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# Mainstreaming and Game Journalism

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# What It's Actually About

If there is one thing that unites game journalists, it is the profession's nomadic nature. Even the most successful writers ping-pong between outlets. This interviewee's experience is typical of most: After launching his career at a hometown alternative weekly newspaper that hoped game reviews would attract a younger readership, his progress was slow, steady, and varied. He freelanced at a bevy of print and online publications—such as (but not necessarily) *Rolling Stone*, *Wired*, *GamesRadar+*, and *Polygon*—paid by the word to churn out everything from listicles to long-form pieces. Yet, he was unable to secure the dream job of an editorship in this competitive landscape and persevered through gigs even as the verticals for which he wrote floundered and closed.<sup>1</sup> Like so many others, he could not exclusively cover games, so he expanded his portfolio to include other “geek” subjects, such as comics. This journalist had always wanted to write about games, but despite having gained significant institutional knowledge and access to some of the biggest studios, he was

left treading water in a profession where permanent jobs are scarce.

In the previous chapter, we surveyed the environment that has contributed to game journalists' professional ambivalence in the post-Gamergate era. In this media landscape, opportunities to write about games abound while digital platforms engender precarious conditions in which news publishers and writers struggle to survive. Anyone can assume the mantle of "game journalist." Some may even find an audience in entertainment, niche, or mainstream channels. As the four archetypes discussed in the previous chapter illustrate, however, impediments to the legitimacy, literacy, and ubiquity of game writing endure. Game reporters are hardly a fixture of but rather migrate between outlets, whereas games, as a subject, are marooned outside the occupational ideologies and boundaries of institutional reporting. The game industry remains a *de facto* gatekeeper, its prerogatives and precedents restraining writers' entry and career paths.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, even though video game systems occupy three-quarters of US households, the question lingers: Why has game journalism not been accepted by mainstream media?

In this chapter, we identify the barriers, including the ephemeral place of journalists within newsrooms, that keep game journalism from joining the mainstream. As with the previous chapter, our observations are informed by interviewees who commented on their own challenges regarding game literacy, ubiquity, and

legitimacy. We noticed that journalists were frustrated that each element necessary for uniform coverage was often undermined by vestiges of perennial controversies within the game journalism landscape. To make sense of these frustrations, we have identified three structural tensions that hinder mainstreaming. First, specialization challenges literacy. Writers continue to be preoccupied with tailoring their work to the core audience for whom the blockbuster-driven part of the game industry produces some of the world's most visible titles. Recall that, despite the industry's unrelenting growth, the specialized language and frames we delineated in the first half of the book hamper a more universal uptake, understanding, and language. Second, precarity challenges ubiquity. Google and Facebook, among other platforms, contribute to the financial insecurity that typifies the daily life of game journalists and constrains their ability to concentrate on more mainstream coverage. Finally, a lack of sincerity challenges digital play's legitimacy. In particular, mainstream publications consistently invalidate the medium through their refusal to treat games as worthy of serious coverage or hire game journalists as permanent staff. As we argued in the previous chapter, institutional support for game reporting, from either the game industry or news outlets, is haphazard and rare. After delving into each of these challenges more deeply, we can only conclude that game journalism deviates from a mainstream course. Therefore, in our concluding chapter we question both the direction and destination

of mainstreaming, returning to our initial provocation: perhaps games will simply never enrich the front pages or arts sections of news sites.

## Specialization Challenges Literacy

Early in the book, we discussed the need for literacy—a more universal understanding of the underlying mechanics and features of games, something on par with listening to rock music or reading a novel. Contemporary game journalism, however, still lacks consensus on what games are and do.<sup>3</sup> Authors treat them as specialized products intended not for a broader public but for a select audience: hardcore fans who, in turn, create the vernacular around games.

The notion of specialization pervaded our interviews—for instance, the insistence that games were growing up. Game writer Clayton Purdom stated that “appreciation for games” was an “age thing” with a “four- to five-year gap” between those who get them and those who do not. Audiences were considered either too young or too old for coverage beyond the limited scope of their favored publication. One writer was incredulous that struggling smaller newspapers would not cover games because they might attract other readers. “I don’t think a ton of seventy-year-olds are reading our site,” Jason Schreier similarly speculated when he wrote for *Kotaku*, adding later that there tended to be more of a “hardcore

focus" due to the site's blog-like nature. Several journalists suggested this kind of maturity was a major stumbling block; as Simon Parkin put it, games were "something you should put down when you become an adolescent and maybe only pick up again when you retire, aside from a few rounds of golf." It was partially from this nostalgic viewpoint that Parkin has oriented his work, asserting that "even if [players have] sort of lapsed and they don't play games anymore, they'll remember maybe interesting games they played while they were at college, or whatever."

