**TRANSCRIPT OF VIDEO:**

**WHO PLAYS UNSPEAKABLE GAMES?**

Apple advert: And why soon, there will be just two kinds of people: those who use computers, and those who use Apple’s.

Apple Holiday Promotion: Oh! Hi! I just came from a great party that Apple threw, let me tell you – what a bash. You know, I think they have a problem remembering their name: they put it all over everything. It’s very strange. But I’ve got good news. I met a guy, and I think it could work this time. He’s an accountant, and he still lives with his mom, so, all right, he’s a little bit nerdy, but I feel the vibes. It feels pretty good. Yeah. Enough about me – let’s talk about the promotion. Apple’s really psyched about this, and you should be too! Why? Because you can make a lot of money during this promotion and it’s really easy.

News clip: A California federal judge will soon render a verdict which could potentially change how we download apps to our smartphones and other devices. Popular video game Fortnite was eliminated from Apple and Google’s app stores last year, after it tried to circumvent their business models. As a result, the game’s developer, Epic Games, filed an antitrust lawsuit against Apple, arguing its app store is a monopoly.

Kaiju: Hi, I’m Kaiji, my pronouns are they/them, and I’m here to talk about adult games. I run an interview and streaming awareness project based around the work of queer game developers called the Digital Diversity project. The first one that I encountered along those lines was Hardcoded, which is a quite well known, slice of life, visual novel kind of simulator, around a very heavily trans community, with a lot of identity and a lot of sex. Society being what it is, I can’t stream any of these games because of their content – because sexualised content is banned on most platforms. Any platform where I would attempt to get some kind of leverage to promote these games and their developers, they don’t exist. So instead I focussed on interviewing them and talking to them and finding out what made them want to write these.

Comment clip: So, this was a fascinating case that has the potential to impact literally billions of iPhone users.

Archive clip: I think people should be allowed to see what an artist or a writer or an actor wants to do. It’s creating something.

It’s ludicrous to have one man sitting in an office saying what you should see and what you shouldn’t.

Comment clip: It is the only app store that is allowed on the iPhone. Think of your Mac or PC desktop, where you can install a number of different stores: if you want to play video games you can install Steam, you do have Apple app store, and a ton of other options. We also learned that the company is pretty concerned with what’s happening in Europe, with very similar allegations by EU regulators: that Apple is running a monopoly on Apple Music and the app store.

That’s really interesting because I don’t know how many people kind of are aware that, you know, the app store in Europe or even in Canada is a completely different app store with different apps available – sometimes the apps that you download here in the US don’t work when you go to other countries.

Archive clip: To mark this dramatic occasion, members of the Lord Chamberlain’s staff – having put down their blue pencils for the last time – have been to the theatre themselves, to see the current revival of the show that started it all: The Beggar’s Opera. It was in 1737 that Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole instituted the Lord Chamberlain’s theatre powers, after the biting satire aimed at the government which the show contained. Today’s version was one of the very last scripts to pass through his Lordship’s office. Tomorrow, Hair, the hippy musical from America, starts its run at the Shaftsbury Theatre. In one scene, men and women in the cast appear on the stage naked. Will this sort of thing be the first post-Lord Chamberlain trend? The director of Hair is Mr Tom O’Horgan.

Comment clip: Look, Apple has had a fairly pristine brand over the last decade or so – especially when you look at it relative to their competitors: Facebook, Google and others. So this could be something – it could be part of Epic’s strategy to scuff up Apple’s brand a little bit. So even if the law doesn’t rule in favour of Epic, it could be that they ‘win’ by kicking the two trillion dollar company in the shins.

Kay Purcell: Hi, I am Kay Purcell. I’m technically a community manager by trade, but community management often overflows into a lot of other aspects and one of my aspects was moderation. So I ended up working very, very closely with our company lawyer, on anything from DMCA takedowns, to FBI requests, to all of the ‘we are not going to decide if anything is art or is not art – but this is what we consider to be porn and does this piece cross the line?’ When I started at DeviantArt, there was no place where you could really go and understand that ‘I’m going to go to this place to find fandom content but there’s also hardcore pornography on this site,’ and that’s ok, right. It was very segmented. Like it was very difficult to even find – I like Final Fantasy and I like Breath of Fire, and it was very rare to find a site that had both Final Fantasy and Breath of Fire fan art hosted together. So people’s understanding of the internet back then was very different. ‘If I see porn on a site, this is a porn site, and there is nothing else here’ was very much the norm.

