a single notable queer-focused mobile game this year, and even looking further back the majority of big releases in the mobile space have been ports of existing titles.

Mobile gaming is the most accessible arm of the gaming industry for developers and players alike, but this brings with it notable issues in terms of diversity, especially as some of the world's largest mobile gaming markets also have strict restrictions on LGBTQ+ rights, including imprisonment and the death penalty in parts of the MENA region. Mobile game makers hoping to scale or find success worldwide may therefore be reluctant to include content which could prove controversial. Even outside of the mobile space, queer characters and themes are still a rarity in the media, and even rarer in starring roles.

As such, this feels far more akin to a lack of content to draw from than it does a lack of interest in mobile platforms. The media in general has a lot of catching up to do in terms of queer representation, and mobile gaming lags far behind other gaming platforms, which themselves trail television, film, and especially literature. It's hard to create an award category with so little to draw from, and the only way to combat this lack or recognition is to create work to recognise in the first place. The queer community is just as diverse as any other, with people capable of being romantic leads, heroes, or villains, and it's time that mobile developers put more effort into developing titles that understand this.

**Iwan Morris**

[Rogue Company comes to mobile with Rogue Company: Elite | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

Rogue Company was one of those games like Battleborn, where it was always in the back of my head as 'oh that exists' back when Overwatch kick-started the shooter craze. Unlike Battleborn however, Rogue Company has lived on and now seems to be making the jump to mobile too.

Activision-Blizzard gets a lot of flak for being too 'mobile', like when it adopted loot boxes, but I'd argue it's not been mobile up until Diablo Immortal was announced. Aside from the disastrous handling of the presentation, Diablo Immortal is arguably a smart move. But it also points to another major weak-point, why wasn't Overwatch on mobile?

I remember when that was initially released and we were promised a multimedia franchise. Instead all we got was the occasional animation and a few comics. Meanwhile, games like Rogue Company which seemed destined to live in its shadow are shooting ahead and offering themselves to a whole new audience.

It's a sobering reminder that all the money in the world can't correct poor long-term strategy, and a heartening example of how a good game can continue to live on and succeed in pushing ahead.

Daniel Griffiths

Apple prepares to allow alternative app stores in the EU

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80428/apple-prepares-to-allow-alternative-app-stores-in-the-eu/>

Interesting, isn't it? Now that it's happened it seems obvious. Of course Apple had to relent and allow third-party app stores. Doing so gets them off so many hooks and, well, it's a victory for common sense, isn't it? Now Epic can do what they want. Apple don't fall foul of any EU law and users can buy goods and services right there in the app rather than being told to clear off to a browser.

But it's also the end of an era too. Never forget that when the iPhone first existed there was no App Store. Famously, Apple's Steve Jobs had to be begged to even consider one. Such was his love for his immaculate walled-garden that he couldn't bear the idea of anyone other than Apple running software on it. The compromise was that Apple policed all the submissions and charged an (at the time) reasonable 30% for all the stress, admin, hosting and serving.

And it worked. To this day (opaque ever-changing submission rules notwithstanding) the App Store is a paragon of virus/porn/nonsense-free online shopping. And it's the victim of its own success as a result. When thousands of users turned to tens of millions that 30% cut and total ownership just didn't stack up any more... We hope and pray that the new wave of App Stores that are inevitably just around the corner take stock and remember how Apple did it right.

//////////END of 16th December entry//////////

Dann Sullivan

FTC vote to sue to block Microsoft's acquisition of Activision Blizzard

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80394/ftc-vote-to-sue-to-block-microsofts-acquisition-of-activision-blizzard/>



Back when this whole Microsoft, Activision Blizzard shebang kicked off it was immediately obvious that it was going to be a story that held headlines for ages - if not just because of the record-breaking numbers involved. However, it's really become a beast of its own and the latest development is, frankly, ridiculous. Now - not wanting to miss a chance to get a jab in - the FTC are not just moving to block the deal, but they're voting whether to sue Microsoft over it.

If it came out that there was a 'Most Wanted' style list at FTC HQ that said 'Microsoft, Apple, Google' and more on it then I doubt anybody would be surprised at all. Similarly, I'd not be surprised if Sony - the biggest voice against the deal, due to Call of Duty - had been leaning on every contact book they had to get their voices heard by this kind of audience. You don't need to offer money, recognition or even gratitude to an institution that has evolved to think that it's a kind of Untouchables vs technology monopolies.

But, here's the thing. The Microsoft, Activision Blizzard deal isn't really a matter for a monopoly board. The conversation has been deliberately steered toward Call of Duty by some parties, but this could just as much be about upcoming Warcraft properties (Warcraft and Starcraft under the same roof as Age of Empires? Ooph), existing WoW audiences, or an array of other things... it's probably not about those either though. Let's face it. Microsoft want King so they can get back onto mobile, and they've even said as much.

