GDC
Independent
Game Summit

Big in Japan, Not in the West: The Difficulties of Cross-Cultural Appeal

Anne Ferrero
from asobu

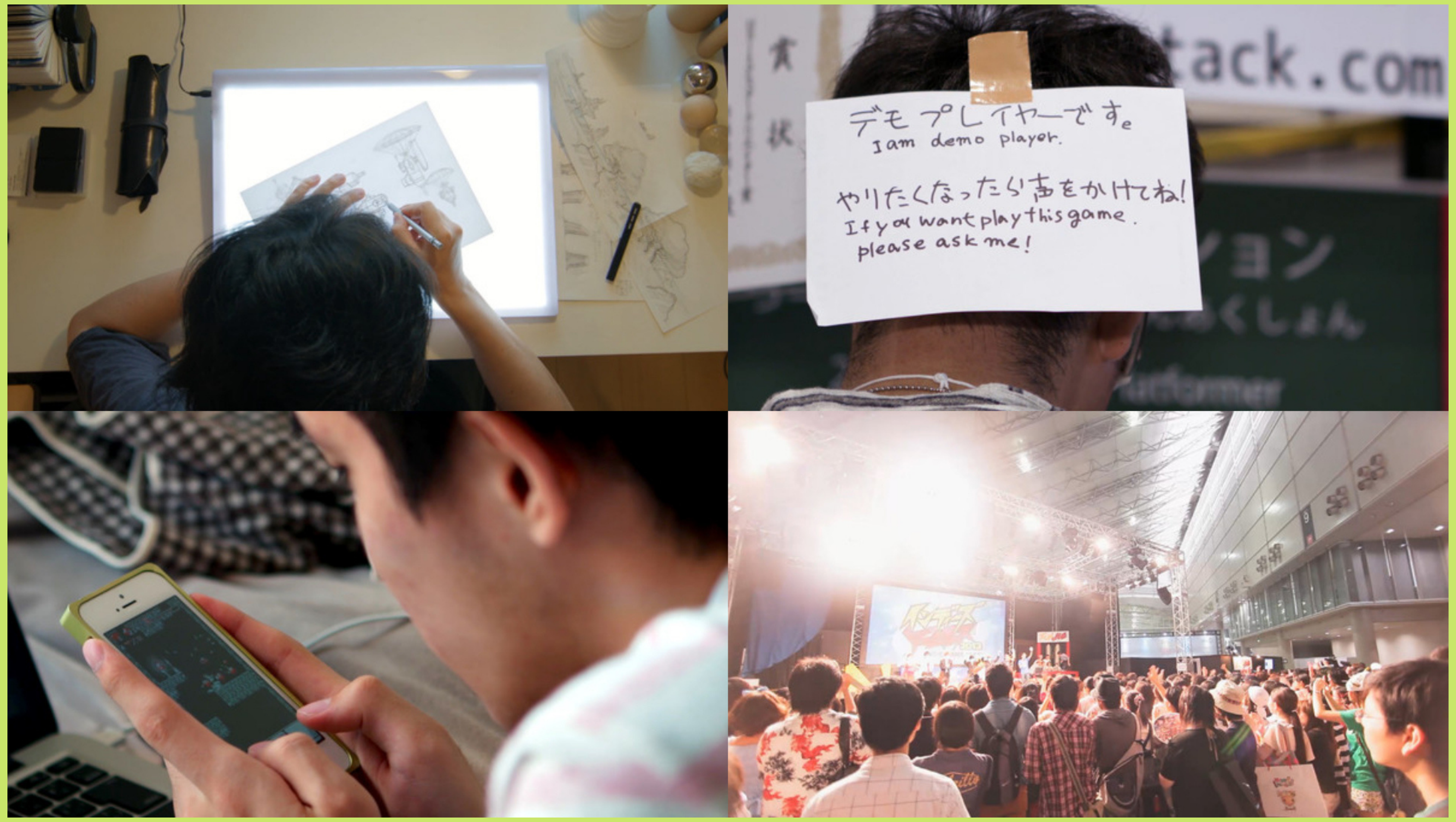
@anne_ferrero
@asobudev

#GDC22

Hi, I'm **Anne**, community manager and other things at asobu

- French TV channel **Nolife**
- In **Japan** since 2011
- Videos about Japanese creators like the “toco toco” series within the team **Archipel**
- Community manager and a bit of everything at **asobu** since Sept. 2019

BRANCHING PATHS
A journey through Japan's indie game scene.


デモプレイヤーです。
I am demo player.
やりたくなったら声をかけてね!
If you want play this game,
please ask me!

Branching Paths: A Journey through Japan's indie game scene (2016)

Japanese indie game history, events, various interviews of indie game creators, game industry people based in Japan:

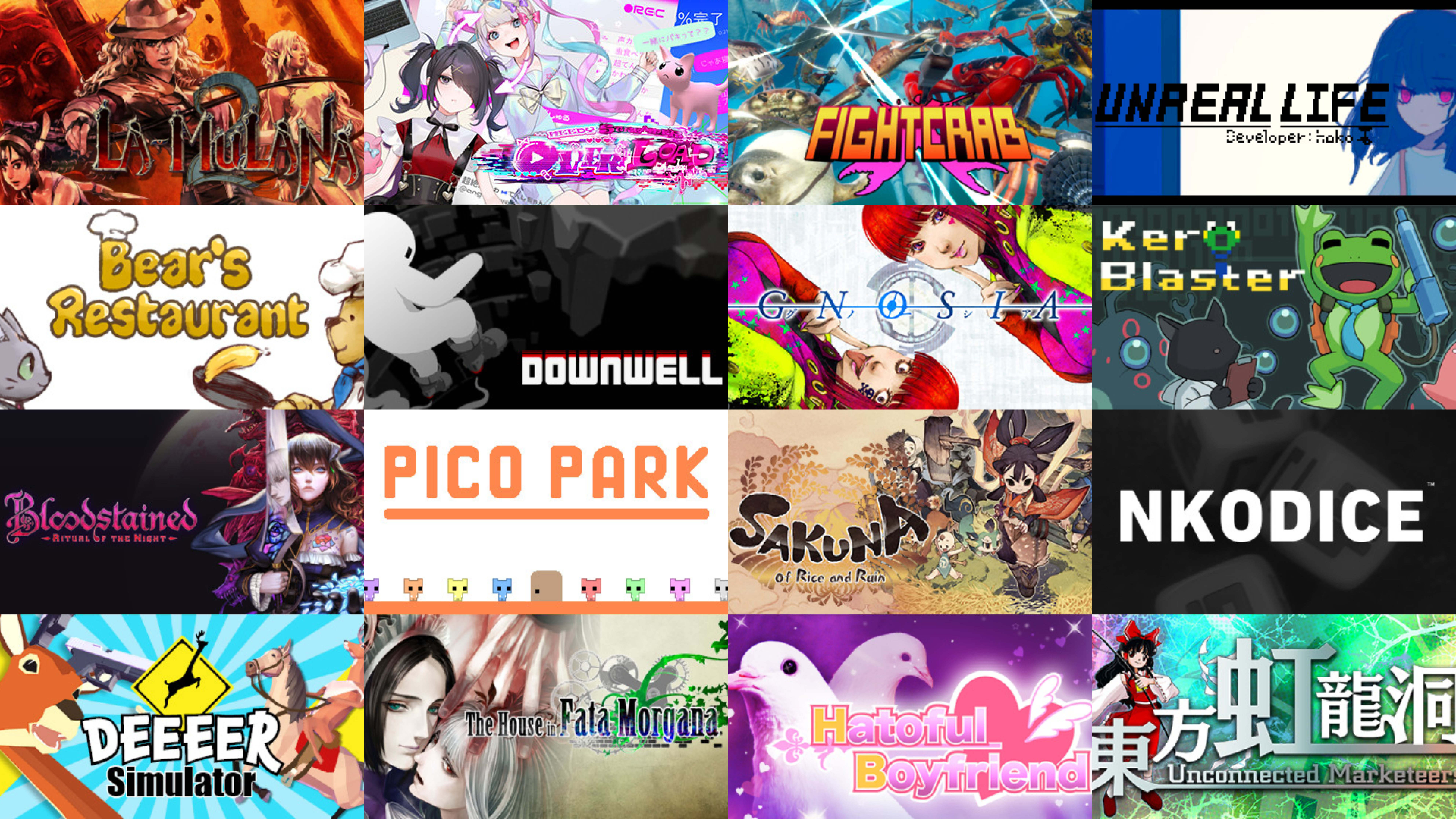
Ojiro Fumoto (Downwell), **Yoshiro Kimura** (Onion Games), **Takumi Naramura** (La-Mulana), **Nal** (Astebreed), **Zun** (Touhou series), **Keika Hanada** (Fata Morgana), **Lucas Pope** (Papers Please), **Jake Kazdal** (Galak-Z), and many more...

Currently available on Steam in various languages

What is asobu?

