

The 10 Apple Arcade launch games you have to play

From wacky cricket to survival strategy

By [Andrew Webster](#) | Sep 18, 2019, 8:30am EDT



Let's just get this out of the way: if you're at all interested in high-quality mobile games and you own an iOS device, Apple Arcade is a no-brainer. The subscription service launches tomorrow for \$4.99 a month, and it's making its debut with a huge range of excellent games from renowned studios like Ustwo, Simogo, and Capy Games. If there are even two titles that pique your interest, that's worth the price of admission.

The biggest problem with the service right now, though, is that it can be overwhelming. There's just *so much*. It can make figuring out where to start almost paralyzing. For the past few days I've been digging through the Apple Arcade lineup to pick out the 10 games I'd recommend most, spanning a number of genres and play styles. (It's a hard job, but someone has to do it.)

However, it's important to note that these aren't the only games worth playing on Apple Arcade. Far from it. In fact, one of the most startling things has been discovering just how excellent the fairly large lineup of games is. There are a few disappointments — most notably the stiff and drab *Various Daylife*, from the team behind [the excellent JRPG *Bravely Default*](#) — but Apple Arcade has a solid batting percentage at launch.

With that said, here are my picks.

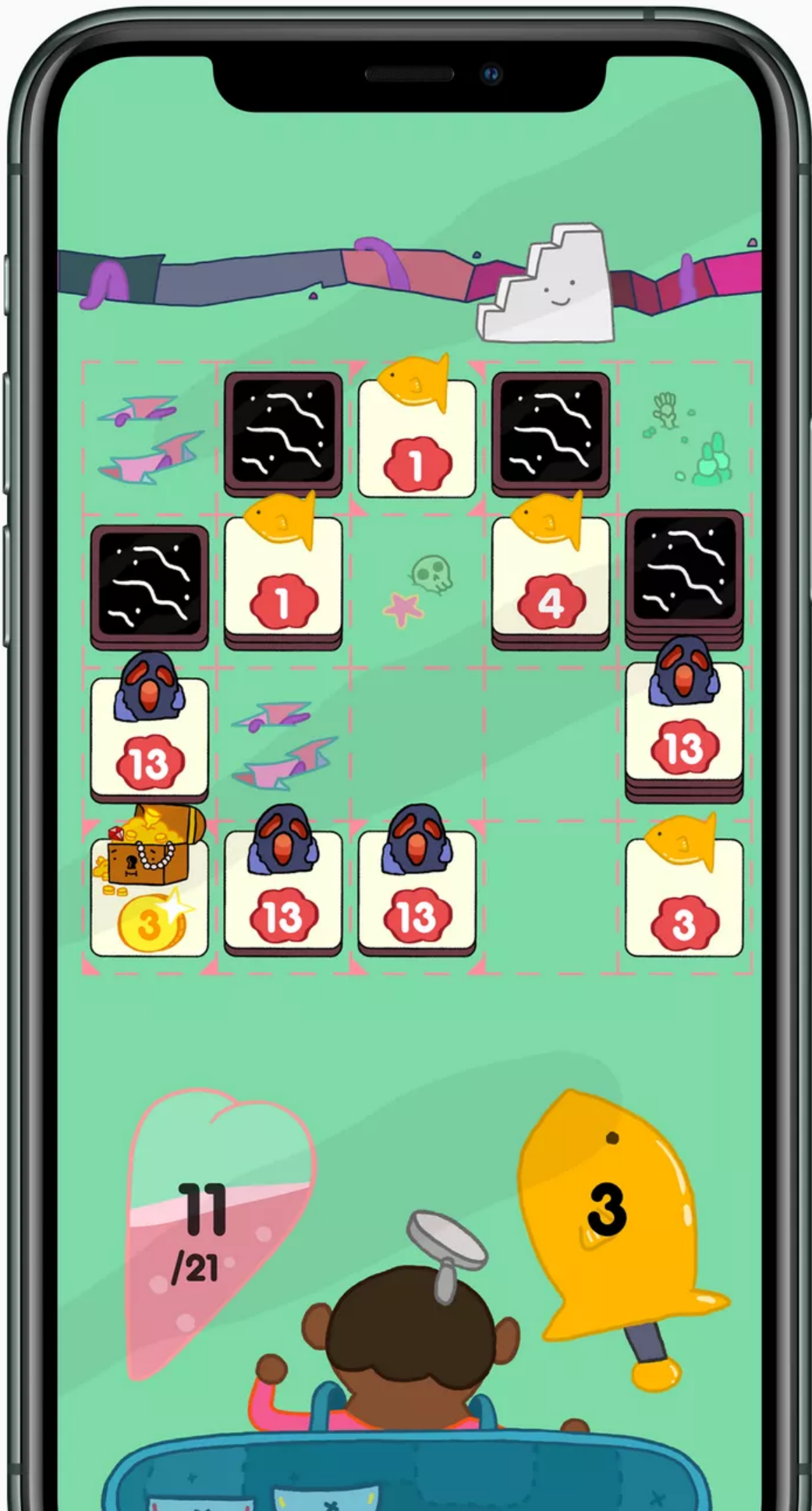
ASSEMBLE WITH CARE

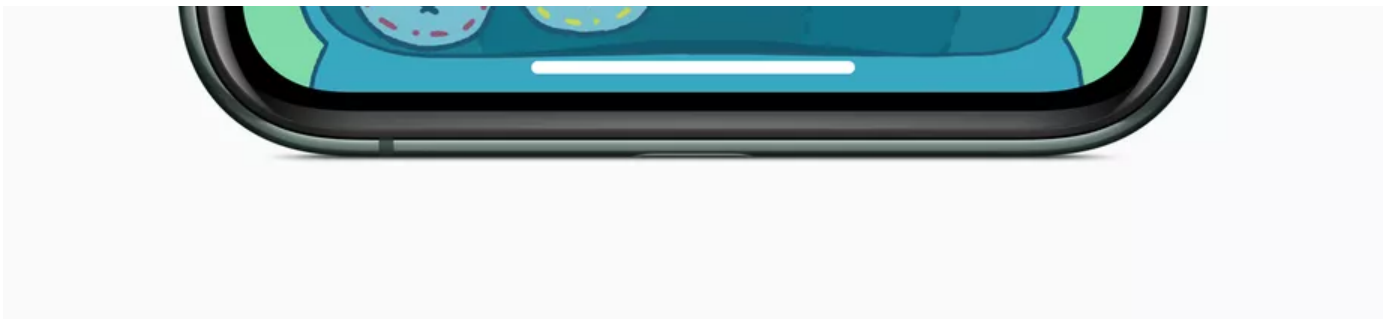
From the studio behind *Monument Valley*, *Assemble With Care* is a similarly brief, touching, and tactile experience that feels perfect for mobile. The game puts you in the role of a repairwoman who has just settled in for a quick stay at a seaside town, and decides to take on a few jobs while she's there. Whereas *Monument Valley* did a brilliant job of creating narrative from little dialogue, *Assemble With Care* goes in the opposite direction; each of the 13 chapters opens and closes with a narrated sequence outlining what's going on.

In between all that, you'll be fixing old objects like a slide projector or Game Boy-style handheld. It's very satisfying taking apart these devices and then reassembling them. You'll use a screwdriver to pry them apart and then find whatever needs to be replaced. It's not especially difficult, but the repair work ties into the story in an easy, memorable way. It's a game about fixing old cameras, but also one that will make you think a bit more deeply about how you treat those closest to you.