Lewis Rees

### **The Game Awards were held last night, but how did mobile gaming do?**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80398/the-game-awards-were-held-last-night-but-how-did-mobile-gaming-do/>

While I was writing about the Game Awards earlier today, something about the Hero video struck a wrong chord with me.

Representation is something I'm always very cognisant and aware of, but there's a disturbing trend that's been identified time and time again when it comes to the representation of the queer community, which I'm a proud part of. Namely, some parts of the community are routinely highlighted over others.

In the music video, only one queer couple is featured: Sera and Angela.

As highlighted in [this video](#) by YouTuber Boilon, Marvel has routinely emphasised queer women over other groups within the community in its mobile gaming offerings.

Too often in the media, representation of an audience is designed for the consumption of a "core" audience, often straight white men. As such, queer women are sometimes seen as more acceptable due to sex appeal. Interestingly, Sera and Angela aren't just the only queer pairing featured in the video, but the only ones who kiss.

Despite the growing number of queer characters in the Marvel roster, including important characters within the MCU such as Star-Lord, Loki, and Valkyrie, it's telling that just one

queer couple made the list, especially as several of the characters featured (Black Panther and Storm and Wanda and Vision) are no longer romantically linked. Notably Wanda and Vision's have two sons, Speed and Wiccan, both of whom are romantically involved with other men, with Wiccan even getting married to his long-time partner Hulkling, emperor of the Kree Skrull Alliance, in 2020.

To be fair, some of these characters aren't featured in the game, which adds further questions as to how the decision to include these characters in the game was made.

The use of Angela and Sera in the video *is* remarkable. Queer representation of any form in mainstream media is always worth celebrating, and in this case even more noteworthy since, in addition to being a lesbian, Sera is a transgendered character. It's also commendable that the two share a kiss, while the straight pairings featured don't. However, the fact remains that Marvel Snap - and Hero itself - can do so much more.

Daniel Griffiths

**FTC vote to sue to block Microsoft's acquisition of Activision Blizzard**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80394/ftc-vote-to-sue-to-block-microsofts-acquisition-of-activision-blizzard/>

Gemma Witchalls

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80383/activision-blizzard-release-2022-representation-data/>

As the 'AquiBlizz' saga rumbles inexorably on, there are some interesting tidbits of information leaking out around the edges. This week Activision-Blizzard released their representation data for the year in a move that was difficult to view with anything but a cynical gaze. As Iwan pointed out in the article, the numbers are skewed by the ever-increasing size of the company as a whole, and especially by the absorption of King's stats - one of a number of famously diverse Scandinavian-based studios. A 61% UEG ratio is pretty stunning, and really pulls up the image of the conglomerate as a whole.

The release of these figures, essentially a proclamation of "aren't we good" from the rooftops, doesn't do anything to ameliorate the effect of numerous accusations of sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination levelled against Acti-Blizz over the years, despite what they're probably hoping. It all just feels like a very hollow offering at this point, a dead mouse that your cat brings in to say sorry for all the birds it killed last week. You have to wonder whether one of the main draws for gobbling up King in the first place was for its good reputation re: company culture and inclusivity...

Iwan Morris

[Devolver Digital announces "Devolver Tumble Time" | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

I found this story especially striking because, despite the satirical nature of it, it does look like a genuinely fun casual game. It definitely shows that despite their flair for publicity stunts, Devolver Digital understands what developers they should partner with, Nopopo in particular also displays a crucial comprehension of how to make a casual game fun. It's flashy, it's fast-paced and by all accounts it looks as if it'll be a fully flesh-out game.

It'll be interesting to see whether or not this game actually includes any genuine monetization. As there's no denying that even if they made it as prohibitively expensive or 'ironic', someone would definitely spend their money on it. The decision to include Devolver's iconic characters from their catalogue is interesting too, as with the recent revival of interest in retro shooters (well, not too recent now actually), names like Lo Wang and Serious Sam are even more recognisable than they were in the past.

Ultimately, despite the attempt to make this game as satirical as possible, it looks like a genuinely innovative and solid take on the hypercasual match-3 genre. I'm also incredibly excited to have Devolver Digital CEO, Fork Parker pushing notifications on me constantly.

// Start here for today's entries 2nd Dec ↓ //

Add your words below! If you could include: Your name / the heading from the story / the URL of the story. Thanks.

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<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80222/week-in-views-18-11-2022/>

THANKS!

Daniel Griffiths

**How to keep your mobile title on top and earning for 10 years plus**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80322/7036545/>

In an era when games aren't so much finished and then released as 'made not to crash' and then infinitely 'prototyped' there's something heart-warming about the careful, thoughtful and thorough way in which [Innogames](#) have nurtured their enduring hit [Forge of Empires](#).