Community space in Tokyo +
online community for indie devs

- **Networking** in Japan and overseas
- Online events and streams **showcasing games and creators** in Japanese and English
- **Creators' support**: advice on funding, looking for a publisher, pitching, helping people who are self-publishing, ...


LA-MULANA 2
●REC
%完了
一緒にバキってこ？？
OVERLOAD
FIGHTCRAB
UNREAL LIFE
Developer:hako
Bear's Restaurant
DOWNWELL
GNOSIA
Kero Blaster
Bloodstained
Ritual of the Night
PICO PARK
SAKUNA
of Rice and Ruin
NKODICE™
DEEEER Simulator
The House in Fata Morgana
Hatoful Boyfriend
東方虹龍洞
Unconnected Marketeers

Summary

Big in Japan, Not in the West: The Difficulties of Cross-Cultural Appeal

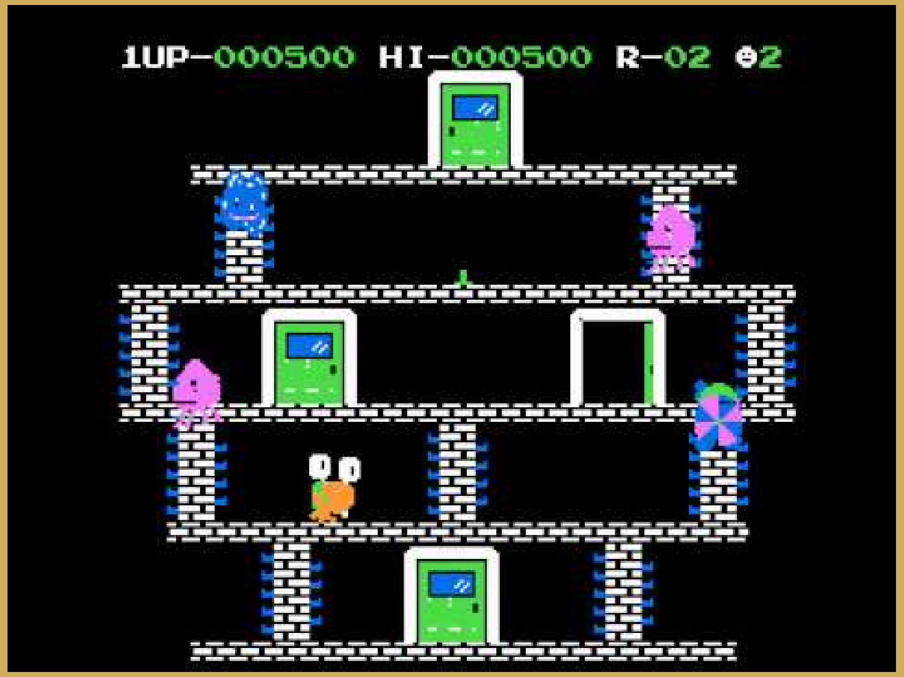
01 Super Quick History of Japanese indie games
02 Indie devs population
03 Funding
04 Language barrier and Cultural issues
05 Release and promotion
06 Relations with industry and institutions
07 Conclusion

Part 1

Super Quick History of Japanese indie games

Super Quick History of the Japanese indies

(More details in Alvin Phu's session for Indie SoapBox 2021, or Branching Paths.)


1UP-000500 HI-000500 R-02 ☻2

Door Door

HScore 413172880
Score 413172880
Player ★★
Bomb
Power MAX
Graze 3932
Point 774/800
東方妖々夢
Perfect Cherry Blossom
59.96fps

Touhou Youyoumu ~ Perfect Cherry Blossom.

01 **Bedroom devs:**

- Around the 1980s
- Sending games to magazines/hardware makers contests

Ex: Door Door, Quinty, etc

02 **Doujin softs/doujin games:**

- From the 1980s and still going
- “Amateur” games sold during events like Comic Market or doujin shops

Ex: Touhou Series, Higurashi Series, Fate/Stay Series, …

Super Quick History of the Japanese indies

(More details in Alvin Phu's session for Indie SoapBox 2021, or Branching Paths.)

Cave Story

Ao Oni

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03 **Free games:**

- Late 1990s-2000s
- Game available on personal homepages, Flash Games, ...

Ex: Cave Story, La-Mulana, Yume Nikki...

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04 **Jisaku games:**

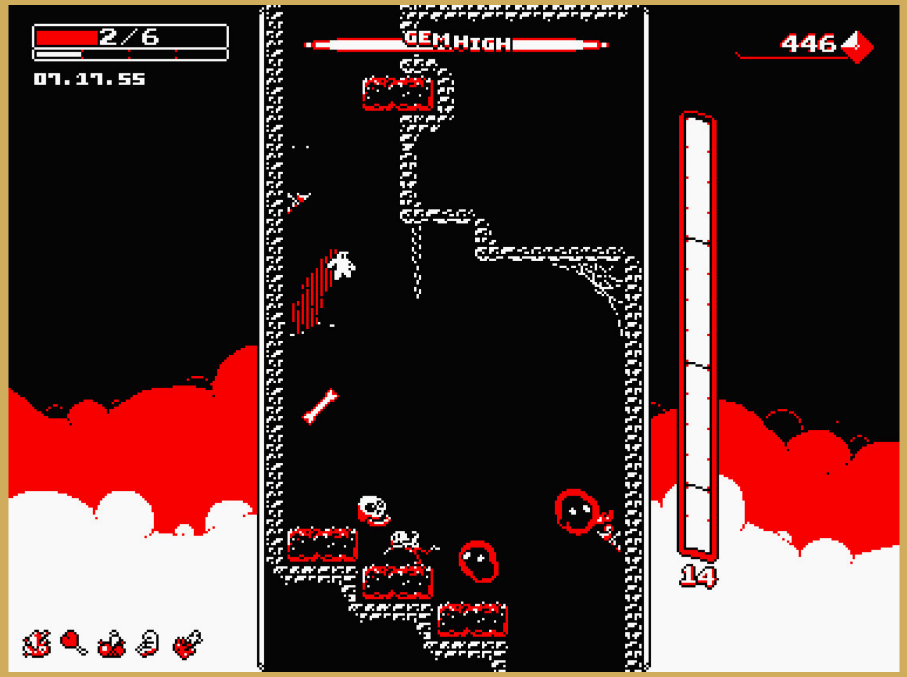
- From the 2000s
- “Home-made”, mainly 2D RPG/horror games/novel games made with easy tools
- Young creators/audience

Ex: Ao Oni, ...

Super Quick History of the Japanese indies

(More details in Alvin Phu's session for Indie SoapBox 2021, or Branching Paths.)

Neko Atsume



Downwell

05 Smartphone games:

- From the early 2010s, on the AppStore and Google Store
- Easy to sell, huge market

Ex: Mom Hid My Game!, Neko Atsume, Hitoribocchi no Wakusei

06 Indie games:

- From the 2010s
- Western concept
- First only available to established companies, then individual creators

Ex: Downwell, Gnosia, Sakuna of Rice and Ruin, ...

Super Quick History of the Japanese indies

Hobby:

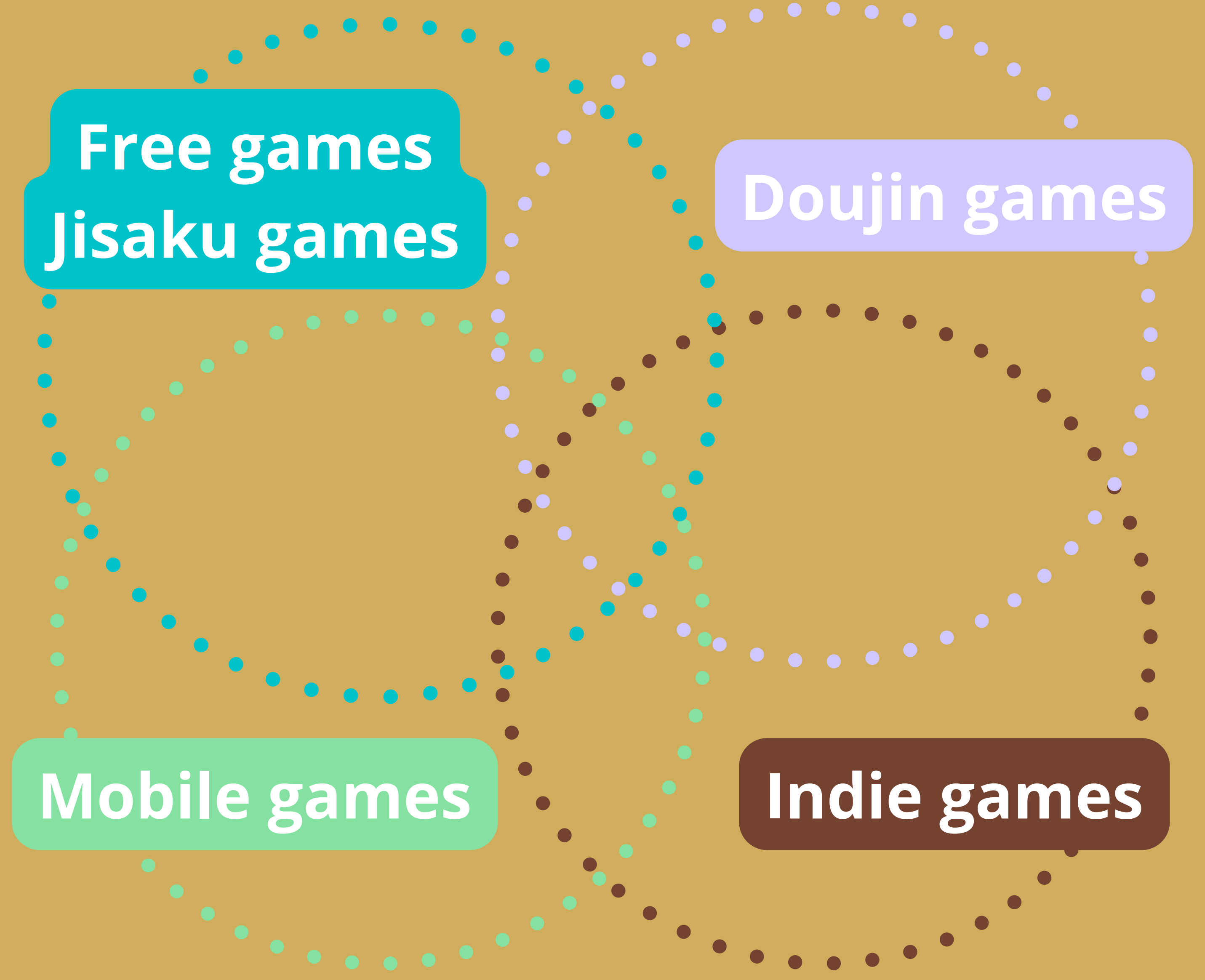
- **Doujin games:** For fun (+ profit in very rare cases)
- **Free games (+Flash games):** For fun
- **Jisaku game:** For fun

In between:

- **Mobile games**: For fun (+ profit if possible)

Hoping for some profit or make a living:

- **Indie games:** For fun + profit


Free games
Jisaku games
Doujin games
Mobile games
Indie games

Communities are different but overlap sometimes

Main indie game events

On-site

Tokyo Game Show:
indie, curation
BitSummit:
indie, curation
Tokyo Sandbox:
indie, curation
Comic Market:
doujin, no curation
Digital Game Expo:
doujin+indie, no curation

Online

Indie Live Expo:
doujin+indie, a few non-curated segments
asobu Indie Showcase:
indie, curation
Sense Of Wonder Night:
indie, curation
Publishers and consoles showcases

Meet-ups

Tokyo Indies in Tokyo
Ichi Pixel in Osaka/Kyoto area

(Both are currently suspended or have online an equivalent because of the pandemic)

Part 2

Indie Devs population

Indie devs population

Estimated to 10,000 people
in the Indie Game Survival Guide
(Takaaki Ichijo)

Biggest communities are in:

- **Tokyo/Yokohama** (all the big game companies)
- **Kyoto/Osaka** (Nintendo HQ+related companies, Capcom, Platinum Games)

ゲーム作家として生きていくための「めんどくさいこと」の極意
インディーゲーム
サバイバルガイド
クリエイターインタビュー
「カニノケンカ」「ALTER EGO」
「グノーシア」「UNREAL LIFE」
著：一條 貴彰
監修：PLAYISM
プラットフォーム対応、外注、マーケティング、マネタイズ、コミュニティ運営…
「著者自らが実践してきた、インディーゲームシーンを
生き抜くための生きた知恵」
PLAYISM 水谷俊次 氏
技術評論社

Indie devs population

Mostly solo devs
or less than 5 people teams

In their 20s (13%):

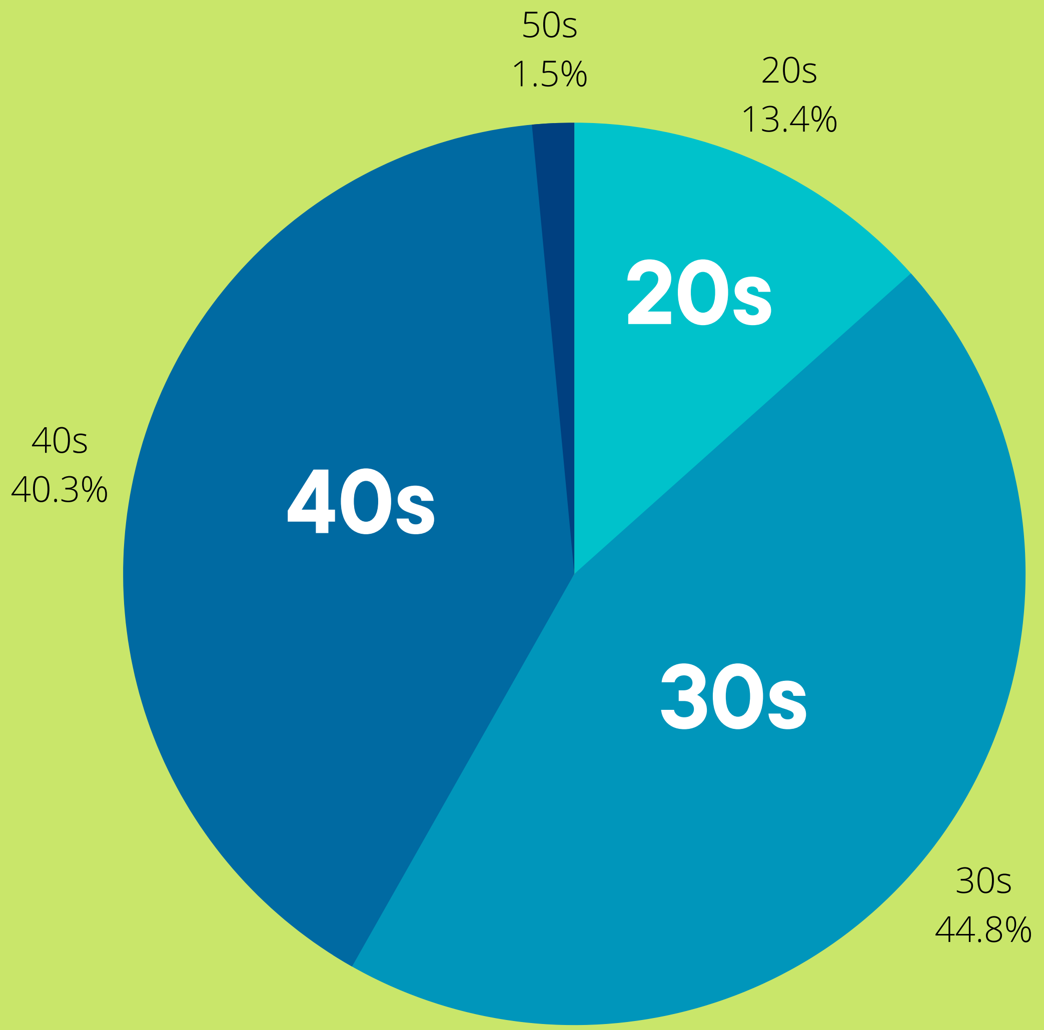
- Few new graduates
- More contacts with overseas games and indie games

In their 30-40s (85%):

- Have another job or savings
- Generation very influenced by Japan’s console gaming

Age range

(Survey made on 65 participants)



Part 3

Games funding

Funding

(Survey made on 65 participants)

37% are full-time indie (very likely lower in reality)
35% have a side job or work full-time
24% are making games for fun