Archive clip: I don’t think any more is going on, I mean, you can only get to a certain point in sex and you can’t go any further. I think it’s just being brought out into the open more – people are talking about it, people are thinking about it. They’re not sneaking off in corners and not telling their friends about it, and being embarrassed about it. They’re coming right out in the open.

But sooner than you may think now, your child will be old enough for a full explanation. So let’s brush up on it, you and I, and together review the human reproductive system. A model will help you review the fundamentals.

The only index we have of this is what people say, and more people talk about what they do, which might give the impression that people are freer. But personally I don’t believe that’s the case.

Bella Blondeau: Yeah, I started playing, like, my first visual novels, I started playing, like, my first porn flash games when I was in my teens, when I was in high school. My name is Bella Blondeau, and I am a staff blogger for Nutaku and I’m here to talk about porn games. Yeah, I wasn’t supposed to be looking at this stuff, but, like, it was already out of the bottle – I couldn’t put that back in, right. As I went into the game industry I kind of took that interest and brought it into that workplace, so I would give coverage to adult games because that was just a part of the industry that I really cared about. First of all there is this discomfort that I think people have, that there are games that are just depicting sexual acts in a very blatant way without any hint of subtlety, I guess. And in America, especially where I grew up, in the deep South for a lot of my childhood, that’s the kind of stuff that people don’t like looking at. It makes them uncomfortable on some innate level.

Kay Purcell: The biggest impact on what is allowed, especially in America, especially when it comes to online content, and also video games, is advertising. If an advertiser is not comfortable with their ad being on the same page as a female-presenting nipple, or a penis, that page is essentially costing you money as opposed to making you money.

Bella Blondeau: There’s a type of censorship going on that is like a very polite censorship, and it is a polite censorship in that you can’t necessarily talk about porn games on IGN and keep all of your advertisers – you simply could not do that. So that to me is a type of censorship because it puts adult game developers at a disadvantage. The powers that be are not able to talk about these games because it then puts this entire industry in a box that is ‘do not touch’.

Kay Purcell: We had rules around what the site allowed and what our advertisers were comfortable being on with. We wanted to give artists more freedom than we generally could, while also maintaining the site. As an example, there was this really, really amazing photograph: it was like a cliff and a guy standing on the cliff, and it was like – I don’t remember – sunrise or sunset, but it was a beautiful skyscape behind him and he was just silhouetted. And he had the biggest boner! It was just out there – but it was also silhouetted. But it was also very clearly an erection. And we had to have long discussions about ‘what do we do with this’ because, technically, that’s a problem. But also, technically, if you go back to Greek myth, an erection was a border marker, it’s a way of displaying dominance. We spent a lot of time having to discern between, like, ‘is this person actually erect, or, given that they’re, like, clearly involved in some sort of physical activity, is this increased blood flow?’

Maggie Mayhem: So, what is SESTA/FOSTA? This is a piece of legislation that was signed into law by Donald Trump on April 11th 2018. It is the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act and the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act. It kind of converged into one piece of horrible legislation that has had all kinds of effects, resulting in 150 – at least –documented tech actions. This has involved Craigslist – if any of you have been trying to find a date on Craigslist you have probably been having some trouble. Many other websites have also been shut down or censored. We’re seeing an increased amount of shadow banning or outright removal of sex workers from services. So what is this? Essentially, what this legislation did is it eliminated Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. This means that websites now have increased liability for any third part content that is posted. So even if a website doesn’t know that someone may be buying or selling sex on their website, they are now going to be in trouble for that. This means there is increased scrutiny on speech online, and it’s had, as I said, tremendous effects.

Kaiju: Honestly, I think the devs are scared about what’s going to happen, especially for content like this. We’ve already seen it happen on multiple platforms. We’ve already seen sex workers’ incomes get taken away entirely by payment processors who, at the pressure of credit card companies and advertisers, refuse to handle any business that is in the explicitly adult direction. Sex workers and especially queer sex workers were making waves about this well before SESTA/FOSTA happened, and it’s just been rolling since.

Archive clip:

Oh well. You probably won’t find anything too incriminating, I hope.

Sharang Biswas: I made a game called Feast, which involves the consumption of actual food as part of the game, right. And I did that because I was interested in, in my practice, about the actions and verbs that players engage in when playing a game. In one sense, games can be defined as a medium in which players or participants need to take action in order to engage – more than just, like, reading and watching or listening, right, they need to do things. And that made me think about: ‘Well, what other things can we use as verbs that would be interesting in games?’ And again, not just what verb is the game modelling, but verbs are the players taking part in in order to play the game? I was talking to my friend who then became one of my co-editors, Lucian Kahn, who is also an indie game designer in New York, and we had both come up with slightly saucy games separately, right. And we were like, you know what would be really cool is if we have, like, an anthology of saucy games. The idea of sexuality, especially queer sexuality in games, has been really interesting for a while, but this anthology that Lucian and I made together with these wonderful designers was kind of what crystallised that, in a way.