FoE is now, incredibly, over ten years old. Games come and go, launched to a fanfare one minute and quietly canned the next. The assumption is that an audience demands a younger model, DiCaprio-style, at every turn. However, in reality, perhaps they'd prefer something that starts off great then keeps getting better?

Forge of Empires not only sustains longterm players who have perhaps loved it since day one, but continues to attract newcomers by virtue of word of mouth, cast iron reviews, and sheer sustained top ten staying power. While Innogame's rivals shed responsibility and manpower [at the first sign of trouble](#) – ever on the hunt for easier 'wins' elsewhere – the FoE team plays the long game and reaps the rewards. And in this day and age we shouldn't be throwing the whole razor away. Just change the blades.

Lewis

**Tencent to stand trial in copyright infringement suit tomorrow**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/asia/news/80298/7139838/>

Tencent went to trial earlier for copyright infringement earlier this week as part of its ongoing feud with Moonton. Both companies have accused the other of plagiarising elements of their games, and Tencent recently lost a defamation case against its rival, which accused Tencent of spreading false information about Mobile Legends: Bang Bang.

As the old adage goes, what goes up must come down. Tencent is the world's biggest games company and, while there's certainly nothing stopping the company from further growth, at least in theory, recent regulatory changes in China, the worldwide economic downturn, and the normalisation of the gaming market following the bursting of the covid bubble has had a notable effect on the company's profit, [recently losing its status as China's biggest company](#).

This lawsuit feels as much about status as profit. Every company wants to be number one, and Moonton represents a growing threat, and one Tencent has repeatedly attempted to take down, whether it's through lawsuits or acquisition bids.

Who'll come out on top? That remains to be seen. The company has previously found in Moonton's favour, which implies precedent, but that was in a totally different case. The only thing that remains certain is that Moonton has become a credible, and growing, threat to Tencent's market share.

Iwan

[Bethesda is working on a new mobile game | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

At a glance I'd say this is one story which caught my eye. Todd Howard has often gotten a bad rap for his Molyneux Esque habit of overhyping. Although most people can really only point to the infamous "See that mountain? You can climb it" quote as an example. However, I don't think you can fault Bethesda for ambition. Howard is passionate about games that much is clear, but with the constant re-releases of Skyrim, and no sign of a new Elder Scrolls for years yet, to many it feels like they're spinning their wheels despite other efforts.

So far their mobile efforts have been fairly successful, if riffing on concepts that are already firmly entrenched in mobile development itself. However, by the way Howard is speaking about this new game you could be forgiven for thinking this might be the 'Skyrim' of mobile games. If you asked me a few months ago what I thought I might've brushed it off, but seeing what mobile has to offer now, it has me intrigued. Is this going to be bigger in scale? A full premium game maybe?

Now of course this could just be PR speak, or it could be an indication Bethesda wants to push their way into mobile with something big and bold that attracts players from their console and PC audience as much as those on mobile. Maybe it'll just be a Fallout or Elder Scrolls gacha? Maybe it'll be the equivalent of what Skyrim was for seventh-generation consoles? It's cliché but, only time will tell.

Dann Sullivan

Devolver Digital and Nerial release Reigns: Three Kingdoms through Netflix Games

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80313/devolver-digital-and-nerial-release-reigns-three-kingdoms-through-netflix-games/>

The mobile gaming and traditional publisher situation is weird, right? All of the biggest mobile publishers also tinker in PC & console spaces, and over the years 'traditional' non-mobile publishers like EA, Activision-Blizzard, Ubisoft and Take Two have bought their way into the mobile space with Future of Games London, Zynga, King and - in ancient news - Popcap acquisitions. But under that top layer of publishers there are a few more layers, all the way down to self-publishing.

When it comes to new trends, it's always worth watching what those in the middle do. They're the ones who show that the ship is actually turning, they'll follow the audience and they'll often also follow the money. As such, it's been very interesting to watch Devolver and how they've been handling the trend of subscription services over the last few years - most specifically the mobile ones.

Devolver have leaned into mobile in a few ways, perhaps more than most. They've been occasionally dipping their toes into the wider mobile market over the last few years, with a handful of titles (My Friend Pedro: Ripe for Revenge, Okhols: Sigma and Swords of Ditto) releasing as premium titles across the two major AppStores. But, they've also been diving into the subscription services. They were an early backer of Apple Arcade, and have over half a dozen games on the service, including a nice Game of Thrones tie-in, + versions of Reigns and GRIS, as well as Reigns: Beyond.

GRIS+ was their last release on the service, back in late September, but Devolver are also racking up releases on Netflix. A three game deal was announced back in June, for Poinpy, Reigns: Three Kingdoms, and Terra Nil, and based on the early success and acclaim of Poinpy, it wouldn't be ridiculous to see them extend that deal.