Writers' preoccupation with finding and maintaining an audience is counterbalanced by an enduring distrust in them. Even if their numbers keep growing, new players are not considered to be well versed in games. Readers are "smart and probably like other cool things," according to Purdom, "but they might not know a lot about games," so he had to find "broader things" to write about during his stint at *Kill Screen*. Another common theme was the fundamental belief that games require a deep knowledge beyond that of the general reader. Former *New York Daily News* reporter Jason Silverstein simply asked, "At what point have you engaged with a game long enough to be knowledgeable about it?" Harper Jay MacIntyre opined that "the rules of games are infinitely more arcane" than sports. "Sports are made to be watched." Although most people have some connection to sports, MacIntyre suggested that "when you give someone a controller with 16-plus

buttons, the barrier to entry for games, for certain folks, makes it very difficult to talk about them.” Others, such as Nick Paumgarten, the *New Yorker* contributor mentioned in chapter 1, claimed that it is more difficult to frame games—or situate their importance within journalistic and critical coverage—than it is with theater, film, and other art forms commonly followed by their publication’s readership.

The result was what we think of as an “us versus them” mentality about games, where the perceived audience—mainstream or enthusiast—drove the stories. “The more mainstream the audience,” said game writer and editor Rollin Bishop, “the more likely you don’t have to skew toward what your traditional gaming audience might want to read because other people are going to read it.” Whereas niche websites might emphasize game mechanics and skill, mainstream journalists resorted to such subjects as game addiction because past stories about children’s health elicited favorable responses. We can safely say that writers cater work to their perceived audience’s interests without seeking common ground between them.<sup>4</sup> And worse, this simply boiled down to, as one respondent told us, “stories you want to tell don’t get told, purely based on the reality of the business.”

Admittedly, the tilt toward more narrow literacies is not exclusive to game journalism. Professionals and scholars alike have lamented the collapse of a common language in the field.<sup>5</sup> Readerships are algorithmically

sorted via social media platforms so only self-affirming content is served to them.<sup>6</sup> To thrive, newsmakers need to appease a more exclusive audience. Of course, styles often diverge based on outlet—a music review in *Rolling Stone* is very different from one in the *New Yorker*—and the contemporary news environment's platform dependency requires outlets to scrutinize readers' needs more closely to stay viable.

In the case of game journalism, appealing to readers requires attending to “core” audiences and the game industry, even if public perspectives are evolving. Feel free to disagree with us here, but the front pages of even the most progressive game websites still feature some of the same generic themes, including such recurring tropes as the ongoing “console wars,” now being fought between Microsoft's Xbox Series X|S and Sony's PlayStation 5.<sup>7</sup> Catering to the concerns of core audiences leaves more casual fans behind; said Silverstein, “For most gamers, there's the system that they grew up with, and that's their kind of vision of gaming, and then ten years later people have an entirely different vision of it . . . The pace of change is so rapid.” Thus, as cultural intermediaries, most game journalists remain the “passionate experts” we discuss in chapter 3. These experts stay attuned to the industry so they can inform the hardcore fans who justify their existence—a gordian knot that restricts consistent coverage.

Equally important, perspectives and ideas that might be the impetus for a common language about games



are wanting. US academia turned out to be an important ally in constructing the artistic status of Hollywood films by establishing a canon and providing new generations of critics with a shared vocabulary.<sup>8</sup> Game scholarship, by contrast, has certainly contributed to ludic literacy and legitimacy, but has yet to have a similar impact.<sup>9</sup> Left to the purview of writers steeped in game capital—technical skills and past history with and knowledge of games—criticism and coverage can be difficult to comprehend, let alone be written for a general readership.

### **Precarity Challenges Ubiquity**

Common language cannot be established when game journalists' employment always hangs in the balance.<sup>10</sup> For many writers, this is precisely the problem: they are not writing about games full-time. Freelancing, as we stated in the previous chapter, has increased the sheer number of articles about games in both mainstream and enthusiast outlets, but the economic precarity that comes with it and the constant quest for work prevents consistent coverage. Freelancing limits game journalists from establishing and internalizing professional norms and ethics and from finding cohesive benchmarks by which to practice their craft.