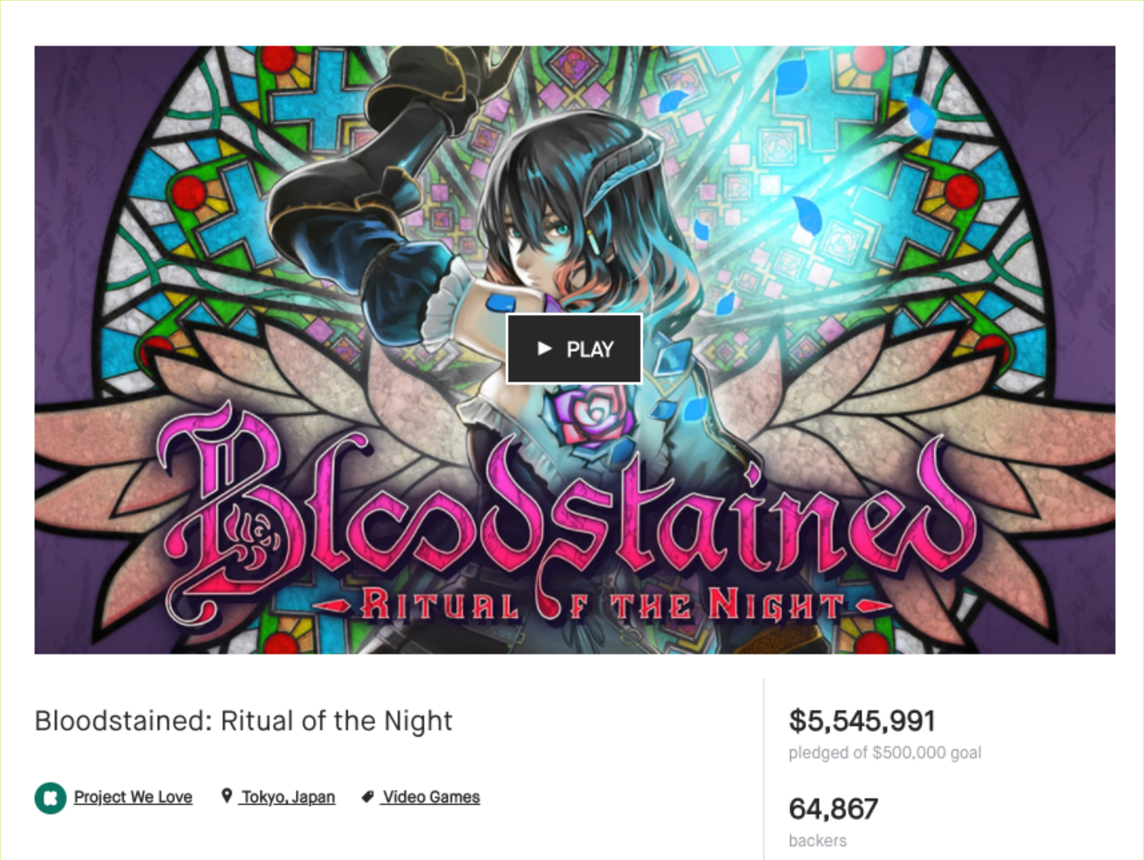
58% rely on having another job
40% and/or funds from their previous game

- **Few/low publishers MG**
- **No help from the government or institutions**
- **Investments only for famous ex-AAA devs or successful mobile studios**
- **Recent help from manga publishing companies**
- **Crowdfunding is very rare**

Crowdfunding Campaigns

Kickstarter: for famous people targeting overseas

- Japan's support was late (around 2017)
- Works only if you're already famous
- Targets overseas backers
- English-speaking team needed



Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night

Project We Love · Tokyo, Japan · Video Games

$5,545,991
pledged of $500,000 goal

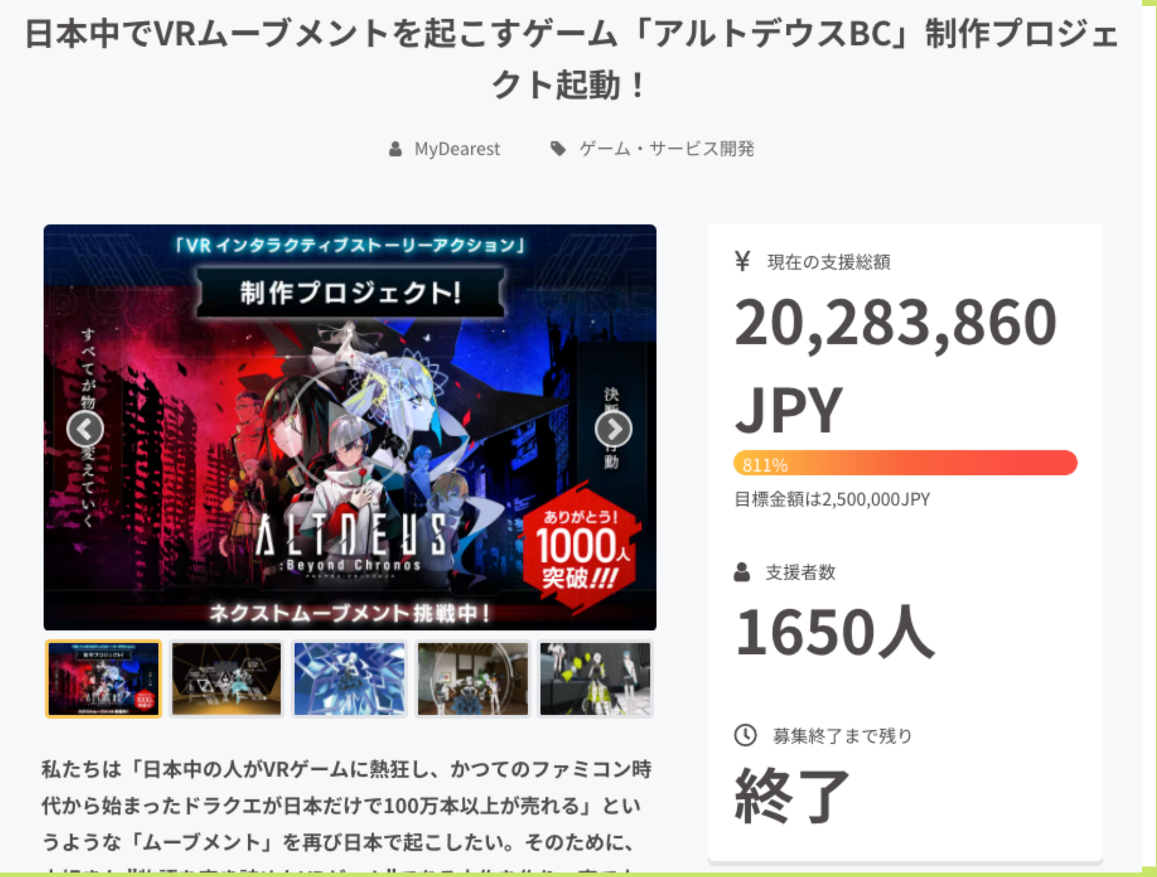
64,867
backers

Bloodstained on Kickstarter
By industry legend Koji Igarashi
64,867 backers → USD 5,545,991

Crowdfunding Campaigns

Japanese platforms for targeting Japanese market

- Mostly Campfire for games
- Good for niche games like VR, anime style
- Targets Japanese backers



日本中でVRムーブメントを起こすゲーム「アルトデウスBC」制作プロジェクト起動！

MyDearest　ゲーム・サービス開発

「VR インタラクティブストーリーアクション」
制作プロジェクト!
すべてが物語を変えていく
決断が行動
ALTDEUS :Beyond Chronos
ありがとう! 1000人突破!!!
ネクストムーブメント挑戦中！

¥ 現在の支援総額

20,283,860 JPY

811%

目標金額は2,500,000JPY

支援者数

1650人

募集終了まで残り

終了

私たちは「日本中の人がVRゲームに熱狂し、かつてのファミコン時代から始まったドラクエが日本だけで100万本以上が売れる」というような「ムーブメント」を再び日本で起こしたい。そのために、

ALTDEUS on Campfire
By indie studio MyDearest
1650 backers →USD175,626

Part 4

Language barrier and Cultural issues

Language barrier and Cultural issues

80% (Survey numbers)

of the devs thought they couldn't communicate well in another language,
or need to use translation tools for comprehension

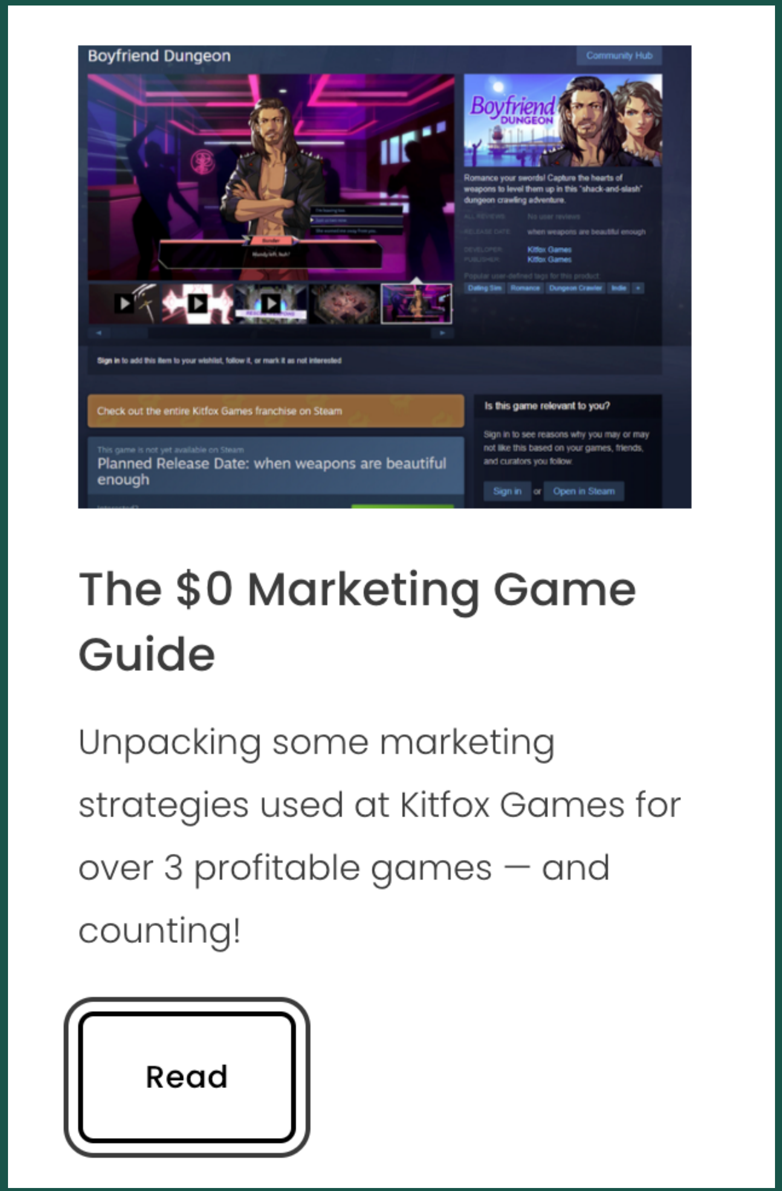
Issues for indie devs:

- Impacts access to information
- Extra costs
- Can't communicate about your game

Language barrier impacts access to information

- Existing resources about development, marketing, ...
- Where / how to apply to events, grants, ...
- Engine / Tools / documentations

Worse, it could lead to wrong info or misunderstandings!



Boyfriend Dungeon

Planned Release Date: when weapons are beautiful enough

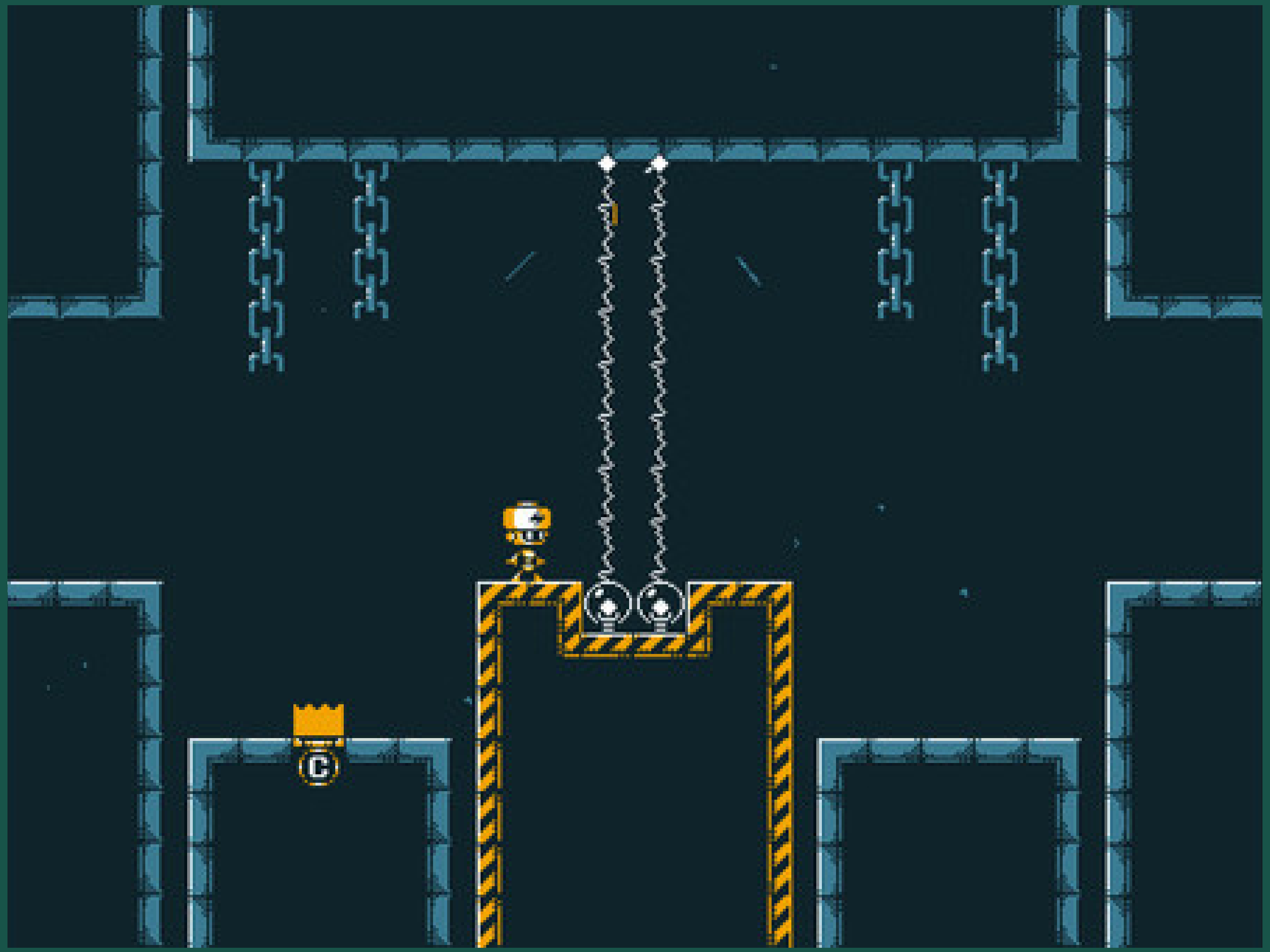
The $0 Marketing Game Guide

Unpacking some marketing strategies used at Kitfox Games for over 3 profitable games — and counting!

Language barrier can cause extra costs

- Need to localize the game
- Missing opportunities/deals
- Having to use extra services

Some shady companies are taking advantage of non-English speaking devs!



Localization

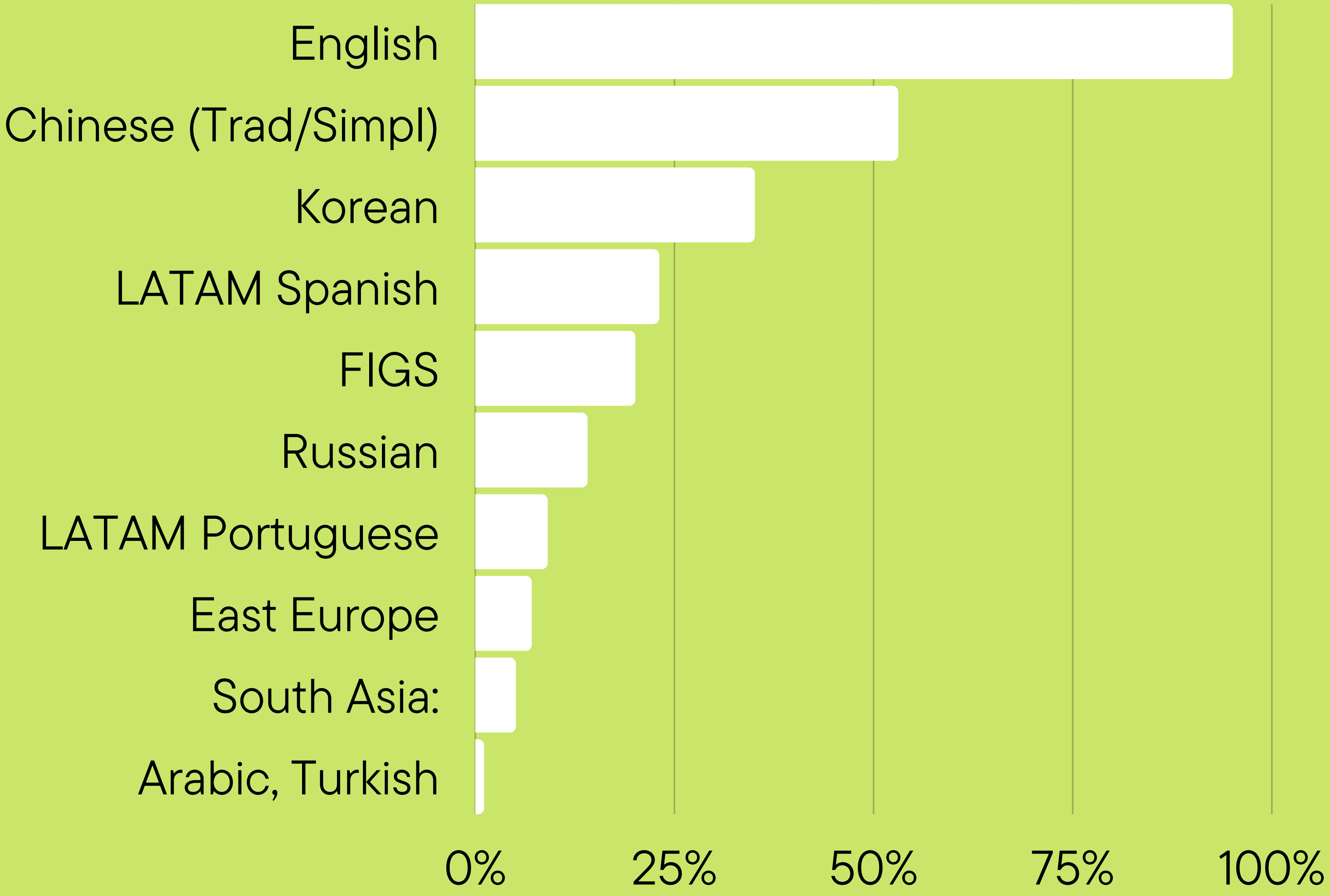
Have you localized your game in another language than Japanese?

