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Hello everybody and welcome to the max frequency podcast I am your host max Roberts and on this fine and dandy episode 13. I'm joined by my friend and Writer Oh staff writer official title over staff writer over at digital trends Tomas Franzese. Hello Tomas. How are you? Good good. You said my name, right? I'm happy about Thank you for having me. Of course Tomas, of course Thank you for coming and joining me I just kind of sent you a message out of the blue the other day and said Will you please come talk to me on my podcast and you were you were gracious enough to to join me this fine evening to consult my agent You're mr. Big time over here over at digital trends formally of inverse Humble beginnings at dual shockers. See I was there you were there you you have ascended to the stars and I'm like here I have my own website. Welcome to the early 2000s where people started blogs. That's me, that's me over here. But we're gonna dive right in to the Halo trailer because you mentioned it in the pre-show, I watched it, about had a heart attack at the volume, and then watched it, so my feelings are very raw. (laughs) So these Halo shows coming to Paramount Plus in March at some point, whatever. Video games are now turning into TV shows. There's The Last of Us, Uncharted has a movie out in a month. There's a Twisted Metal show in production. None of this is really new per se, but Halo, very big, coming in. They just put the full trailer out at the playoff game before the Super Bowl, was it the Chiefs and the, whatever, I don't know. - Yeah, Chiefs and the Bengals. - This football. Spingles upset and beat him. So. - Very good, very good upset. So, they, Tomas, if we're never gonna see Chief's face, or like we're not gonna see him talk, we're not gonna see his mouth move, why can't we just use the actor for Chief? - So, I have a feeling they're going to go the Mandalorian route with it. Like basically just copy it, where it's part of his code as a Spartan that we don't see his face. And they're gonna kind of play it like Darth Vader, where you see him scarred from the back a little bit. And then in the climactic scene at the end, one of his characters, maybe that, like the girl who was talking to him in the trailer has to take his helmet off for some reason. And then it's a huge end of season reveal or something. And that they've confirmed this is a separate timeline technically. So I guess there's that for this like-- - What does that even mean? Halo doesn't have like timelines. - Yeah, no, but basically they're just saying it's not the same universe. So it's like this, like I think they are kind of retelling Halo 1, but like it's not a direct adaptation. It's like, oh, here's, excuse me, here's our take on Halo 1 and like a separate universe. - Okay. here's all the characters and the property you know, but we're just gonna shake it up and tell it the way we want to for TV purposes. - Yeah, pretty much. - 'Cause he just sounds, it's one of those things, it's just off enough, like Star-Lord in the Guardians of the Galaxy game. He's just close enough to Chris Pratt, but also just off enough. And it's like, ah, I don't know about this. We should have just like gone harder in one direction, I think. - Yeah, that's one of the hardest things about video games because voice acting is such a pivotal part of it. I mean, like if you were to adapt like Pokemon or something where there's no voice actor attached to it, it isn't that as much of a like issue. But with things like, I think you can even apply this to Tom Holland in the Uncharted movie. like when you have such a firm like notion of like, oh, this is what this character looks like and sounds like that when they kind of come in with something different, it's very off-putting. And even in the case of like Cortana, people don't like how she looks. That is the voice actress for Cortana, but we're just used to only hearing her voice with the in-game model, but

now it's like we were seeing and hearing her. And so I think it's just kind of a shock to people because we spent so long with certain looks you obviously can't always replicate in live action and so I think that's one of the outside of any the already tough stuff with like having to write and adapt it it's like it's but then when I think it's also something Last of Us is gonna go into because you go into these story games where part of the reasons those like Master Chief's voice is iconic Cortana's voice is iconic and it's like so there's certain like there's a reason they didn't get rid of Cortana's voice because they they knew they could kind of get away with that, but Master Chief's voice actor is older, I believe, and not really like an action lead, so I understand why they recast him. But yeah, I think it's just kind of a tricky subject about like, "Oh, we need to kind of be faithful, but we can't, unless we just want to recast everyone from the game and not have like Hollywood names that will sell this to execs." Like, it just creates this dissonance. It's... they... but they also could have just animated Cortana. They could have. I mean, I think she looks... like as a person, she looks fine, but she just doesn't look like the Cortana that we've seen for 20 years, and that's just off-putting. Not that... I even think people would have been okay with it if they like, just kinda upped the... I mean, I know visual effects are more complicated, but like, upped the blue shading on her, 'cause like, they're already doing like, some CG stuff with her, 'cause she did kinda have a different view, but like if you made her really blue, like I think people would be like, "Oh okay, looks weird because she's the voice actress, but like okay." But I think it's the fact that like you can clearly see a skin, like a tan skin color under that when we're just kind of used to like blue skin that, like you know if like the people from the Avatar movie came out and it was just one of them was like human skin you'd be a little thrown off, so yeah. - It's, you know, I, I don't have Paramount Plus. I try to keep the streaming services pretty, you know, keep the, trim the fat off, as it were, for the monthly bills. But you know, if it gets good enough buzzed, I'll check it out for sure. This is a curiosity thing. You know, you brought up Uncharted, and that's out in a month. I just bought my tickets for it the