Looping back around though, rumours put Apple Arcade's userbase at 9 digits, and Netflix have reported 222m users on their service, both of these promise the audience, and there's no doubt that Netflix and Apple have the money, so it begs the question, why wouldn't you take the bait - and why aren't more of 'those in the middle' being targetted like this?

Brian Baglow

UK and Germany on course to contribute over \$12.1 billion to global games market.

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80336/the-uk-and-germany-to-generate-a-combined-121-billion-to-the-global-gaming-market-in-2022/>

Are UK gamers starting to take mobile games more seriously? According to the recent report from Newzoo, the UK's ongoing love affair with consoles may be in decline. We're not talking a messy divorce, nor even a sad dissipation into indifference, but the signs are there that mobile might just become the new favourite for UK gamers.

As someone who talks to a lot of developers, there's still a tendency in some parts of the UK's games community to see consoles as the home of 'real' games. The mega-franchises and triple-A titles are the ultimate expression of design and development genius.

Mobile can sometimes still be seen as a johnny-come-lately interloper which - to quote several hilarious YouTube channels - 'are killing the games industry'. While you and I know that mobile is not only the pioneer when it comes to new experiences, business models and audiences (the next billion gamers in the world aren't coming to the Xbox...), for some creators out there, mobile is yet to be trusted, with its free-to-play malarky and need for data, monetisation and knowing what MAU means.

The Newzoo report shows that despite a significant percentage of gamers in the UK still favouring console - 43 percent, as opposed to 33 percent of gamers in Germany, the most popular platform in the UK is mobile, with a whopping 46 percent of gamers whipping out their phones for a play (43 percent in Germany, fact fans).

With consumer demand growing, could it inspire the development community in the UK into a new period of creative frenzy, in a similar way the home computer revolution of the 80s did?

Watch this space...

// Start here for today's entries 25th Nov ↓ //

If you could include: Your name / the heading from the story / the URL of the story. Thanks!

### Lewis

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80268/netflix-is-working-on-an-aaa-shooter-at-its-new-la-studio/>

Netflix are straying into the world of AAA gaming as part of their latest move into gaming with its new shooter, but what does this mean for its mobile arm?

Netflix have been on a successful trajectory, expanding with new studios in some of the world's mobile hotspots. However, [the company has struggled to engage players](#). An AAA title may be less profitable, especially given the fact that signs point to the game being free for Netflix subscribers, but it's exactly the sort of flashy move that could attract new players.

AAA titles are sexy, despite the fact that mobile gaming remains the largest sector of the gaming industry, and this move could boost the profile of the company's mobile games in addition to attracting a fanbase of its own.

The company's basis in streaming also offers the company the chance to leverage the success of existing IPs. Outside of mobile titles, the company has seen great success with collaborations, such as a crossover between sci-fi series Stranger Things and popular multi-platform horror title Dead by Daylight. The company's existing portfolio of first-party titles mean that it's well-placed to create a game that already has a built-in fanbase.

Apart from Stranger Things, which already has a VR game on the way, there are numerous titles within the company's portfolio that are seemingly perfect for video game adaptations, including hits such as Alice in Borderland, All of us are Dead, and Squid Game. Regardless of whether this title is original or based on an existing franchise, the company is well-placed to succeed as it expands its gaming interests, and boost its profile as a legitimate game maker in the process.

Dann -

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/asia/news/80256/console-gaming-is-on-the-rise-in-china-as-mobile-gaming-takes-a-hit/>

China is easily one of the hottest topics on the site, and for many good reasons. For a start, their current [unwieldy restrictions on gaming, on what can be published there](#) and the heavy stance against globalisation make for a narrative that seems simply alien compared to most of the 'West'. Add to that the fact that it has the largest population in the world, and that quite a few goliaths of the mobile industry have roots there and... well, it's fascinating.

News that Sony and Microsoft are both pushing into the space, attempting to Hoover up interest from developers with a little bit of honey is not surprising at all, but at a time when

Chinese industry bodies are [reporting success with their goals of reducing online play time](#)  
I'm wondering if the two console giants are too late.

In my opinion it feels as though China has been taking these steps - removing birth control, restricting online gaming time, controlling extra-national media - to resist a kind of Lost Generation situation where a population declines while also being radicalised against itself through entertainment-adjacent channels. The West is currently living that, with populism and nationalism on the rise and a mass of infighting between increasingly segregated and divided sections of the population.

But, to wrap that tangent, if the nation's own industry bodies are declaring the experiment as success, then maybe they will move to end it? If that happens, and the licensing restrictions lift, then Tencent and NetEase can shirk the legislative chains that have been holding them back, and Microsoft and Sony's money will be wasted.