(From the survey)

- Yes: 50%
- The publisher took care of it: 19%
- **No: 31%**

Preferred languages by Japanese indies

(From the survey)



Language barrier impacts promotion

- Describing your game correctly
- How to/Which media to contact?
- How to/Which social networks?
- How to communicate with fans?

Some *Japanglish* terms and
what it actually means in English

Belt action → Beat them up
Wire action → Grappling hook game
SRPG → Tactical RPG
TRPG → Tabletop RPG
STG → SHMUP
PV → Trailer

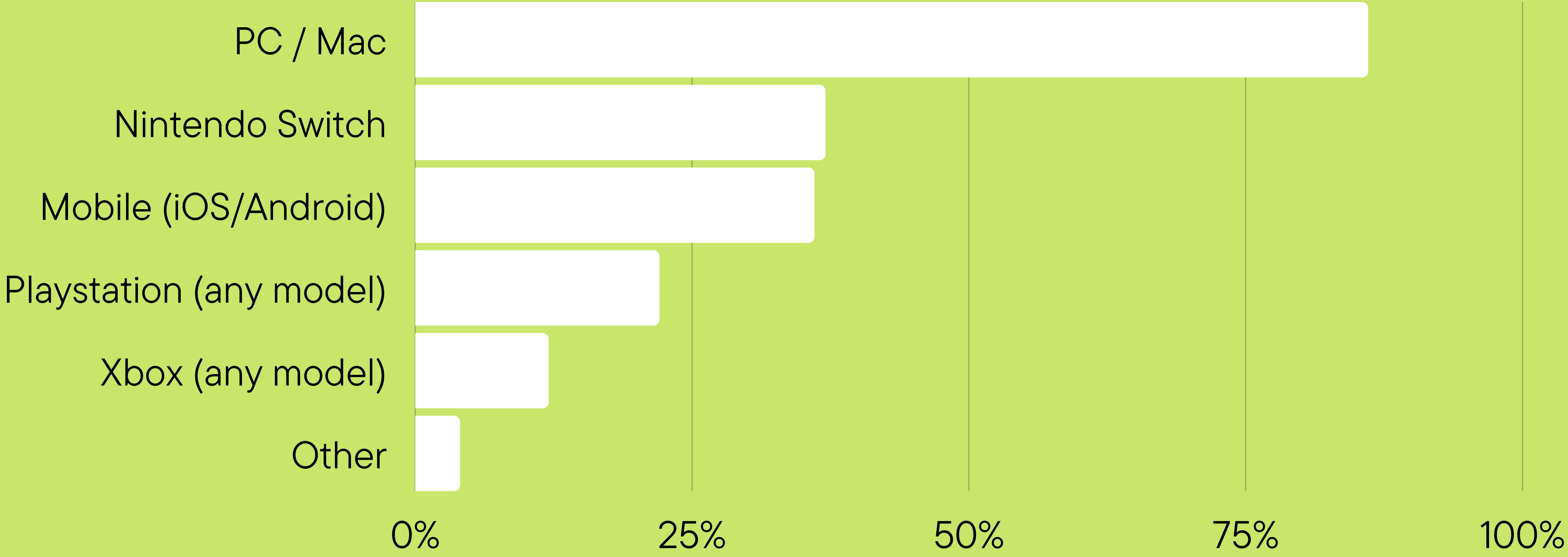
Part 5

Release and promotion

Platforms

(Numbers from the survey)

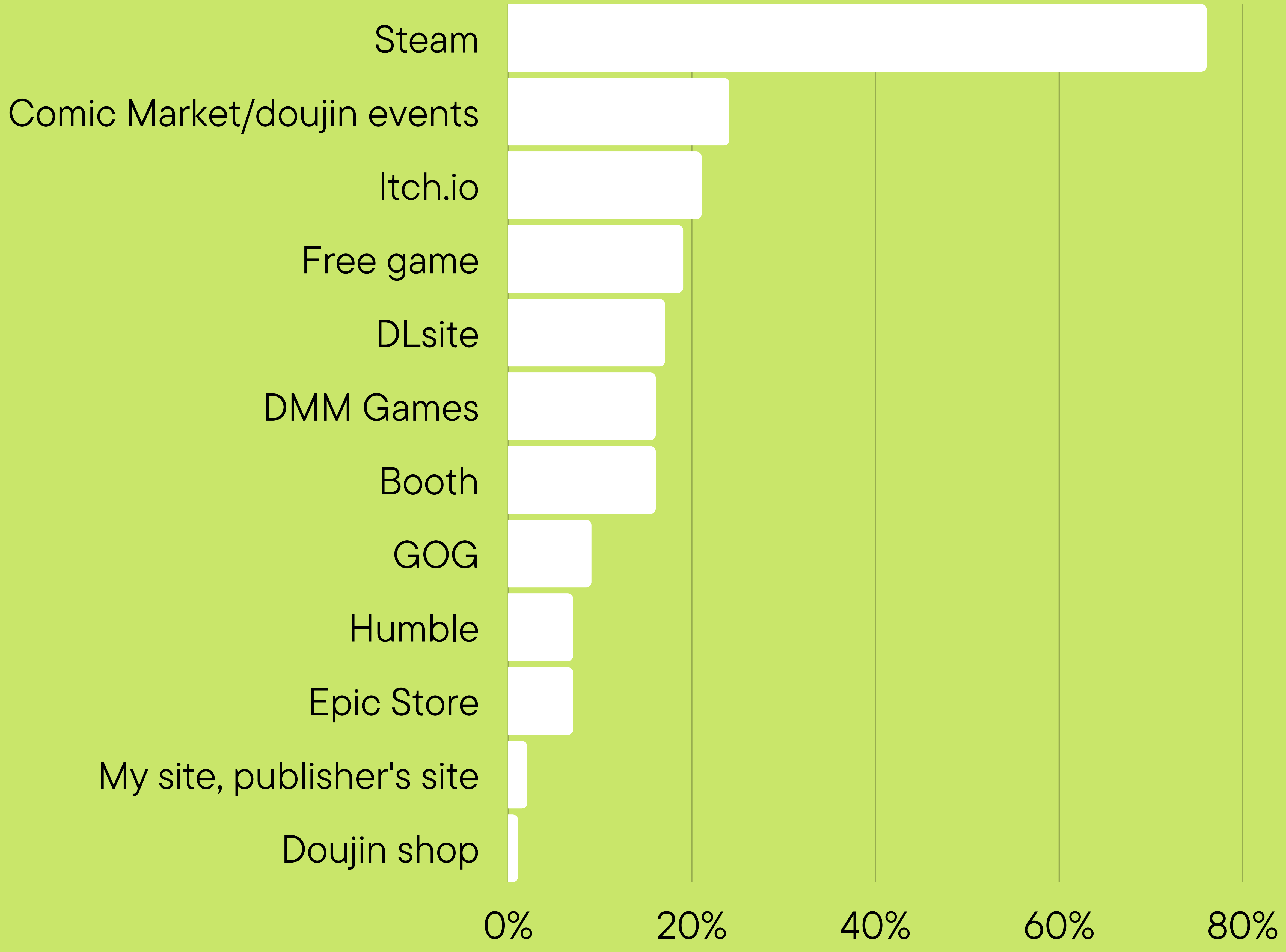
Note:
PC and Xbox markets are historically lower than in the West



Stores

PC/Mac games

(Numbers from the survey)



Note:
DLsite, DMM Games and Booth are Japanese platforms selling digital content

Release and **promotion**

(Numbers from the survey)

When releasing in Japan

75% are self-publishing
13% have a publisher
Rest: still in dev or mixed-publishing

66% I did the promo
13% Publisher did the promo
21% No promotion

When releasing overseas

40% are self-publishing
25% have a publisher
35% no release

25% I did the promo
18% Publisher did the promo
57% No promotion

Release and promotion

(Numbers from the survey)

Did you contact Japanese media?

56,5% Yes
8,1% The publisher did
35,5% No

Did you contact overseas media?