other day. And Tom Holland is not Nathan Drake, but he's a closer sell to me, because we have an idea of like a young teenage-ish Drake from Uncharted 3, I think the more off-putting casting is Wahlberg as Sully. Like he's just not Sully, he's not an old man. - Yeah, no, I get that. Even Tom Holland, I think the issue is that for me at least, he's doing the Spider-Man voice. Like I get as a British actor, you have like your American accent, but I think just like Tom Holland's American accent is Spider-Man. - Spider-Man. So now he's doing it as Nathan Drake. Then I'm just kind of like, I'm like, oh, it's like a Spider-Man No Way Home sequel or Spider-Man's Nathan Drake. - It's just the alternate. It's just one of the multiverse universes. - Yes. I mean, Sony does make the Spider-Man game. So they could connect them if they really wanted to. I actually wouldn't be surprised if we see Spider-Man in the MCU, like from the video game eventually. Like I know there was an Easter egg in Far From Home with his costume, but like if you just have him show up in the suit and then have Yuri Lowenthal do the voice and then have like Ben Jordan or whoever his like character model be under the suit, like I actually think they could do it and just never unmask him or just like or unmask him in ADR. Like I do think it's actually possible that they could do that. They absolutely could do that and you know they did it in Spider-Verse, they had the the suit there in the background. So you know, that's all. - That would probably be the, oh imagine if in Across the Spider-Verse he just ends up in the game and it looks like the game. That would be pretty cool. - They could do a lot, they have a lot of potential there. It's interesting to see these game companies kind of flex their entertainment branches or connections. So like Sony has, you know, they make movies and TV shows. So, you know, that's part of Sony as a company. Microsoft does not, so that's why they work together with companies to produce and create this Halo show. And I feel like we're kinda getting this influx here of video game focused movies and TV shows specifically. I mean, you mentioned The Last of Us show that's coming out soon. I mentioned Twisted Metal. Now there's Halo and The Rock the other day was teasing a new video game movie, there just seems to be more of a cultural awareness of video games and wanting to tap into them for film and TV. And I'm curious to see how this all pans out for these companies because it's, I feel like Sony has kind of the upper leg here because they already have these connections and relationships in place and Microsoft kinda just is gonna have to sell around? Like Disney sells

their IP to developers to make games, it's almost like Microsoft takes their game IP and sells it to studios to make movies and TV shows. - Sure, yeah, but I mean, and there's advantages and disadvantages to that. Like obviously the biggest problem with Sony is going to be quality. Like if the Uncharted movie isn't very good and like the Ghost of Tsushima movie and the Last of Us show aren't very good, Like, yeah, you're doing it in-house, but if quality's a problem, then they're still not going to be successful. Whereas Microsoft could say, well, they did say, oh, Paramount, we're gonna give you this IP. They could be like, oh, Disney, we're gonna give you Fable or something, that just is a random example. And who knows, they could go and actually, they can choose who they partner with and make something better. Whereas that almost might cripple Sony, where they kinda have to go to the Sony execs and be like, please make it under your constraints instead of looking for the best partner. - That's an interesting, I, for, in all honesty, I don't expect the Uncharted movie to be very good. - Yeah, no. - Just because it's been stuck, it's been stuck in development for so long, directors have changed at least twice. I've only seen one trailer, it just looks like this strange amalgamation of the games. my curiosity just, I have to satisfy that angle. It's funny, you know, when, I told Abby before, but she forgot, and then she's like, there's an Uncharted movie coming out? She's like, why didn't you tell me about this? I'm like, well, I did. Second of all, her goal was like, why are you not more excited about this? I'm like, 'cause I'm really worried about it. - Yeah, I mean, the companies look and they see like, oh, Uncharted's like a however million billion dollar franchise like we just like copy paste in the movie and we'll make that same money but I think also I mean like all entertainment fan bases gaming fan bases are very you know rabid and whereas like I personally think the Halo trailer is looks mostly good I know it's like people have their issues with it but then like you have the one Cortana thing and the entire Halo fan base is going to attach onto that and like hate it and then they might choose to hate the show in turn because of that one thing. So you attract that when you kind of go into these new audiences of you know gamers quote unquote. But is that is that just the vocal minority then do you think? Because I'm curious to see what Uncharted sale you know is received in theaters and stuff you know my parents talked about wanting to go see it you know my parents know I play the Uncharted games but they you know they've never sat down and played it they really don't know anything beyond it's a video game that my son plays. That's definitely a thing. I know, uh, I mean, even just different adaptations and stuff. And, uh, what was the, what was the last big anime to live action thing that came out last year? Anime to live action? Or was it anime or was anime something, I forget what it was, but there was some like animated thing went to live action last year and like, Oh, cowboy bebop. Uh, and yeah, I mean, people didn't like Cowboy Bebop and like my dad even I've tried showing him the, or I haven't tried showing him But he's like seen the anime before and didn't really like it, but he loved the live-action show so I think it's just the thing where there are like non gamers who like Won't care about Uncharted's story because like I'm not gonna play a video game But then they see the same thing in a movie form and they may actually enjoy it because they're like Oh, it's this is the way I can easily experience it where it's like if they don't want to sit down and play a