CRICKET THROUGH THE AGES

This *Qwop*-style game is best enjoyed with another person playing on the same screen. The premise is absurd: as the title implies, *Cricket Through the Ages* explores the history of humanity through the lens of cricket. What this means is you and another player will attempt to bowl balls and hit them while contending with the game's purposefully wonky physics. Throwing a strike has never been so hard — or hilarious. To make things more extreme, once you come to grips with how cricket works, you're then thrust into increasingly bizarre scenarios, using the same physics-based gameplay to kick a soccer ball, play badminton, and fight in a war. Oh, and at some point you'll be able to control a bayonet-wielding queen.





CARD OF DARKNESS

Card of Darkness is sort of like a game of solitaire mashed up with a dungeon-crawling RPG. You start each game with a series of cards face-up, which represent things like gold, weapons, enemies, health, and special magical scrolls. Tapping each will do something different — enemies will drain your health, weapons give you something to defend against that — and will also turn adjacent cards face-up. Like in any good dungeon crawler, the goal is to find a pathway through an increasingly dangerous space while steadily leveling up. The card mechanic forces you to think in a different, more strategic way, and the adorable art style hides a game that can get downright devious at times.

GRINDSTONE

Capy Games is a studio best known for fantasy adventures like [Below](#) and [Sword & Sworcery](#). But before that, the team created some excellent puzzle games like *Critter Crunch* and *Might & Magic: Clash of Heroes*. *Grindstone* on Apple Arcade combines these two into an incredibly engrossing mobile title. You control a burly adventurer, with the goal of connecting lines of like-colored monsters to clear them away, which you do by cutting a bloody path through your enemies. It's a seemingly simple mechanic, but it's augmented by a number of clever gameplay mechanics, including gems that can link together different colors, and items to be equipped like shields and arrows. And it's all rendered in a wonderful cartoon art style that looks like *Conan the Barbarian* by way of Adult Swim.