Daniel G

## Germany increases funding for game industry support to \$72m

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80208/germany-increases-funding-for-game-industry-support-to-72m/>

Yes, the world has gone to hell in a handcart. Global belts are being wound in so tight that our eyes might pop and there's quite literally 'a war on'. Christmas is looking more like a wallet-blitzing smash-and-grab than a celebration and the national grid's Twitter account thinks it's April Fool's Day. The only upside to right now is that bird flu looks like it'll make your annual battle for a turkey redundant and our fingers are so frozen that we can't turn the heating on. Phew...

But it's good to know that somewhere common sense prevails and through careful thought and smart planning brighter days lie ahead. This week Germany pledged €72 million to fund games development in Germany through 2023, being the largest and most forthright yet of what feels like every developed nation's attempts to capitalize on an industry obviously in growth. Needless to say the likes of Ireland, Finland, France, Spain and more aren't far behind. It works a little something like this: You put the money in – you get more back in return. Complicated, I know.

Meanwhile in the UK devs are getting £2.66 million in 2023 and that's locked for the next three years. No wonder UK gaming talent isn't so much moving abroad as actively jumping ship. Anyone remember [From Bedrooms to Billions](#)? Still, us plucky Brits left behind while the world marches on will bumble through and find a way, eh? 10p for a cup of tea, guv?... Wait... A cup of tea is HOW MUCH!?!

Iwan



[Onoma titles Deus Ex GO, Hitman Sniper: Deadly Shadows & more to be shut down | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGBiz](#)

When I was in university only about a year ago, I took a module for video games that covered them in-depth in an academic context. One of the primary subjects of that was video game preservation...and how even a relatively young medium like games are incredibly fragile when it comes to preserving them.

It's rather fitting then, that one of the stories that came up this week was about game preservation as well. Specifically about Deus Ex Go, one of the entries in Square Enix Montreal's 'Go' series. I was a huge fan of Human Revolution and even Mankind Divided, so the Deus Ex series is dear to my heart (yes, I have played the original too before you ask).

In this way it's really a bit of a double-whammy to see another part of the unfairly shortened new series of Deus Ex games lost to time, as well as a pretty prominent example of how game preservation is overlooked. The idea of losing access to a game you paid upfront for is also, to say the least, not fun. But that's a matter of legality, I'm sure.

It was also eerily prescient that earlier this week [I covered the topic of game preservation in a feature on the site](#). Then the very next day, this news comes out. It's at once satisfying that it was so topical, and sad to end up with more evidence to support it.

///25th Nov ENDS///

[staff id="100298" name="Lewis Rees"]

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[staff id="100280" name="Daniel Griffiths"]

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[staff id="100296" name="Gemma Witchalls"]

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[staff id="100233" name="Dann Sullivan"]

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Gee

Lewis

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80203/netease-and-blizzard-are-suspending-game-services-in-china/>

China is one of the biggest mobile markets in the world, but also one of the hardest to break into. The strict censorship laws and recent pause in game licensing has made it [more difficult than ever to successfully release a game in the country](#), despite the potential rewards of doing so.

The end of the agreement between NetEase and Blizzard is definitely big news, but while it will see a significant loss of revenue for NetEase, I'm not so sure the same holds true for Activision Blizzard. The company is well placed to find an alternative publisher within China, and with a range of popular titles like Hearthstone, World of Warcraft, and Overwatch 2 up for grabs, it's likely that many publishers will be interested in striking a deal. As such, while this may seem like a major issue for Chinese gamers, I don't anticipate a long term loss of these games within the country - instead, I think that Blizzard will strike a deal with another publisher, maintaining its place within China's market.

Dann

[Zynga subsidiary Rollic acquires hypercasual games studio Popcore](#)

Take-Two made one hell of a deal when [they acquired Zynga back in May](#). Not only was there an almost immediate (in financials terms) payoff for them, as [Take-Two are now mobile-first as a result](#), but their new-fangled mobile division appears to be making smart-decision after smart decision.

Zynga were a massive independent name for a long time, but sometimes companies come along, acquire, absorb and dissolve entities - EA were notorious for this, and nobody knew if Take Two had similar intentions. It seems to be quite the opposite here, Zynga appear to have been brought in, given a little pat on the back and a big wallet and told to just crack on with what they were already up to. Zynga, and through them Rollic, have doubled down in recent months with their hypercasual intent, picking up mobile growth company [Storemaven](#) and now acquiring Popcore, an established hypercasual studio.

Zynga was already [reporting increased revenue prior to the acquisition](#), the acquisition seems to have turbo-boosted their ambitions. They remain, as much so as before, ones to watch.