game So that is the market you're going for but it's also but you're you also want the gamer Market because if your fans hate the movie like it's probably not gonna get the word of mouth to attract those new people because what you want to do is get like Me to be like Oh dad Do you want to come see this with me and then my dad ends up? Really liking it and then like going out and buying the Uncharted remastered collection or something like that. So that's the The high level goal here. That's the goal But it's tricky when your fan base might end up hating the movie for various reasons. Yes. I think a real test is going to be, at least currently, is going to be The Last of Us TV show on HBO because it's got the cache. I don't think that's gonna be disappointing. I love Pedro Pascal. I love who they got playing Ellie because Hilda is very good show. But I just yeah that even Last of Us was so specifically what it was and it doesn't even seem like they're adapting the whole game in the first season. And I don't want to see the first four hours of Uncharted or of Last of Us adapted. I want to see the whole game adapted into one season. But then it's also like why don't I just go play in the game for like the same amount of time if I want to. I want to see that. So it's a tricky situation. I'm curious to see how that plays out. But

yeah, you are right. That'll be the make or break. Like if Last of Us is bad, then it may make people go like, okay, maybe not so much. It's gonna be, you know, because it has the cache of HBO attached to it. It's got the guy, I'm blanking on his name now. - The Chernobyl guy. - Mandolin, Chernobyl guy, Neil is still attached to the project as a producer, along with the other Naughty Dog co-president, who's Eric Williams? Yes? - Sure. - I don't know. Now I'm blanking on it. Now I have to type it in. But, you know, this one seems to have a lot of, there's a lot of oomph behind it. Evan Wells, my apologies. I mixed Kristoff. - Christoph and Evan. Anyway, it just seems like kind of the the make or break video game TV show thing right now. It could easily tie into whatever the multiplayer Last of Us game that they have been working on. So then you've got this point of a game is coming out, the show's coming out, just like Uncharted here with the movies coming out, the remaster for PS5 just came out, which is doing really big sales, the PS5 console and Uncharted itself was the top selling PS4 game, Uncharted 4 was until God of War came along. So now you see that kind of get a new breath of life here on the PS5 and God of War ironically on PC and then Uncharted is coming to PCs. It's just like these are cash cows for Sony on the Playstation side of things and now we've got this coming into TV and film and we're gonna see how it shakes out. And I feel like Uncharted's not gonna stick the landing and I hope The Last of Us does. - Yeah, yeah, I'm not the biggest fan of that approach 'cause I almost think in a weird roundabout way this almost brings us back to the licensed game days where I'm afraid, you know, I think there's the rumors that there's the new Twisted Metal and they're timing it for the show and it's kinda like, oh well, but then if you're telling those people, "Oh, you have to get it done within like the next year and a half so we can have it ready to go with the show." Like that causes crunch, that causes quality issues and all these other things. So I am curious if like Sony starts forcing that more, if their quality drops. 'Cause you know, Sony's usually known for like, we have a really high bar of quality. And even if we don't own everything like Microsoft, like when we put out a game, it's like the best game of the month or year it's in. So yeah, I am a little afraid that if they start rushing stuff to meet these media tie-ins, that it'll cause a drop in quality because they care more just about having a product to go alongside it. I mean, even the Uncharted remasters, I think, were received well, but they didn't have multiplayer. To me, that also should have just been a free upgrade, because they did free upgrades for a lot of the other games. All of Xbox's next gen upgrades were free. So yeah, it just it puts these weird situations where it's kind of like I feel like where you were almost like you're returning to the licensed game eras, but it's like first parties like making like I wouldn't be actually you know what now that I think about it Halo's second season is probably going to line up exactly with the TV show. - With the show? - Yeah, now that I think about it. So there's probably going to be some cross promotion there. - Yeah, that makes sense. I wouldn't be surprised if in the game you can get a set of armor from the show, or it just seems to be more and more that entertainment across different mediums is gonna start merging more and more, which I suppose creates the metaverse, I suppose? I don't know. But which just, we're gonna start being berated on all sides of like, Halo's over here and Halo's over there, or Uncharted's here and Uncharted's there, Twisted Metal is back. So here you go, have a show, have a movie, have a book, have a game, and it's like, well, let's all just take a breath here. - Yeah, I mean, IP in the modern era is just so valuable, and games. I think that's the other reason I think you're seeing Hollywood studios turn to it, is that they're looking for known franchises that are safe bets, and they've turned to video games. - They've tapped out the comic book vault, and so now they're coming to the video game. - Yeah, so now you get all these IPs with built-in fan bases, potential for new fan bases, and are kind of just like, oh, let's throw that on the screen. And then eventually someone's gonna come along like Disney and perfect it. It might not be "Halo," it might not be "Last of Us," but like maybe "Illuminations" and "Mario Bros." movie does it. The "Sonic" movies are doing well. So something's going to like nail it and then everything's gonna kind of sprout and copy that. - Yes, I agree. I haven't actually read/listened to the interview yet. been meaning to, but I did start reading it the other morning. It's this NPR interview about Uncharted and like how they reverse engineered movies to make the games and now the games are being reverse engineered to make a movie. And it's got, it's an interview with Neil Druckmann and Asad, I'm going to botch this, Quizzle Bash?