Rhianna Newlove: Well, I started off with interactive fiction in general, that was what I found most cool in games – little stories – and obviously there was a lot of adult themes out there as well. But, like, even when they were niche enough to appeal to me, they were often – like, they were not openly queer. And there was also a general don’t-ask-don’t-tell approach to sexuality in those games. Like, everyone’s anonymous and people can just be a shitlord because that’s just how adult stuff is supposed to be, according to some people. So I’m, like, not inherently interested in sex scenes, as such – more like niche kink content. But I still feel like writing it is interesting because the way that games approach it varies a lot. Like, a lot of games nowadays will have an option to say ‘Do you want to have sex: YES or NO’ to sort of give players accord. One issue I’ve got is that choosing not to have sex with someone means avoiding intimacy or avoiding general game content – like, even if that is just entirely offscreen. So what I try to do with my new game is, like, also have some dialogues for if you choose not to have sex, that’s just still vaguely intimate, I guess. Also, I really wanted to have a scene where you negotiate what sex acts to actually do, because games are generally structured around the player, but there was a talk by Meghna Jayanth and it talked about how giving NPCs their own goals outside what the player’s own goals are – like, it helps those NPCs feel more fleshed out. So by giving the player the option to suggest certain acts that the other partner’s not interested in, and, like, won’t partake in, I feel like that gives them more agency.

Sharang Biswas: Influential games – in that they have made me think about games and sex, and depictions of sex in general – are Just A Little Lovin’, which is by Tor Kjetil Edland and Hanne Grasmo, which is a large-scale Nordic larp. It’s a five day larp about queer people during the early years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in New York. It’s a very heavy sort of game, but characters have sex a lot. Players do not have sex – in fact there’s a rule that players do not have any sex – but characters do in their representational ways. But one of the things that happens is after every sex scene the players stand back-to-back and each monologue the thoughts that are going through their heads, post-coitus, let’s say. And that’s very interesting because that then emphasises not necessarily just the act of sex, which is important in a game about HIV/AIDS, but also, like, what are the power dynamics, reasons, those kinds of things; like why do people have sex, right? And it’s really interesting because of the character design – like there are characters who have sex for lots of different reasons. Right, definitely check out Robert Yang’s work. Robert Yang always makes these small, very thoughtful games, that explore a facet of sexuality, gay men’s sexuality.

Robert Yang: I think the first game that got banned was my dick-pic game called Cobra Club. And in that game it is a dick-pic photo studio, where you take pictures and send those pictures to people who want them. So even though it’s a dick-pic game it’s a consensual dick-pic game; it’s a dick-pic utopia. And that game got banned from platforms like Twitch – possibly the most popular streaming platform for games – and that’s kind of messed up because my games are designed, first and foremost, as maybe as, like, conversation pieces. And when these games are not allowed on that platform – the first and foremost platform for video game culture and discussion – it kind of robs them of a lot of power and audience. And so then I thought ‘oh, ok, maybe the problem is genitalia. So maybe I just shouldn’t show genitalia in my games’. So then, my next game, Rinse and Repeat – that’s a shower simulator game – I actually made a point of censoring the genital area and obscuring it and pixelating it. And then that game also got banned even though I thought I was doing what they wanted. So then I said ‘ok fine’. I was just, kind of, like, upset with guessing what this faceless corporation wanted from me. And, by the way, when they ban my games they don’t say anything about why it was banned or what I should be doing – there’s zero communication – and if you email them they also won’t even say anything. They’ll also just say ‘please refer to our policy. Bye’. You know, there’s zero communication, because I’m not a huge company that controls a lot of market share and controls their audience. I’m just some random guy making games about gay culture. As far as they’re concerned, I don’t even exist. I’m not even worth talking to. So then, for my next game, The Tearoom, I thought ‘ok, fine, I’ll have zero nudity, and what genitalia there are, they will be replaced with the most acceptable object in all of video games, which are guns’. So I replaced all the genitalia with guns – and, to my knowledge, this game has not be banned. Because when you are sucking off a gun, there’s nothing objectionable about that. You’re just cleaning another guy’s gun.