For those attempting to make a career covering games as freelancers, the situation is bleak. "Game journalists,"

one writer lamented, “are constantly overworked and underpaid in the process of doing all this work.” In untenable positions, writers juggle multiple assignments to stay afloat financially. Time and again, freelancers bemoaned their insecurity and, unsurprisingly, many of them moved on to other jobs. One writer, exhausted after years of pitching stories without acquiring a solid gig, nearly gave up writing altogether. Another, frustrated by having to repeatedly chase editors for payments, went into promotions for an independent game studio. In fact, many of those we interviewed wound up pursuing jobs within the industry itself; examine the LinkedIn profiles of communications officers at game companies across North America and you will likely stumble upon more than a few former freelancers.

Occupational instability is further complicated by the economic precarity of news organizations more broadly. Print publications’ shrinking budgets and consolidation by major conglomerates has simultaneously increased the need for and yet further devalued freelancers. The result is fewer long-form, investigative, or even historical pieces because of the costly nature of such work; the number of meetings with editors required (let alone travel expenses for face-to-face interviews, etc.) would increase a freelancer’s billable time. A game editor for a mainstream paper noted that, despite the prestige of the position and their own eagerness to put in more time, they were only permitted to work three days a week because the publication did not have the resources to

support a full-time position. Although freelancers may bring standout stories and perspectives to editors, they are not a fixture in newsrooms, arguably a key space where editorial decisions are made.

For most journalists aspiring to full-time, permanent jobs, their lowly position on the professional food chain perpetuates unpredictability in terms of payment and labor. Jason Schreier described the irregular paychecks during his freelancing days as “very stressful.” Some freelancers writing for publications that folded were never paid at all; Chris Plante of *Polygon* admitted, “I still have dead companies that technically owe me money.” As with careers in the game industry itself, there was and remains an expectation that merely gaining a foothold into the world of video games was compensation enough.<sup>11</sup> Beyond pay, labor was a dominant theme; Rollin Bishop remarked that one had to constantly “provide value to the editor by introducing them to [their] pitch,” which would earmark a valuable story. Whether it was devoting excess hours to an investigative piece or just hustling for the next article, the notion of constantly working without pay was considered normal.

Game beat reporter Cecilia D’Anastasio—whose much-touted work in 2017 at *Kotaku* catapulted her career to *Wired*—exemplifies the nonfiduciary obstacles confronting freelancers. One reporter worried about the attacks D’Anastasio might face. “If one person is taking on all that kind of labor again, especially a woman, at

some point someone's going to come for her, especially since she's reporting about corruption," the journalist said, adding, "I can't imagine what [D'Anastasio's social media] mentions look like." D'Anastasio had the backing of *Kotaku* for most of her reporting, but another freelancer might not be able to tackle a comparable investigation and be guaranteed the same protections. The increased visibility afforded by such platforms as Twitter, TikTok, and Facebook has made journalists—particularly ones who are members of marginalized groups—even more vulnerable.<sup>12</sup> Add to that the increased workload of freelancers engaging in constant "relational labor," or continuous work to connect with audiences across platforms.<sup>13</sup>

For freelancers, indulging in lofty, long-term projects typically takes a back seat because of the unrelenting imperative to score more work. As MacIntyre reminded us, "You can't expect a freelancer to work on something for three months unless you have the budget to do so, or it's a matter of access. It's much easier when you're actually a [full-time employee] of a site." The result is that freelancer precarity dissuades diversity in the profession. Workers who cannot tolerate insolvency, such as those supporting families, burdened by student debt, or simply lacking the savings to withstand a dry spell, cannot stay in it for long.

Consequently, novel modes, perspectives, stories, and ways of writing are stifled. The exertion of homogenous gamer voices was particularly evident after Gamergate,

which famously forced some of the most talented writers to quit after enduring harassment.<sup>14</sup> To make matters worse, both news outlets and game publishers demonstrated a reluctance to publicly support those being harassed. MacIntyre declared that, since the controversy, game magazines remain “unable to adequately hold our art [i.e., games] accountable while also having our readers follow us across the line.” On the more positive side, one editor described how the scandal compelled his publication to be bolder—but only after he and others faced significant disruption to their lives, such as the hacking of his wife’s personal internet account and a subsequent FBI investigation. Like many others, he eventually left his job.