He's the head of PlayStation productions and quote we've got 10 shows and films in development in total on PlayStation productions so they've got I mean they're really seeming to leverage their own IP to make shows and movies and we know of at least three of them four what's the metal goes to Shishima guys and uncharted thank you and then I got it got a war they got a half in the works that's that did so Well, Horizon, there's probably something in the works. - Yeah, Horizon's gotta have its own show. - Yeah, anything that was a hit in the PS4 era, I think is getting its own show. - Gran Turismo, the show. - Yeah, let's get the Gran Turismo guys. The Gran Turismo tour. The Gran Turismo. - Bring back the testers. - There we go. - That's what I'm saying, bring back the testers. So, you know, it's an interesting time. And we'll see how Halo works. 'Cause I guess Halo is really, 'cause Halo has also been in its own development kind of rut for a very long time and it's coming out here in two months. - They've been, that and Gears of War, I've heard for like the last decade they were happening. And Gears of War still is like nowhere to be found, but we got Halo, so. "Yeah, we'll see how that all shakes out." And about 25 minutes in the show, if I can count time, "Hi, Tomas, you have a new job." - Oh yeah, that thing. Yep. - Yeah, that job that keeps you, you know, food on the table. - Yeah, I guess I'll introduce it, yeah. So yeah, previously, from 2016 to early 2020, I worked at Dual Shockers, that's where I met Max. I was a staff writer and then a news editor there, kind of more on a volunteer basis. And then I was a part-time video game news writer at Inverse from early 2020 to late 2021, basically last December. And then I got a full-time job offer at Digital Trends to be their new gaming staff writer. And so I started in January and I've gotten some articles done since then in my first week and a half there and I'm liking it a lot so far. - Yeah, I was looking through all your stuff over there. I kept clicking this see more articles button and realized, oh wait, he just started this job, there aren't more articles. - That button's janky too, it sometimes doesn't extend. On mobile it works best, I know, but yeah. - Well, first I just wanna say congratulations, This is awesome, Digital Trends is big. Getting the full-time news writing job, I feel like is actually rare in this space these days now. - Yeah, I remember seeing some, I forgot who it was, but some, it might have been on Minmax or something, but some podcasts I was listening to, they mentioned that there were less, like more people were famous musicians than there are full-time gaming writers. So it's a ridiculous thing where, Yeah, there's probably only about like a hundred and something people that are paid a full-time wage to like write about video games. So it's nice to finally break through. It's a grind. It's been five years and I kind of got an early start, but I'm definitely happy to be kind of full-time and finally like like I was okay before but just kind of to be able to see a future as like a full-time having a full-time job in the industry is like a really nice feeling. Yeah, I can only imagine. I remember getting some freelance opportunities at IGN to do some wiki guide stuff and was like, "I can see it," and I did not go there, but that was a choice of mine. But I see people like you or Logan Moore who have grinded and put in the work and the time, and now both of you, for the example's sake, have full-time jobs writing at major publications. actually doing the writing part of it. I feel like the video game coverage industry now is mostly podcasts and videos and streaming, which is its own form of entertainment and providing information. But when I went to college, I wanted to do the writing side of things. And then while I was in college, it just all seemed to pivot toward video and podcast and events and streaming and things. And it's nice when I see people come up and actually do the writing side of it, 'cause I feel like it's going away. - Yeah, oh yeah, no, I mean, I totally get your point. And that's honestly the thing too, is like, I mean, I love video games obviously, but like I also do this 'cause I love writing. You know what I mean? That's one thing where it's like, yeah, obviously there's the notion of like, oh, you sit down and play video games all day. And it's like, no, I do this, 'cause like I get to interview people. I get to play good games and then critique them. I get to write news, which I enjoy doing and I really enjoy my job. But yeah, it's pivoted recently. It's also a huge, if you're going just off the quality of your work, it takes a really long time to get noticed. A huge part of it, I mean, if anyone who's new to writing is listening, it is who you know. >> Every job is about who you know. Yes, but I mean, even more so than like other industries, like if you want to go full time, like be friends with somebody who is full time at a publication, like that, that is one thing I wish I kind of knew earlier on. But I mean, I do also like that I didn't because

it meant I also kind of got the work ethic and work quality in because I know people burn out because like, they don't spend enough time like honing the writing part of it. Like you look at like Philip Meeuwsen or whatever at IGN where it was kind of like he kind of got picked and put on IGN with like not a lot of experience and then like it ended up backfiring really badly. So yeah I just think it's like it's like obviously who you know is a very big part of it but also just like get get to the point where you're confident in your work and yeah so yeah things just happen to line up where like my my current editor Giovanni I happened to work at Inverse with them briefly for about six months and then this opportunity opened and because I knew them but also because my work was of high quality like I was able to interview and get the position. So yeah I think it's just you got to grind for a long time until you know enough people have enough good work and then you apply to something and then you happen to get noticed and then you happen to get interviewed and then you're hopefully not ghosted by a month which happens in the industry unfortunately. It happens everywhere. Yeah that's basically my route but yeah like I said so it's kind of be good good to finally be over the hump of all that. Where like I'm here and then I am full-time writing about games at a website. So yeah it's nice to finally to kind of be at the the summit and then look and be like oh that's a the larger amount of IGN over there but I'm just going to stake my claim on the summit for as long as