Iwan

[Riot Games and Ubisoft to collaborate in preventing toxic behaviour in games | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGBiz](#)

Ubisoft and Riot Games coming together to combat online toxicity with their “Zero Harm in Comms” research initiative. This is an...interesting one, as a lot of people are pointing out on social media it comes across as slightly hypocritical, or at the very least a case of skewed priorities, for Ubisoft and Epic Games to concentrate on something like this when [criticism is still](#) being levied at their [corporate culture](#). It may have noble intentions, but for many people it looks more like damage control.

The fact is, as many people pointed out, a lot of Ubisoft and Riot Games’ multiplayer titles are built around a hypercompetitive and antisocial atmosphere that, although it doesn’t encourage toxicity, creates the perfect environment for it. League of Legends is infamous for this, for many people it’s an [inextricable part of the game](#) and its reputation. To the point that for some people, enduring and overcoming abuse is as much a part of the match as the play itself.

The best way to discourage toxicity is not to heavily moderate your playerbase, but to create a system and way of playing that encourages meaningful and healthy interaction. But that’s not nearly as simple in concept as trying to filter out what people say and do. Even if the latter is virtually impossible when it comes to practice. Of course, at this stage it’s just ‘research’, so until we find out what they’re going to do with the information gathered, it’s all a bit up in the air. But whatever it is, it’ll need to be a lot more fundamental than chat censoring.

Daniel

## NetEase and Blizzard are suspending game services in China

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80203/netease-and-blizzard-are-suspending-game-services-in-china/>

As to whether we or anyone will ever get to know the real inside story of Activision Blizzard under its incumbent and controversial CEO Bobby Kotick is highly debatable but the clouds of rumour cries of foul play continue to bluster as stormily as ever around the beleaguered King of King. This week we’ve not only seen the ongoing ingrained Actiblizz sexual harrasment issues resurface (with evidence suggesting that management were aware of the issue but chose to do nothing), prompting a rebuttal statement from the board under Kotick’s command, but Activision Blizzard have been forced to withdraw their games from China, doubtless costing the empire millions in lost revenue. Normally such moves would be squarely blamed upon the fickle Chinese gaming laws who’s moveable rulebook is even

more opaque than Apple's. But when the boss of Chinese partner NetEase [goes public to say](#) that "One day, when what has happened behind the scenes can be told, developers and gamers will have a whole new level understanding of how much damage a jerk can make," one has to question as to just who that jerk might be... I guess we'll just have to wait for the movie to find out. Is Danny DeVito busy right now?

// 11th Nov ↓ //

Lewis

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80147/pokmon-go-live-events-contributed-300-million-to-local-cities-in-2022/>

### **Pokemon Go generates revenue for local economies**

The COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented public health crisis, and caused massive damage to the global economy. Gaming is arguably the industry that dealt with the economic downturn best, as new users sought out new forms and entertainment and established gamers spent more money on gaming.

What makes this story interesting to me is that it shows how gaming can have a positive effect on unrelated businesses, and perhaps the greatest argument so far for the company's business model, and the possible effects AR gaming can have on local economies, as players traveled to the host cities and explored, pumping much-needed revenue into local businesses.

Although mobile gaming is often seen as a niche hobby, events such as this should prove definitively the massive potential of gaming on a mobile device, allowing players to take part in events such as this and contribute to the local economies in an immediately noticeable way. Going forward, I expect to see more and more events such as Pokémon Fest Live worldwide, encouraging mobile players to explore the host cities and discover more than they may have thought possible, all the while helping those cities financially.

<hr>

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/79879/strength-of-mobile-division-key-to-activision-blizzard-acquisition/>

Back in 2007 I was much, much younger. It was my first year working at GAME, which for a college dropout with purely creative ambitions and a lifelong interest in games, was a pretty tidy arrangement. Nobody really expected it to be such a massive year for games, but it shifted the entire console landscape; Call of Duty beat out Medal of Honor (remember Medal of Honor?) while Bioshock and Assassin's Creed debuted. So too did The Witcher, Uncharted, Mass Effect and Crisis series.

Fifteen years in games is like a lifetime in most other industries though. Bioshock's developers scattered to the wind, Mass Effect's developer; [Bioware](#) was rolled into [EA](#); Call of Duty's [Activision](#) has twisted and turned from Vivendi control (who also had a good run at Ubisoft) through rebranding to include Blizzard to now being prime pickings for Microsoft. THQ, at the time a powerhouse for third-party IPs and licenses, is now so dead and gone that the name was revived by - what was in 2007 - a small retailer who would hit big two years later with We Sing and then go on to become looming industry giant Embracer Group.