Beyond increased occupational risks, precarity affects the writing process itself. A freelancer’s life promotes uncertainty about their craft. With the prevalence of different levels of ability, approach to the subject, and professional backgrounds, the quality of writing about games is erratic. Often, journalists simply do not have the time required to compose a meaningful review. It takes longer to go through all the levels of a game than to read a book, as Jason Silverstein reminded us, “so in some ways it’s harder to cover than a lot of traditional beats because you just have to actually know the game inside and out. That’s a very difficult thing to do just as far as time investment.” Once again, passionate experts who already spend their free time playing core games are most primed to write about them. Noncore gamers,

or even those who simply have other commitments, can hardly make a living in this environment.

One of the recurring themes in this book is the boundary work performed by traditional journalists. It is a process that functions to legitimize their collective occupation. Yet, in a position where success is always based on hustling for the next job, cultivating occupational boundaries and ideologies that might result in cohesive writing about games is nearly impossible. Such institutional support, though, is vital. Film scholar Mattias Frey convincingly argues that despite an ongoing public narrative of a “crisis” in their authority, film critics successfully fought to establish both their place within newspapers and criteria for evaluation that remains embedded even in the most watered-down online rating systems.<sup>15</sup> Game writers, by contrast, tend to lack such stability. They cannot fight for their place and are thus denied the kind of touchstone on which other modes of cultural criticism and reportage stand. Without institutional backing, there is no universal coverage—just more of it. More writing is not the same as ubiquitous narratives, which would make game journalism at least feel more mainstream.

## **Sincerity Challenges Legitimacy**

Next to insufficient economic investment, a lack of emotional and intellectual investment also thwarts

legitimacy in game journalism. Games are simply not taken seriously, especially at mainstream outlets. The topic does not conform to the expectations and beats of most newspapers and is therefore dismissed as frivolous or as not worth the hassle of dealing with aggressive fans. Such a view is reflected in the comments about games “growing up” that we discussed in the opening pages of this chapter. The implication is that the medium is still in its infancy. In comparing himself to film and music writers, Purdom confessed that he might not be taken seriously at a dinner party or be in the *Paris Review*. One author decried, “There’s still always a large percentage of people [who] will say, ‘This is stupid,’ ‘It’s child’s play,’ always ‘It’s a waste of time.’” Games outside of children’s entertainment “have this reputation for escapism, especially among enthusiasts,” MacIntyre said, adding that “when you start to apply outside lenses or outside standards it starts to feel like sort of outsiders are knocking down the fort walls or kicking over your sandcastles.” These statements reveal not only journalists’ but also readers’ skepticism about the sincerity of game journalism. MacIntyre also noted that coverage tends to be characterized by “fads of the time, because [games] tend to be more broadly understood as products” to consume, and when you’re done with them, you get rid of them.” By contrast, they said that football, for example, is not going to be replaced by a new type of football.

Games are continually framed by journalists as child's play, fad, or mode of escape. Without a common literacy surrounding them, publications struggle to situate them in any other way, and the industry's rapid growth and increasing diversity of content does not help. In fact, reporters acknowledged that if some "dreadful world event" or "political shift" happened, "that's the most important thing of the day and whatever you put out about video games just doesn't matter very much." But the insincerity goes deeper because, as the *New Yorker's* Paumgarten acknowledged, there is a "legacy, a vestigial sense of gamers, of 'this is what boys do in the basement.'" Old tropes like these are surprisingly persistent. Aja Romano, a culture reporter at *Vox*, cautioned that it was also important "to really understand how that trope has functioned to sort of both alienate and demonize gaming culture and gamers over time."

The endurance of these contentions surprised us, especially when considering the more serious attempts by enthusiast journalists to find nuanced stories about the medium—something we expounded upon in the previous chapter. And for publications that foster this type of reporting—"elite" enthusiast sites such as *Kotaku* or *Polygon*—there were significant efforts toward legitimacy, whether it was the establishment of beat reporters or even formal codes of ethics. *Kotaku* is an insightful example. After many changes in ownership and years of posts about ethics, *Kotaku* now has a



coherent editorial policy as an affiliate of G/O Media.<sup>16</sup> Among other things, it specifies that reporters “should pay our way when covering stories to avoid any suspicion of quid pro quo,” and that freelance contributors must contractually agree to adhere to the same standards as staff writers.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, editorial policies across outlets are neither uniform nor necessarily inculcated into writers’ professional lives in part because of their freelance status. Some are ignorant of publications’ guidelines; one interviewee said principles were “internalized” rather than explicit. As is the case with most forms of journalism, ethical norms and direction stem not only from the rules of single publications but also from the general practices and perspectives of writers. It bears repeating that, ultimately, it is this lack of consensus among professionals that impedes legitimacy of the medium in the long run.