I can. >> Yes. It's super great to see. I'm -- one of the things that I've kind of observed and I don't think it's like an astute observation. Like, oh, look at me. I've had an epiphany about the industry. But in my time of -- from the moment I realized that people could get I paid to write about video games to, you know, at the end of college, when I was trying to get into this field in a full-time capacity, I realized that the bulk of, at least the major outlets I believe or have seen, were based out west in California. They're, you know, San Francisco, LA, those types of spaces, and part of the job was moving there to that location. - And I had to move for digital trends. I mean, I lived in, when I worked at Dual Shockers and Inverse, I lived in Virginia. And Virginia actually has a couple now with Washington Post and Axios, but I applied to those and didn't get those. But then I ended up moving to Chicago for digital trends 'cause I couldn't work in Virginia for that. - Well, that was actually-- - That's the other tough thing is that like, I'm not gonna share exact details, but this isn't the highest paying career yet they want you in all these major expensive cities. So then there's also a whole privilege aspect to it where it's a bunch of white men doing it 'cause they have the means and can do it. So yeah, I am happy to see it kinda getting more decentralized recently where more places seem open to remote work. - Well that was, I kind of had been hoping that, there were a couple of moments where I thought kind of signaled that the games industry can move out of major cities, and particularly the West Coast. There was about a year, year and a half, where Danny O'Dwyer moved to the East Coast, when he and his wife, they had a baby, and they kind of moved out there, and he did no-clip documentaries from the East Coast for about a year and a half, and I thought, wow, this is moving out of argue, like this well of locations and developers and resources to do the same type of high quality interviews. He's since moved back to California, out west, which is totally fine. I just thought that was an interesting kind of blip. And I know that Colin Moriarty is out there in Virginia, so that's Last Stand Media, they do obviously all their work kind of remotely and on the East Coast. But mostly I kinda was hoping that the last two years of COVID and working from home for most people, working remotely, kinda would kinda light up the, hey, you can write about this stuff from anywhere, which was gonna lead me to ask if you were moving to Chicago because you wanted to or because you had to, and it sounds like you had to. - Well, yeah, I had to. I mean, it was also a myth. I have friends and family here. So I didn't mind moving. And I was also at the age, I was still living with my parents. So it's kind of like full-time job coupled with moving out, going to a city I'm familiar with. A lot of things just happen to line up well. But yeah, I mean, it's tough. Because I'm sure there are a lot of people also in my situation, but if I moved to New York or LA or San Francisco for a job like I wouldn't know anyone or anything out there like I visited those cities before but I've never lived there whereas I've lived in Chicago before so yeah it's tough and I don't see too much reason that shouldn't be decentralized like I get there's like tax issues and different stuff with that so but still I think like like I've always worked remotely it is a job that can be worked remotely and I do think there

is a benefit to being in the office from what people have said. But yeah, I just think with sites like IGN, it's also a way to kind of, I don't want to say gatekeep, but like, you know what I mean? Like if you, once IGN gets someone, they like get someone and they're out there and like, they just moved to LA for this job. So they're going to be dedicated to that job. So yeah, I think it's kind of that situation. And then obviously it's just, it's tech, like most tech companies are in New York and like SoCal, so you're going to be in those spots. - That was one of the factors for myself when I realized that at least working in the industry in the traditional sense was not for me because by the time I was out of college, I had graduated and a few months later I got married. I had met my wife in school and then we got married And so suddenly moving to San Francisco was not just a me decision but an us decision. And when you take the range of a salary of a writer for a website like that and then you put it in one of, if not the most expensive city in the United States, it's just, and you're on the complete opposite side of the country from all of your family, at least in my particular case. It just, that's untenable. is just not a smart thing for us to do and it doesn't just impact myself. But it's, I'm curious to see what the fallout of this is and the fallout of COVID, it sounds really dark. But it's an interesting, I think the last two years have really forced companies to look at and assess and maybe not. I know in particular, Walt Disney World, at least where the parts that I work in, remote is not really like a option to choose. Once the company deems it safe to go back in, we'll be in. And clearly we could do our job for the past two years and so it's interesting to see what companies aren't willing to give up and what will be. 'Cause there are benefits to being in the office, but there are also, you know, it's one of these gives and takes on both sides. and look at the events in streaming like E3, or let's just say like revealing games in June, 'cause what is E3 anymore even? But that whole dynamic has changed over the past couple of years, or Gamescom and other events in the fall and winter. There's been a pivot, a shift, and I think a part of that should be the coverage of it. we'll just see kind of what happens. Yeah, no, it's a very interesting time. And I do think the I think that's also one reason you are saying more independent creators arise. Because like, there are even all the YouTube channels like like him or hate him all those YouTube news channels. Like I'm sure those were people who in a world where you had the capability to work from anywhere might have ended up writing for a major website, but because of where they were located or who they didn't know or whatever. They ended up doing it themselves. And you can always do it yourself, like you know you have this and your website and everything. But yeah, it's just kind of a weird, complicated industry that I think is a bit more stressful than most people would think at a glance. - So is Digital Trends office, is there in if they're in downtown Chicago? - Yeah, it's still