Those fifteen years in games have [completely changed the companies](#) at the top of the console game, and while the platform holders, [Microsoft](#), [Sony](#) and [Nintendo](#) are all still intact, the publishers that defined that generation have been ripped to shreds. With the bigger names that remain, [Take-Two](#), Activision Blizzard, EA the majority of their wealth comes from mobile (Activision and Take-Two both reported 52% revenue from mobile in Q3). Mobile might not be a new frontier, 2007 was, after all only a year before Apple's AppStore launched, but it's definitely the major battleground for all of those who are still fighting to keep a foothold in the mobile space.

2023 will likely see Activision Blizzard, and with them, King, rolled into Microsoft, and also see Sony start to realise the mobile ambitions that they've recently kickstarted with a new mobile division and the Savage Games acquisition. Even [Capcom are now starting to work closer with mobile, with a recent deal struck with Tencent's TiMi Studios for Monster Hunter](#). It's clear that the age of consoles is almost over.

[EU Parliament votes to adopt resolution recognising importance of video game eco | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

**IWAN:** The fact that [a resolution](#) is being adopted by some of the highest legislature in the European Union to recognise video games for their contribution to the economy, and calling for more support, should be bigger news in my opinion. It's baffling to think that with the broader game industry being one of the biggest forms of mass media currently, if not of all time, that some still seem to consider it secondary to more 'traditional' forms.

Specifically, for mobile, I think this is an event that can be considered a real 'moment of change' where they have the opportunity to step forward and say, "Hey, this is about us too! We're a major part of this!" For people who want to get into the game industry, the new push for education courses shouldn't just be 'This is how you design for console and PC' but also 'This is how you design for mobile.'

Mobile is one of the most accessible platforms, and being able to reach an audience that, frankly might as well be all of the world which is connected to the internet, should be something that warrants a section all of its own in the report. However, even if mobile doesn't receive a specific mention, there's no denying that the industry is going to garner greater attention now that they're part of a broader economic consideration.

Companies like Supercell are as big as any software company if not bigger, and with more EU investment, ideally, this sort of cash will go to smaller studios that are likely to start with something on a widespread platform that can be monetized to give them creator cashflow. In this case, mobile is the perfect platform for that. However, it's a question of if legislators will

recognise that. Even now, the people coming into politics who are invested in video games are talking about companies like CD Projekt, Ubisoft and Paradox, an incredibly narrow view that misses the much wider and more diverse studios out there which don't develop for the 'big two' platforms.

**Daniel Griffiths, Editor of BeyondGames.com and BlockchainGamer.com**

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80153/unitys-latest-financials-reveal-3229-million-in-q3-2022-revenue-and-predict-q4-earnings/>

***Unity's latest financial report reveals \$322.9 million in Q3 2022 revenue and predict Q4 earnings***

In these days of permacrisis and uncertainty – where the gaming industry simultaneously enjoyed huge highs in player engagement but had to endure an ongoing inability to get the latest hardware into their hands – it's nice to see one predictable happy ending.

The fact that Unity weathered all storms and made impressive bank isn't particularly any kind of surprise, but the numbers involved in their recently announced Q3 earnings are just the kind of good news that the big picture of 'games' is looking for right now after big name console titles slipped into 2023 and it's looking like little Jonnie STILL might not get his PS5...

Mercifully on mobile, there's far less chip vagaries to worry about and it's only the games industry's inability to get together, collude, collaborate and create that could have potentially slipped slush into our egg nog. And that's where the likes of dev platforms such as Unity come in – bringing development under one shared solution, allowing the sharing and free communication of assets and generally helping the smart folks to get the mobile dev job done while the rest of the world fell to pieces around them.

Here's hoping that as well as the Unity backroom boys making a few bucks, the genius minds at the frontline who make the mobile magic happen, get to have an almighty festive season too.

//ends//

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// 4th Nov ↓ //

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/article/80066/intrinsic-ads-are-viewed-more-fondly-by-gamers-and-may-be-more-effective-than-interstitial-ads/>

I'm really interested in this as a subject from a socio/psychological perspective, as adverts in games (and other media) have long been a source of much ire for many people, myself included. Whilst I tolerate them if they mean I don't have to spend money to progress within a game, they are a constant source of irritation. Intrinsic ads, however, are sort of 'fun', in a nostalgic "oh wow, we really are living in Back to the Future now" sort of way. I will still make a conscious effort not to buy anything I've seen in an advert, because I'm stubborn like that, but the beauty of intrinsic ads is that half of the time, you don't even realise that the reason you're craving chicken is because of something carefully placed in the game you were just playing. The next logical step is to go subliminal, which is obviously not something I'd advocate (and surely won't happen until we get a few strides further into the dystopian future that we all know is coming). Joking aside though, it makes complete sense that players are responding more positively to this type of advertising, and personally I think it's the right direction to allow for a more seamless and less frustrating gaming experience.