SAYONARA WILD HEARTS

You never really know what to expect from a Simogo game: the Swedish studio has released everything from [low-fi puzzle games](#) to [folklore horror stories](#) to [interactive novels](#). *Sayonara Wild Hearts* goes in yet another unexpected direction. It's a pop music-styled arcade action game, where you control a skateboarding girl through a vibrant world of dance battles, motorcycle chases, and a story of inter-dimensional drama. It's fast and stylish in a way few games are, with a feel and structure that's almost like an album, right down to the fact that it's short enough to replay multiple times.

MINI MOTORWAYS

[Mini Metro](#) was a game about connecting train lines across a city, and the follow-up *Mini Motorways* does the same thing for roads. It features the same clean and colorful sense of

style, but the goal here is to connect peoples' homes to various buildings. You need to build roads that link together homes and offices of the same color, and as you play, the city will grow with new people and businesses to connect. You have a few other ways to control the flow of traffic — including bridges, motorways, and traffic lights — but eventually things will get very busy.

Like its predecessor, *Mini Motorways* can be both soothing and stressful; soothing when your careful plans work out, and stressful when everything goes wrong. And like *Mini Metro*, the game features a handful of levels based on real-world cities, so you can test your urban planning skills against the sprawl of Los Angeles or the orderly density of Tokyo.

WHERE CARDS FALL

The [long-brewing](#) *Where Cards Fall* seamlessly blends together a touching tale of adolescence with a series of clever environmental puzzles. In each stage, you have to get a character from the start of a small level to the end. And to do that, you build a pathway using stacks of cards that can be turned into houses of various sizes, letting the character avoid gaps and reach high ledges. It's intuitive and playful, and some clever twists — like dream clouds that depress under the weight of a building — make the puzzles feel much more dynamic than they otherwise would be.

Once you finish a level, you're treated to a flashback sequence, where the main character explores scenes from their youth — awkward moments at a part-time job, lonely times in an arcade — all rendered in a kind of Simlish-style language that gives the story a welcome sense of vagueness. It's all very serene and relaxing, encouraging you to take your time and really soak in the details.

SKATE CITY

Figuring out the controls for a skateboarding game can be a tricky thing. Make things too realistic and the controls can get unwieldy, whereas if you simplify things too much, you lose the satisfaction of pulling off a sick combo. *Skate City* manages to streamline things just enough so that it works on a touchscreen, but still feels like, well, skateboarding.

The game takes place from a side-scrolling perspective, and features very simple touch controls. You tap to push forward, and swipe in a variety of directions to pull off various moves. Hop on a rail and you'll need to hit on-screen buttons to balance yourself out. Beyond the way it plays, *Skate City* also just nails the vibe that's so important to skateboarding. The soundtrack is excellent, and the visuals have a grainy, sun-kissed look to them that just makes you want to pick up a board and explore.

BLEAK SWORD

The most simple description for *Bleak Sword* is that it plays like a low-fi, bite-sized *Dark Souls*. You control a tiny pixelated warrior in a dark fantasy universe, and you're thrown into battle with all kinds of creatures ranging from bats and wolves to zombies and giant tree monsters. You have a sword and shield, and you can quickly dodge enemies with a well-timed roll. Along the way you'll earn new gear and level up to increase your power.

What makes the game work for mobile, though, is how simplified and bite-sized everything is. The touchscreen controls let you easily roll around and attack with a swipe of your finger, and each level is incredibly tiny: they're small dioramas filled with a handful of enemies, and they usually take around a minute or less to complete. This makes it easy to get in a few quick rounds whenever you have time. It also makes *Bleak Sword* incredibly tense: just a few short seconds stand between life and death.

OVERLAND

Overland is a turn-based strategy game where your main goal is simply to survive. You start out in an abandoned parking lot with a car that's out of gas, and from there you pretty much have to figure things out for yourself. You can make a handful of decisions each turn — whether that's searching a dumpster for supplies or talking to a fellow survivor about joining you — after which you wait for the post-apocalyptic creepy crawlies to scutter about. Given the circumstances, each decision you make is incredibly important. You need to eat, move forward, and avoid the nightmare baddies. Just making it out of a level alive is something to celebrate. *Overland* is a bleak game, yet somehow its dark, disturbing world didn't prevent me from saying “just one more turn” over and over again.