like I'm fully remote right now, but they have offices in Portland, Chicago, and New York, and then maybe some other places I'm forgetting. But yeah, so like they, eventually they'll have an office here, but currently I'm remote, just living in Chicago. - Cool. Have you been just to the office in general to grab anything or they've handled your onboarding entirely? - Like it's still closed, it's like, it's COVID, like no one's back in. - Oh yeah, oh I fully get it, especially in big cities. Here in Florida, it doesn't exist I guess. (laughing) So you know, depending on where you are, Chicago doesn't seem like it's necessarily Florida. - And Virginia's kinda like that now too. - Okay, so it's just creeping up the east coast here. - Pretty much. - All right, you know scrolling through some of the stuff you've written, your first piece looks like it was a review for Rainbow Six Extraction? - No, it was actually the Microsoft Blizzard thing. There's two that work to that. - Oh, it was? - Yeah, you have to, yeah, I'm not sure if the page extender is working. But yeah, that just happened a lot. - Oh, that's right, you were saying the button's not working. - Yeah, yeah, but yeah, my first one was the Your Biggest Questions about the Microsoft Activision deal answered. That just happened literally the week I started. Like the Tuesday before my first day writing where I got kinda online and Microsoft acquired Activision, so basically right out of the gate, I reached out to people and it was the first thing I wrote, it was like this big feature about the biggest gaming news of all time, maybe. - Certainly one of them in our lifetime. - Yeah. - Let's just use it, let's just pivot right into that because that's one heck of a story to break. Your first week on the job, I didn't-- - Well, I didn't break the acquisition story. - Well, you know what I, no, you didn't break the news, but like the story broke and then it's like-- - Sure, yeah. Oh, you know, it was a

hell of a coincidence. I know there were like when people I worked with that didn't very saw that that was my first thing and they were like, "Oh my God, what a first week." - Yeah, like you definitely had stuff to write about. It was not a boring, slow week in the news cycle. So by the time this episode, like around the time we're recording this and by the time it should be out, it would be roughly two weeks since the news broke, but Microsoft had announced that they were going to acquire Activision Blizzard sometime here in 2023 for the cool amount of, what was it, \$68.7 billion. That's with a B. An entirely all cash deal that is basically just Microsoft going to the bank of Microsoft and saying we would like to take half of our money out and give it to this company instead, which just is mind boggling. Do you write a check? I don't understand how that part works, but they've announced that they're gonna buy Activision Blizzard, which means a lot of things. There's a lot of implications, a lot of angles, and there's been a lot of discussion, and I've kind of been sitting and thinking and marinating for two weeks here, and I wanted to talk to someone about it and I thought why not the guy who wrote your biggest questions about the Microsoft Activism deal answered to come and help work through this. There's a lot to kinda go through here and so I mean, let's start with the, I wanna say the call of duty, unionization, that kind of angle of it. So obviously Activision owns Call of Duty, they own Candy Crush, World of Warcraft, Overwatch, Diablo, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. All of that will be owned by Microsoft, thus increasing their giant pool of now first party IP. If you can't make them, just buy them. And Microsoft is definitely flexing that muscle. But the big, one of the big clouds looming around it is multi-platform type decisions, specifically Call of Duty because that's kind of the most famous out of the bunch for multi-platform reasons, maybe followed by Overwatch. And then not just a couple of days after the announcement, it was Raven's QA team, correct? - Yeah, so okay. - You think? - Yeah, kind of backpedaling a little bit, like since this article it's also come out that Call of Duty is exclusive through the end of next year or not exclusive is on Sony through the end of next year because there were like deals beforehand so like yeah this year's Call of Duty next year's Call of Duty and like a Warzone 2 Bloomberg called it is next year and then yeah there's the the Raven I that situation is so tricky because like the there was the yeah Raven was on a strike and then they did stay unionized then they dissolved their strike in good faith and then the next day Activision told them all that they were like getting rid of the QA department and putting everyone in individual departments so like the design QA will be with the design team that kind of stuff kind of and it was like very clearly union busting and so now I think they have to they have to petition like the whole studio which an inner right to work state like Wisconsin that's more conservative may be difficult which sucks because I mean it's just the gaming industry should unionize with the conditions like especially at Activision Blizzard what's come out about them like it's the union like there's a reason I put the unionization stuff first in the article because I do think that the human element is really important to consider or Activision Blizzard like several and not even several like lots of employees were mistreated and they haven't done a great job at responding they've been union busting and like they are still fighting it but yeah it's a tricky situation because yeah like I spoke to Jessica Gonzalez and I mean they're everybody in there is still like everyone who wanted to unionize is still going to fight for it but I do think that even if Bobby Kotick won't admit it in interviews and stuff Like, what happened last July was definitely the thing that made Activision like, unredeemable to the point where they had to sell to somebody and Microsoft was just kinda willing to absorb the blow 'cause they're a big tech company. - So correct me if I'm wrong, and I definitely could be wrong. You're definitely closer to this and just the news in the industry than I am, But my understanding about the QA being split up and put into different departments was actually that that was in discussions according to emails prior to all of this and that even some QA people I saw on Twitter were saying that they do prefer like the actual QA part of the job being embedded in those teams. - That's the thing, it is good, but yeah, it was a whole thing where like it all started because they laid off some people in like early December when they shouldn't have. And yeah, I wouldn't be surprised if this is something they already kind of meant to do beforehand. And yeah, like I've seen the same tweets that kind of say like, oh, it's actually really good when you have QA. But I do think like Activision is purposefully going through with