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/football-manager-2023-touch/id1626267810>

Apple's own Apple Arcade launched with a boom a few years back, but a year on it had all started to go a bit quiet, and people even stopped asking big questions about how much Apple paid for that mobile exclusivity, the length of clauses or about active users and engagement. In fact, people have perhaps been too busy talking about [Xbox Games Pass](#), and [Netflix's](#) endeavours in the same space to even think about Apple's own. Indeed, Microsoft and Netflix have been playing to recent trends (New Studios / Acquisitions) stronger than most of last year's big players.

But, Apple have landed an absolute blinder; they've secured Football Manager 2023 Touch for their Apple Arcade service. Is this a win for Apple? Almost certainly (although it's definitely a win for SEGA, who are also distributing through Xbox & PC Games Pass). Football Manager is one of the silent monoliths of PC gaming, at time of writing there are over 90,000 people [playing the game on Steam](#), but it remains highly undercelebrated. Football Manager 2022 Mobile's [own Google Play listing](#) states that the mobile series has had over 8.8 million sales to date - and the next entry is now exclusive to Apple devices.

While it was always suspected that Apple's Apple Arcade service was a tool to keep 'premium' quality games on the platform, this is an absolutely massive steal for them and snatches up something that was already annual and already going to exist and brings it into their ecosystem. A very bold move.

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/asia/news/80049/hypercasual-games-dominate-japans-charts-by-installs-but-struggle-to-engage-players/>

Japan's often considered the hub of video gaming, and some of the biggest game makers in the world call the country home, but the country is slow to adapt to mobile technology, and while hypercasual games dominate the download charts, session time speaks for itself: gamers spend only 1 percent of their time on the genre, compared to 17 percent on RPG or action games. It's clear that the download rates aren't enough to compete with the popularity of other, more "prestigious" titles.

[Hypercasual games may lead download charts worldwide](#), and generate an enviable amount of revenue, but compared to more established genres they struggle to engage players. Whereas download rates in Japan fall in line with global trends, the simple fact of the matter is that these rates aren't reflected in sessions. Japanese players are more likely to spend their time on more involved experiences than hypercasual games can offer, less a distraction than a serious endeavour.

This isn't to say that hypercasual game makers should divert their attention from Japan entirely, as the genre is still seeing downloads in huge numbers. However, developers and publishers hoping for long-term retention and an engaged fanbase in Japan could do well to consider other genres.

[Jagex and Titan Publishing partner to create RuneScape comics & books | Pocket Gamer.biz | PGbiz](#)

I find it quite interesting that this announcement comes shortly after RuneScape finally made the jump to mobile. Being the [largest video game market by revenue](#), and with the ubiquity of smartphones, it's likely going to broaden their audience significantly. For many games, just having significant user bases isn't enough, by spreading into other mediums, they diversify their revenue and increase awareness of the game itself. League of Legends, Fate Grand Order and more have all pursued this.

For those games, their world is a big part of their brand and their appeal. League of Legends made a big splash in the mainstream with the release of "Arcane", and Fate's media presence is predicated heavily on its anime releases. It's no surprise then that Jagex wants to push RuneScape into other mediums.

I'm only surprised that it took them this long. There was a short series of books released by Titan in the late 2000s that were set in the RuneScape world, but while the game itself has an enduring pop culture presence, its world hasn't had quite the same impact. If Jagex can get Titan to make Gielinor as iconic as Azerot, or Piltover and Zaun, they could capitalise on the influx of a new audience and sell to a whole new one.

<https://www.pocketgamer.biz/news/80062/netflix-expands-gaming-arm-with-addition-of-indie-studio-spry-fox/>

**Netflix expands gaming arm with addition of indie studio Spry Fox**



You've got to hand it to them. Rather than give up and let others be the 'Netflix of games', the *actual* Netflix of games (aka Netflix Games) isn't shy about righting the ship [at every possible turn](#).

While the likes of Meta robotically get on with the heads-down gruelling invention of the metaverse (while the rest of social, games and Web3 hurl shit their way) Netflix – in their attempt to make Netflix Games 'a thing' – get off far more lightly. Instead they're allowed to flounder, fret and [spend, spend, spend](#) their way out of trouble without anyone crying foul.

Why? It's because rather than heap on mistake after mistake ([pricey headsets](#), badly designed [services that nobody wants or uses](#), a [revolving door of staff](#) and [frankly embarrassing end results](#)) Netflix are actually working hard to get things right.

Buying Spry Fox – the developer behind Alphabear, Triple Town and Cozy Grove – and – potentially – letting them loose on a raft of Netflix-owned IP is a smart move and one that we approve of.

Here's hoping the [good decisions \(and great games\)](#), and ever improving service) continue.

Now, if only they could successfully convey the fact that yes, [you DO have access to Netflix games](#) if you have a Netflix account... AND here's the non-gamer, fool-proof way that you make them appear on your phone... Now THAT would be something.

///ENDS///