Even more immediate and ironic, the “core” fanbase around whom journalists have shaped content also stands in the way of the expansion of legitimate game coverage, making reporters’ lives more difficult, especially those reporters who are visible on social media. The journalist and professor Evan Narcisse warned that “enthusiasts and the fan base can be a very prickly readership to serve because they have a lot of preconceived notions about what this job should be and how it happens. . . . People still think about payola as a thing in video game journalism.” Simon Parkin, referring to Gamergate, relayed that the coverage about it

“exasperated” fans’ worst fears that journalists were just “campaigning against gamers” without “listening for the nuance.” He noted that both fans and journalists have missed an opportunity to “show the wonderful diversity of the medium and how it’s trying to explore games as a much richer and more interesting subject, beyond just ‘Can I shoot the other guy before he shoots me?’” Instead, an article deemed “wrong” in the eyes of readers would earn him “a whole bunch of flaming,” as another journalist put it. The ability of core audiences to reject different styles and perspectives, a necessary ingredient for legitimacy, is a constant frustration for writers. “Specialist games media readers don’t tend to like it if we criticize games,” said one enthusiast-turned-institutional reporter. “People don’t tend to like it so much if you’re like, ‘This is exploitative,’ or ‘The way this game is made to encourage constant attention is not good.’” Even if legitimacy through criticism is a reporter’s goal, it stays out of reach.

Given these obstacles, it is important to remember cultural legitimacy is not a naturally occurring process but rather one that is negotiated and at times even fought for. As we explained in the first half of the book, the mutual dependence between industry and journalism and the establishment of critical authority both play key roles in creating boundaries by which to assess media content. For instance, the television scholar Amanda Lotz demonstrated how by the 1980s, some thirty years after the medium gained widespread

popularity in the United States, a more responsible form of reporting was already forming.<sup>18</sup> Critics who grew up watching TV “increasingly attended to investigations, reportage, and considerations of the business operations of this highly commercial industry, which deviated from the dominance of reviewing and emphasizing the artistic and aesthetic aspect of the medium that was more characteristic of their predecessors.”<sup>19</sup> Lotz traces this development to a variety of factors, including technical and sociocultural changes and the creation of the Television Critics Association (TCA), which established a foundation for a unified identity and purpose behind critical authority in the face of challenges from new media environments. “[T]he collectivity of the group has aided the whole and helped to increase the significance and role of critics in the promotional practices necessary to cultural production.”<sup>20</sup> In contrast to the more erratic world of game criticism, the joint institutional efforts of TV critics established legitimacy far beyond that of individual publications.

At the same time, Lotz argues, the legitimacy of TV criticism was also fostered by mutual dependence between networks and reporters. Like the press conferences and game conventions described in chapter 3, she details lavish studio “junkets” to curry journalists’ favor toward specific shows.<sup>21</sup> In turn, critics acted as purveyors of the good and the bad in the next TV season. Eventually, these outings became places for critics and executives alike to hold the industry accountable even

in the fragmented, high-pressure environment created by the growth of online news outlets like the ones we have covered in this book, which offered a greater diversity of content and style.<sup>22</sup> Sincerity, therefore, stemmed from the symbiosis between TV networks and the press.

Such critical authority and industry buy-in, however, are absent in gaming. Studios still tightly control the narrative around their games and utilize a wide array of promotional channels to disseminate their content. And with the flood of live streaming, they have avid fans who can showcase the latest and greatest games. "The way in which the gaming industry is structured," said Romano, "makes what would be 'mainstream gaming news' within game culture less accessible to mainstream media." Another game journalist and editor characterized the relationship between the press and the industry as precarious, with large publishers such as Bethesda Softworks reserving important announcements for major trade shows such as E3. One even speculated that access was overrated: "Publishers like to hoard, especially with mainstream game sites, access over us in ways that I don't think they even do with YouTubers or influencers who are much more interested in just taking whatever deals publishers actually give them."