it 'cause it also serves as a union busting technique. Like the fact that, and I think it's also the fact that they didn't properly communicate it to those employees. - Sure. - Where like, yeah, they kinda, they waited until they were like, reunionizing to go, like, we're gonna make this tough for you. Whereas like-- - Now we're gonna scatter you across the wind. - Yeah, like if they knew they were gonna do this in November, they shoulda told them in November and then being like, oh, we're gonna lay some of you off and the rest of you will be dispersed. And you don't, like, but instead they like, they just fired people, didn't tell them anything, let them go on strike, waited till they dissolved the strike and then told them what the situation was. So that makes it like, I'm sure in a court of law, it'd be tough to get them committed for like union busting, but like it's fairly blatant like that doing this means it's harder for the union to happen. - Okay. And then your article talks about this where, you know, how does the purchase itself impact unionization attempts? It sounds like it doesn't necessarily, like it doesn't change at least the unionizing angle of it, like they're still gonna try and push for unionization. - Yeah, they're gonna try. I think even if Raven isn't successful, I would not be surprised if Blizzard itself, I think has the strongest momentum to unionize. even if Raven isn't successful. But yeah, like I said though, but there's also the weird fact now that like, that Blizzard is a subsidiary within a subsidiary within a section of Microsoft. So the union doesn't like, yeah. So like I said, that's one of the reasons they kind of sold 'cause now it's like, yeah, they can unionize and I think it'll be great for the workers and everything. but now it's like one chunk of a mega conglomerate company instead of like half your company. So I think that's one of the reasons they sold. - Yeah, I mean. - Yeah, yeah, it's officially, we delayed Diablo 4 and our investors didn't like that, so we sold. It's like if studios sold every time they delayed a game, like the industry would look very different. - It would look very, very different. - So let's talk about those, IP Diablo delayed, I think Overwatch 2 was recently delayed, I think even Phil Spencer said that he was in on a meeting or talked about with the Overwatch 2 team, if I'm not mistaken. Call of Duty, all hands on deck for Modern Warfare 2, there's Warzone 2 rumors floating around. - Yeah, you wanna hear my theories for what's gonna happen to every IP? - Lay it on me. Okay, so Call of Duty, this year it's on everything, next year it's on everything, Warzone's on everything and remains on everything. Call of Duty then takes 2024 off and then comes back in 2025 as an Xbox exclusive. Overwatch 2 launches multi-platform because it benefits that as a multiplayer shooter. Diablo is Xbox exclusive 'cause there's Xbox guys already working on that and that seems further out than Overwatch just from like marketing. So, yeah, that's my theory. And then everything else is just Microsoft. Like if they make a new "Crash" or "Spyro" or "Transformers" game or something, like that'll just be on Microsoft. - Yeah, I think it's actually quite, I was gonna say silly, but I obviously don't handle multi-million slash billion dollar corporations. But when people wonder, you know, are these games going to be exclusive or stay multi-platform? I feel like it's silly to think that they are going to stay multi-platform. I mean, when you spend \$68 billion, like you want those games on your platform. Now, the interesting kind of loophole you could have is the Game Pass xCloud angle of it, where it's not necessarily platform in the hardware sense, but platform in the service sense. And-- - Oh yeah, you're gonna be able to play, I mean, it's even a thing, like you're gonna be able to play the Call of Duty 2022 or 2023, I should say, 'cause that's when the acquisition will be. But yeah, like if it's a new Call of Duty Black Ops, like six next year or whatever, you're going to be able to play that on your phone, like via the cloud on Game Pass and stuff like that. And it's even if Call of Duty stays multi-platform, like if you're day one Game Pass title, like that's where people will go to play. Yeah. - It's, they've secured a catalog of first party games that can keep Game Pass relevant. - Just imagine the trailer, you know what I mean? Just, they did it for Yakuza when it happened, but like there's going to be a, I'm sure we'll get a trailer in two years or whatever. That's just like every Call of Duty game is on Game Pass. And like literally, if you tell a casual gamer who only plays Call of Duty, like, oh, you can buy PlayStation and then pay 60 bucks every year, or you can get the subscription service and get every Call of Duty ever on the service. Like you're going to go for the service that has every Call of Duty ever, also has Halo, also has all these other games day one for Microsoft and then also sometimes has like cool indies like Nobody Saves the World or third party games like Outriders and even Sony games

like MLB The Show. Game Pass is definitely the... I mean, I know you talked about their financials where this of the hardware is doing well, but yeah, that 25 million on Game Pass I think is more important to them where the console's obviously important 'cause it's the machine you play the thing on. But it is, they want as many people on that service. Like they want it one-to-one where everyone who owns an Xbox has Game Pass. So yeah, like you said, it's kind of the thing where it's Microsoft's, I'm sure Microsoft will continue to make gaming hardware just 'cause there's no reason not to do that. But it is very much like, if they were to put game pass on PlayStation 5, like Call of Duty would be on PlayStation 5 'cause Microsoft's still making money from game pass. So, and like they've made, they've kind of made that clear. Like you can, sorry, sorry, I'll let you speak soon, but yeah, you look at the precedent, like with what they've done with Bethesda, like I'm pretty sure this is gonna play out similarly. It's like multi-plat stuff stays multi-plat, everything else is like on the, on game pass wherever game passes. I Logan use this phrase with me the other day this expression that call of duty for the sake of