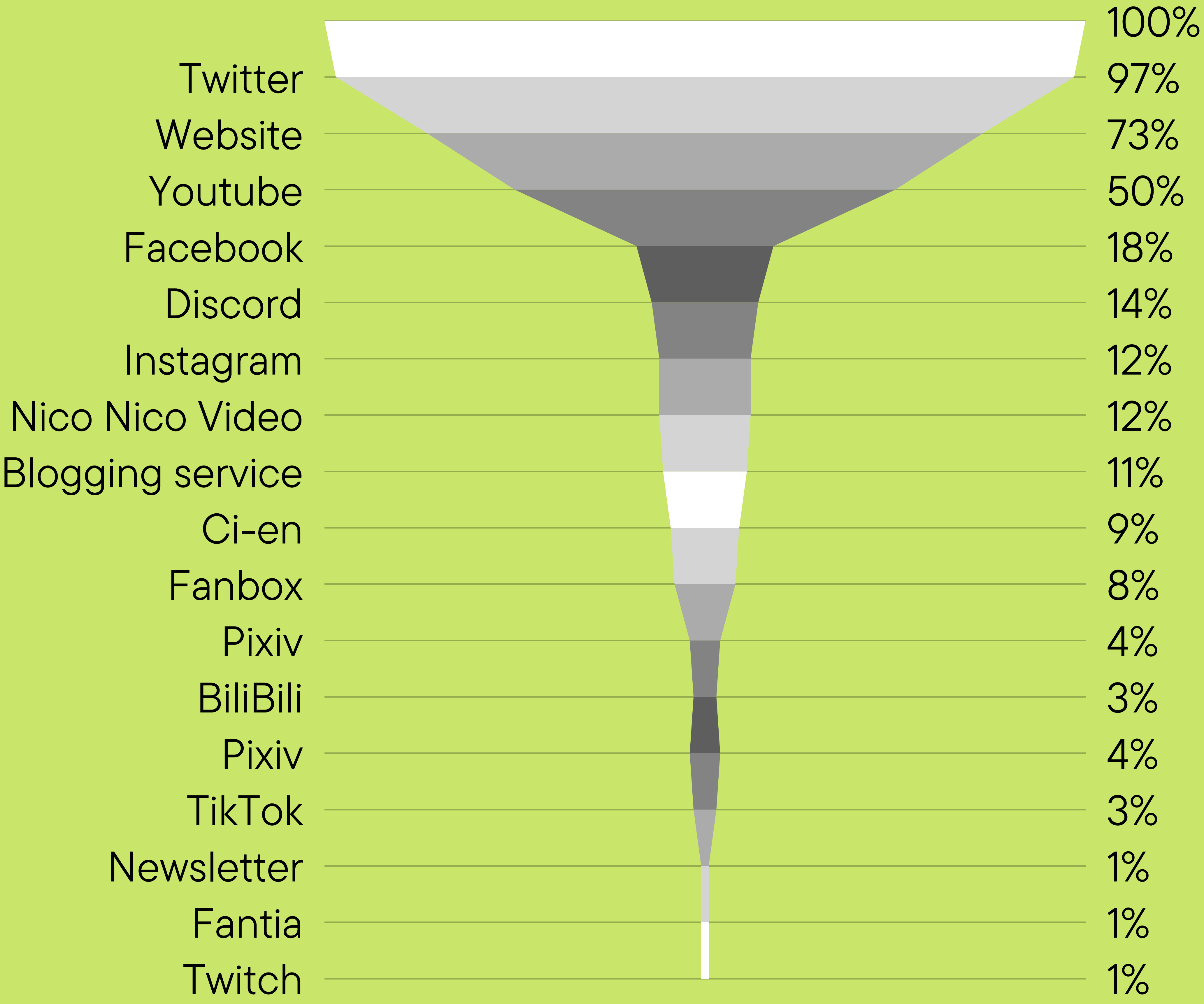
19,4% Yes
16,1% The publisher did
63,5% No

Additional notes:
- Around 80% did not contact any influencers in Japan or overseas
- 86% never attended a game event overseas

Promotion

Social networks/platforms

(Numbers from the survey)



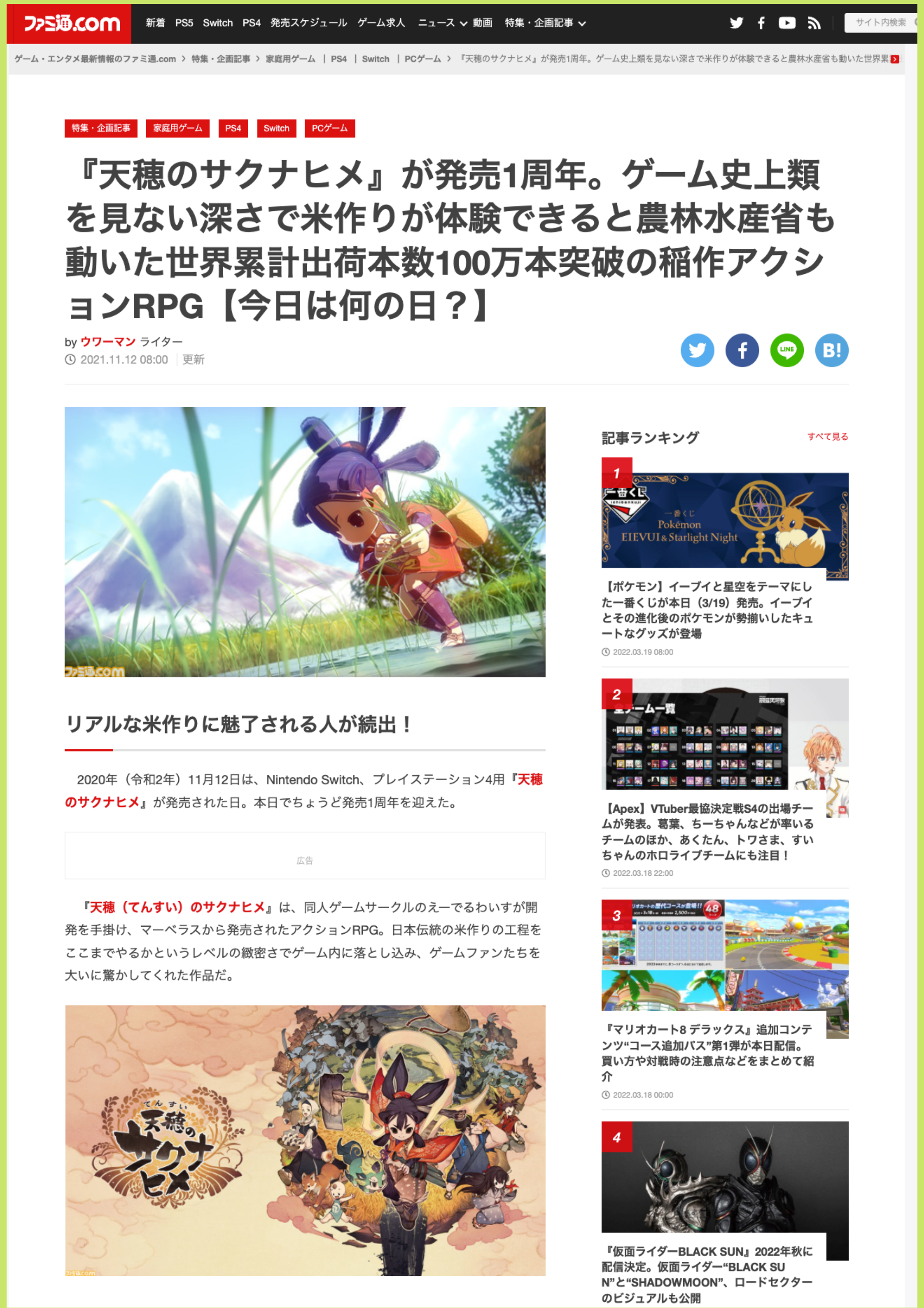
Notes:

- **Ci-en, Fanbox and Fantia are Japanese equivalents of Patreon**
- **Nico Nico video is a Japanese video platform, Bilibili is a Chinese one**

Japanese game media

A few facts

- Few generalist game media, around a dozen: Famitsu, 4gamer, Gamespark, Dengeki, IGN Japan, Automaton, Gamecast, ...
- Sending a press release = at least 1 or 2 articles/posts
- Only IGN Japan reviews are in Metacritic
- Automaton translates some articles into English
- Podcasts are not a thing yet


ファミ通.com
新着 PS5 Switch PS4 発売スケジュール ゲーム求人 ニュース 動画 特集・企画記事
サイト内検索
ゲーム・エンタメ最新情報のファミ通.com › 特集・企画記事 › 家庭用ゲーム | PS4 | Switch | PCゲーム › 『天穂のサクナヒメ』が発売1周年。ゲーム史上類を見ない深さで米作りが体験できると農林水産省も動いた世界累
特集・企画記事 家庭用ゲーム PS4 Switch PCゲーム

『天穂のサクナヒメ』が発売1周年。ゲーム史上類を見ない深さで米作りが体験できると農林水産省も動いた世界累計出荷本数100万本突破の稲作アクションRPG【今日は何の日？】

by ウワーマン ライター
2021.11.12 08:00 | 更新

ファミ通.com

リアルな米作りに魅了される人が続出！

2020年（令和2年）11月12日は、Nintendo Switch、プレイステーション4用『天穂のサクナヒメ』が発売された日。本日でちょうど発売1周年を迎えた。