A crisis of critical authority will only persist if writers must assert their importance while in constant negotiation with publications, readers, and the industry. This negotiation, however, can ultimately lead to the legitimation of a genre or medium. Outlets such

as *Rolling Stone* likewise played a leading role in creating a common language around rock and roll music in the 1960s while positioning themselves as countercultural.<sup>23</sup> But even in these magazines, the relationship between editors and journalists can be testy. When studying the organizational hierarchy at music magazines in the United Kingdom, the music journalist and scholar Eamonn Forde found that freelancers are un tethered from such structures and instead adhere to editors whose fixed physical presence within newsrooms allow them to control content.<sup>24</sup> These examples stress that despite infrequent conscious attempts, a fervent legitimization process is imperative for games to become mainstream.

### **Living on the Edge of Mainstreaming**

Bereft of the building blocks of mainstream coverage, the vital stakeholders—journalists, publications, and consumers—are randomly molding impressions of games as they acculturate. When journalists write primarily for niche audiences, there is no common literacy. Ubiquitous coverage is challenged by the precarious situation of most writers, who must accede to the prerogatives of magazines and the industry to survive. Finally, and perhaps most important to our argument on mainstreaming, games are simply not taken seriously, with stakeholders continuing to consider them

as immature. When industry and fans are less and less dependent on journalists, as seems to be the case with game journalism, establishing a mutual language, professional boundaries, and even job security all become daily challenges. And the cycle perpetuates itself—all of these problems are endemic, long-standing, and aggravated by the restructuring and shuttering of newsrooms and magazines across the United States. It is difficult to imagine how a common and mainstream approach to games can be cultivated under these circumstances.

So what recourse is there? Based on our interviews, a major concern revolves around the value of game journalists' labor. For individual writers, as we have demonstrated, it is difficult to make a career out of covering games. A would-be reporter or critic must truly love the craft, because their day-to-day efforts are defined by what Brooke Erin Duffy has theorized as "aspirational labor"; they must heavily invest in the niche culture and language of games to even begin to gain a foothold in the profession.<sup>25</sup> This necessitates playing hours of games without compensation, meeting publication deadlines for unpaid articles, and unswerving dedication to specific titles and genres to achieve even a modicum of success. At the same time, this army of aspirational writers can easily be replaced; as we noted at the beginning of the book, the proposition of playing video games for a living is quite seductive. This work, however, comes at the expense of institutional knowledge, occupational security, and ubiquitous, meaningful

coverage. Until the value of game journalism is reconsidered, individual freelancers will soldier on without serious investment from mainstream outlets.

Coincidentally, while journalists find themselves in an unstable situation occupationally, publications themselves also teeter on the edge of legitimacy and stability in a fragmented media environment. They face competition from an industry that can easily and directly communicate with and promote its products to end users. Studios do not need to engage with news outlets the way other media industries do because they have immediate access to a well-heeled contingent of fans who will readily contribute to their bottom line. Film, music, and other media have relied on critics for legitimation, but a coherent dialogue about games between critics and consumers remains a pipe dream.

We have our flame-retardant clothing at the ready, so allow us to make a bold proposition: maybe game journalism should not be mainstream. Unlike staid sections of the newspaper, from local hard news to the arts, entertainment, and even sports, game journalism simply may not fit into a clearly defined category.<sup>26</sup> It might be more suitable to align games with lifestyle journalism, which, as a mode of service journalism, has a distinct market orientation but also conveys “real” information: “factual information and advice, often in entertaining ways, about goods and services [the reader] can use in their daily lives.”<sup>27</sup> This purposefulness was echoed in our interviews: “Our job,” said Harper Jay

MacIntyre, “is to share information as we get it that is either going to provide a service to our readers or is going to be something that they are interested in.” The journalism scholar Folker Hanusch cites numerous subjects that fall under the lifestyle umbrella—fashion, health, technology, and gardening, among others—that appear in different sections of newspapers and websites.<sup>28</sup> He has dispelled academic critiques about this type of reporting “being unworthy of being associated with the term journalism.”<sup>29</sup> He comments that the ties of “soft news” with commercialism are hardly unusual in the news landscape, which tends to define “hard news” primarily as reporting on violence and politics.

At the same time, mainstream outlets neither invest in game journalism nor indicate the degree to which games should be included in their bailiwick beyond vague nods to their unrelenting popularity. As a result, news organizations that wield the greatest power to check abuse in the game industry have little incentive to act as a watchdog. That said, the prominence of mainstream verticals such as the *Washington Post's* Launcher points to a promising future in which different forms of lifestyle journalism are embraced as essential categories for the long-term viability of newspapers. Unfortunately, even that well-received section was abandoned in 2023, accompanied by gaming staff layoffs. In hindsight, our interviewees were spot on: games and games reporting still have a lot of growing up to do.





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