Apple Holiday Promotion: The customers pay for the software upfront, and they can choose from tons of hot packages – look at this! Oh, like I’m going to read every one. I’d be here until Bewitched came back to prime time, come on.

Robert Yang: Apple and Google also have policies against sexual content and free expression on these platforms. Apple specifically argues that apps are not art: if you want to write about sex, write a book. If you want to talk about sex, record a podcast or something – do not do it in an app. An app is not art, an app is not a form of speech or expression, therefore it can be strictly controlled. If I put all my time and energy into making an iPhone game and then Apple just say ‘oh yeah, we’re never letting you put this on anyone’s iPhone, ever’ then I’ve wasted all my time. I’ve wasted all of my resources, and energy in doing that. So there’s a huge sunk cost into engineering any of these apps, so if you’re not sure Apple will accept it or not, you can’t feasibly put all that time into it.

Kay Purcell: It is cyclical: first it was, like, gay writers, then it was newspapers – newspapers were going to destroy all of us – then it was the radio – the radio was going to corrupt all of us – then it was comic books – and comic books were evil and was going to corrupt our youth, and then it was TV because radio was losing their foothold so they had to attack TV, and now it’s video games. It is absolutely cyclical.

Kaiju: Then you start walking into really questionable territory of ‘what is and ‘unacceptable’ game’? Is this game that talks about sexuality ‘unacceptable’? We see that happening in the adult industry everywhere: the porn lords of the UK were particularly well talked about for quite a while – you know, you couldn’t do this, you couldn’t do that. So it’s just like, who makes these decisions about yes, you can do this but no, can’t do this? Until you end up in a very puritanical, cis, heteronormative situation where any game that isn’t just a cis man and a cis woman being heterosexual together is ‘unspeakable’.

Kay Purcell: It is definitely easier and more acceptable to make games about queer content, about sex and about sexual queer content than it was. But that doesn’t mean that it’s easy. The needle is moving – it’s moving so much faster than I thought it ever would – but that doesn’t mean that it is easy for anyone involved in the space.

Robert Yang: I don’t know, I bounce a lot between a pessimistic mood and a positive mood – you know, I imagine, many of us do all the time. I think currently I’m in a pessimistic mood, unfortunately, where I just feel like the forces of evil are winning; where the forces of censorship and oppression and anti-sex puritanical oppression – they just have their shit together, and they are pushing on all the different pressure points of tech capitalism to get them to close all the walls in on us. Anyone who wants to do any type of social expression, on almost any platform – you know, not just my struggles with Twitch or Apple. It’s hard to feel like artists and sex workers and all these people I find solidarity with – it’s hard to feel like we have a lot of power or influence on these platforms, right.

Kaiju: I feel like the current landscape is going to open people’s minds in ways that we hadn’t thought before. I think the last five years alone have been hugely influential on our understandings of sexuality and gender, and I think that in those few years we got a lot more people coming to terms with that side of their gender and identity, and I think the development of platforms and media that allows people to experiment is going to widen things even more.

Robert Yang: As someone who, kind of, came into making sexual content and sexual art more recently, it’s realising that ‘oh, this war has been raging on for, like, a really long time’, and, ‘oh, we lost a battle a long time ago’, and then those consequences are still being felt.

Archive clip: What you have just seen is not the worst material available. And yet, even this required editing to make it suitable to be shown in this film.

Robert Yang: I can only imagine, like, a new generation of artists and queer people suddenly joining this conversation and discourse and realising, ‘oh, shit! We lost that battle like a million years ago! What is happening now?’ I certainly feel a deeper connection to history once I realised how long this oppression and cultural war has been going on.

Sharang Biswas: I think it’s so important to continue, because, you know, I believe we need to normalise conversations about sex and sexuality in culture anyway, and as games are just another artform within the broader space of culture, it needs to permeate that field as well.

Bella Blondeau: You have, like, this growing, burgeoning community of people who are on Twitter, in public, some people with their real names, going ‘hey – I’m not embarrassed that I’m playing this, I enjoy this, let’s talk about this, I’m going to share this’. And I want people, when they play these games, to go ‘yeah I played this, here’s what I think about it’. Because if you do that, you break the stigma surrounding sex games; you break the stigma surrounding sex.

Kaiju: I sure as hell know that talking to people after I’ve talked about certain adult games that I’m passionate about has changed their way of thinking. And when their way of thinking changes, they talk to other people, and their way of thinking changes, and it goes on and on. That in itself is changing people’s lives. And that makes me hopeful that there is a future for these games – that there is a future for the people who make them – but we might just have to change our perceptions of what sustainable art creation is like.