広告

『天穂（てんすい）のサクナヒメ』は、同人ゲームサークルのえーでるわいすが開発を手掛け、マーベラスから発売されたアクションRPG。日本伝統の米作りの工程をここまでやるかというレベルの緻密さでゲーム内に落とし込み、ゲームファンたちを大いに驚かしてくれた作品だ。

記事ランキング すべて見る

1 【ポケモン】イーブイと星空をテーマにした一番くじが本日（3/19）発売。イーブイとその進化後のポケモンが勢揃いしたキュートなグッズが登場
2022.03.19 08:00

2 【Apex】VTuber最協決定戦S4の出場チームが発表。葛葉、ちーちゃんなどが率いるチームのほか、あくたん、トワさま、すいちゃんのホロライブチームにも注目！
2022.03.18 22:00

3 『マリオカート8 デラックス』追加コンテンツ"コース追加パス"第1弾が本日配信。買い方や対戦時の注意点などをまとめて紹介
2022.03.18 00:00

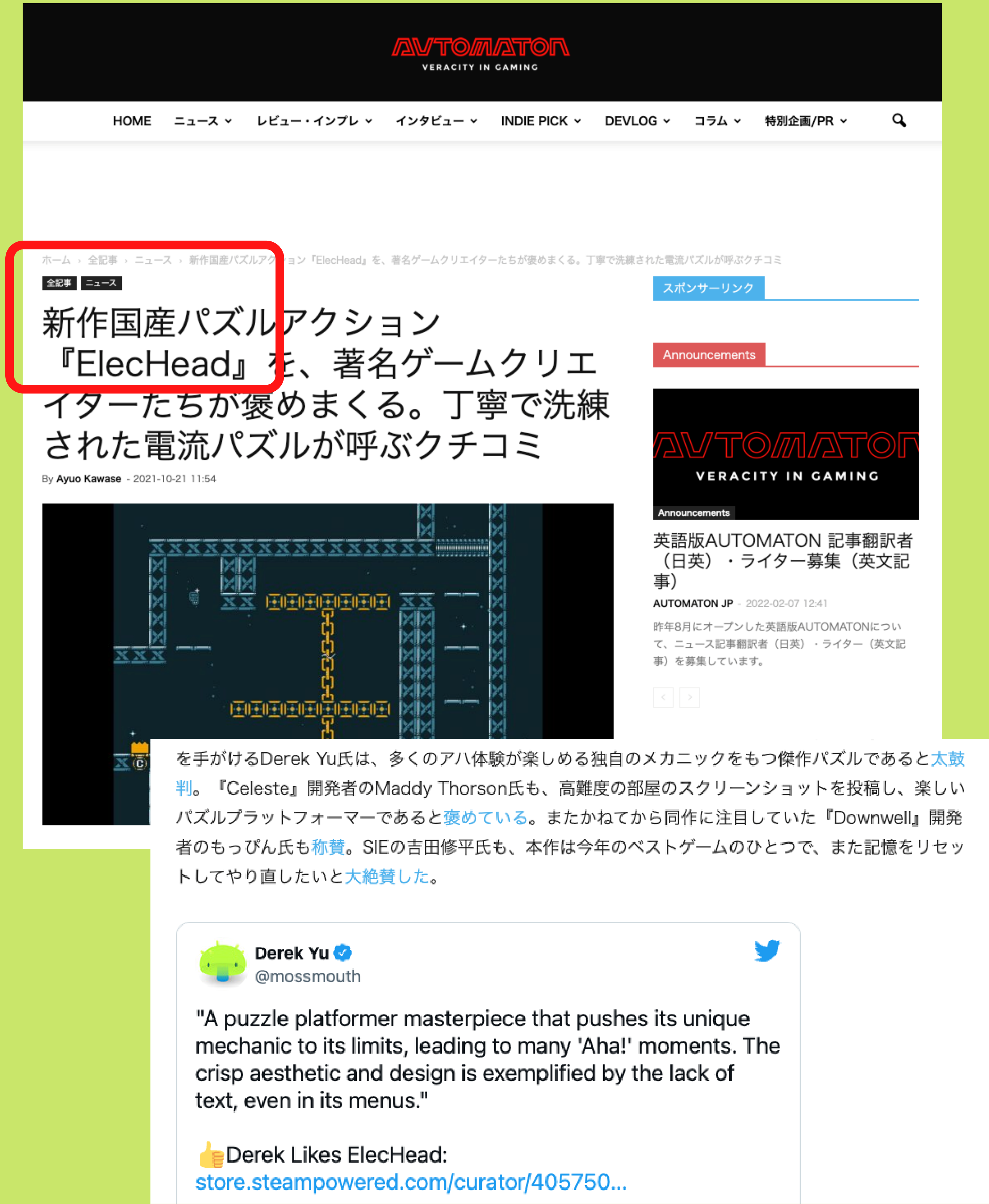
4 『仮面ライダーBLACK SUN』2022年秋に配信決定。仮面ライダー"BLACK SUN"と"SHADOWMOON"、ロードセクターのビジュアルも公開

一番くじ
Pokémon
EIEVUI & Starlight Night

Inverted import = Big in Japan effect

Giving credit or attention to Japanese things that are supposedly “popular overseas”

- Marketing tool in music, tv, fashion industry, …
- Potential media material


AUTOMATON
VERACITY IN GAMING
HOME
ニュース
レビュー・インプレ
インタビュー
INDIE PICK
DEVLOG
コラム
特別企画/PR

ホーム › 全記事 › ニュース › 新作国産パズルアクション『ElecHead』を、著名ゲームクリエイターたちが褒めまくる。丁寧で洗練された電流パズルが呼ぶクチコミ

全記事 ニュース

新作国産パズルアクション『ElecHead』を、著名ゲームクリエイターたちが褒めまくる。丁寧で洗練された電流パズルが呼ぶクチコミ

By Ayuo Kawase - 2021-10-21 11:54

スポンサーリンク

Announcements

AUTOMATON
VERACITY IN GAMING
Announcements

英語版AUTOMATON 記事翻訳者（日英）・ライター募集（英文記事）

AUTOMATON JP - 2022-02-07 12:41

昨年8月にオープンした英語版AUTOMATONについて、ニュース記事翻訳者（日英）・ライター（英文記事）を募集しています。

を手がけるDerek Yu氏は、多くのアハ体験が楽しめる独自のメカニックをもつ傑作パズルであると太鼓判。『Celeste』開発者のMaddy Thorson氏も、高難度の部屋のスクリーンショットを投稿し、楽しいパズルプラットフォーマーであると褒めている。またかねてから同作に注目していた『Downwell』開発者のもっぴん氏も称賛。SIEの吉田修平氏も、本作は今年のベストゲームのひとつで、また記憶をリセットしてやり直したいと大絶賛した。

Derek Yu @mossmouth

"A puzzle platformer masterpiece that pushes its unique mechanic to its limits, leading to many 'Aha!' moments. The crisp aesthetic and design is exemplified by the lack of text, even in its menus."

👍Derek Likes ElecHead: store.steampowered.com/curator/405750...

Games can't always resonate everywhere

Some games might not be popular
in other regions or be difficult to export

Unreal Life

Steam version:
78% of sales in Japan
Nintendo Switch version:
97% of sales in Japan

UNREAL LIFE
Developer:hako

Games can't always resonate everywhere

Some games might not be popular
in other regions or be difficult to export

NKODICE

Dice game based on
Japanese dirty words,
can't be localized

Part 6

Relations with industry and institutions

Indie games are not fully recognized by schools, companies and institutions

Schools

- Promise a place in a game company
- Last year almost dedicated to job hunting
- 99% of graduates won't become indie
- International exchanges are rare

Game companies

- New graduates entering every April
- Not allowed on contract to have a second activity
- Don't support indie games (Hardware makers do)
- Few indie talks in game conferences like CEDEC

Institutions

- Soft power initiatives like Cool Japan are only available to big companies
- Very few regional support
- No pavilion or program to showcase games in overseas events

Part 7

Conclusion

Some things that would be nice :)

01

More translated content, more English captions

02

More region/country booths, exhibitions, showcases, Steam sales

03

More school exchanges, residencies

04

More non-English incubators, accelerators

Conclusion

Enjoy games and the cultures they're born from!

Let's showcase diverses games and creators!

More roles models/stories to relate, get inspired and learn

More diverse games will create new fanbases

JRPG, Bullet Hell and visual novels are created all over the world now!

Showing that indie game can be a career

Step out in the non-gaming world, get the same support than indie movies or music

Found a game or a creator you like?

Engage the conversation, talk about it, like or RT!

Thank you!
ありがとうございます!

Special thanks:

Justin Ma, Takaaki Ichijo, Ezaki-san, Terajima-san, the devs who shared about their games, and people who replied to the survey

If you have any questions:

anne@asobu.dev
@anne_ferrero
@asobudev