discussion could be the Trojan horse to get game pass on PlayStation you know forge some sort of deal with Nintendo or Sony or both to get the service on competing hardware because at the end of the day, Microsoft's goal is just to get that services subscription revenue consistent. You know, using a calculator, like a fancy person, a year of Game Pass Ultimate, so that is obviously the most ideal subscription tier for Microsoft to like have a customer choose, is \$15, I think a month, or \$180 a year, and that's Game Pass on Xbox, that's the PC Game Pass, and that's the XCloud, the streaming part of it. - And yeah, that's two to three games a year, which is what most people probably buy. - Yep, and it's 180 bucks, and so if you take that and you multiply that by 25 million, you get four and a half billion dollars. Obviously that is the most ideal scenario as far as subscription and tiers and things like that. But, you know, out of this 25 million, how many people are still coasting off of the \$1 conversion charge and just all this other stuff. There's so many factors, but Game Pass will make the 68 billion back in due time. Plus hardware sales, software sales outside of Game Pass through Game Pass. It eventually will make money, and with the more first-party titles in the catalog, the less important, not that it isn't important, but the less important third-party deals for day one titles becomes, because suddenly you just have the biggest IP coming in there all the time, or you make partnerships with other services. It's not EA, is it EA Play? What is the service for EA called? - Yes, yeah, EA Play is-- - EA Play and Ubisoft. - And then you also get Disney+ and Funimation. - Sure, you-- - And Discord Nitro. Yeah, you get other stuff like-- - Do you get Discord Nitro through Game Pass? - Or you get at least a trial for-- - Oh, okay, I was about to say, I've been living without Nitro apparently. - Yeah, so it's, yeah, I mean, I don't know for sure, but I wouldn't be surprised if in March they're like, hey, you get Paramount+ with it, 'cause of Halo. - Yeah, those are deals that just make sense. - Yeah, I mean, so yeah, that's kind of, it's a platform first and foremost, you get so much with it. Like it's Microsoft's strategy to be the media box in your house, like, it can be. - It's not even, I think, I don't even think it's the box anymore, I think, 'cause essentially any box-- - It's the service. Any boxes now, the service, even in Xbox One, an original Xbox One here, before too long, we'll get an update and it can just be an XCloud streaming box. Suddenly-- - Yeah, what I really want them to do, and I need to ask someone at Microsoft somehow if this is possible, if they were to ever get XCloud working on an Xbox 360 where you could then play Series X games, I think that would be mind-blowing. - I mean-- - 'Cause so many people probably have 360s laying around. And I don't know if it has the internet capability to do that, like I could-- - The bandwidth part of it? - Yeah. - I don't know. But it's, I mean, if you think about it-- - The idea they could do that. - They could, and it's, but there's phones everywhere. TVs, I think, are starting to get the app, if I remember correctly. The entire Xbox One generation will be able to do it, all the way from the weakest original Xbox One, which suddenly makes that console more powerful than it's ever been because it just didn't have the capability to run most of Xbox's first party games at like the highest, you know, the native 1080p it could do. And so now suddenly that console's more viable. And if you can get it on a competing platform, say the Switch, suddenly you have a portable market. and who cares if they go out and buy the \$300 Switch, you're still getting the \$15 a month from them for the Game Pass angle of it. And if you could get it on PlayStation,

which could eventually happen. I mean, Sony clearly doesn't mind getting Game Pass money. They put "MOB the Show" on it last year. I wouldn't be surprised if they do it this year. - Yeah, so Sony's tough. It's like, like you mentioned earlier, Call of Duty might be the game that does it. I do think Sony's stubborn enough where they're, they're gonna not like Game Pass. I think, 'cause they're doing Spartacus or whatever, they're- - I was gonna, I wanted to talk about that. - If that falls on its face, like then I could see them going like, okay, Game Pass. But I think like, this acquisition is basically like, if it wasn't clear before, it's now very clear to Sony that like, oh, this is like, Microsoft's gonna snowball us in like several years. 'Cause if you look at Microsoft's content plan, like for the past few years, it's all been like not a ton now, but like in the late 2020s, like I don't know when it's gonna happen, but there's going to be a year over the next couple of years where like the flood gates of all these acquisitions open, and we're just gonna get a ton of IP on Game Pass. And that's when we'll see it pay off. And I think that date keeps moving back 'cause of COVID. it seemed like it was supposed to be timed with the Xbox launch, but then that obviously didn't happen. But yeah, so yeah, like I said, so the service is the end game. It's just Sony's either gotta get their service rolling or then make their platform like, "Oh, okay, we're a platform that also is snowballed by that service, but we also have dedicated fans that'll buy it for God of War, which you can't play on Game Pass? - I, one of my, I do these annual predictions every year, just kind of three predictions from the big three, what I think they'll do in the year. And part of it this year, for 22, was about PlayStation's online subscription, kind of the next era of that. Because Game Pass is clearly such, if not a financial success, because at least, you know, I would have argued up until this point, I don't think it is turning a profit per se, but they're gaining-- - They said it's not burning money. I do know that they're lying or not, but Microsoft has claimed it's profitable. - Okay, and it's-- - Or like not profitable, not burning money, I think was the term they used. - So it's not generating a profit, but it's also not burning through all their money. - I think that how they're able to say that is that the money's separate. Like it's Game Pass isn't spending the money, it's Microsoft spending the money. So Game Pass is just a revenue stream for them. And then Microsoft is spending all these billions. But then they also like, I mean, of course, it's like, it's not like one-to-one, but like, you know, if Windows 11 has a good year money-wise, like that money goes into the pot that like that game studios can take out for Activision. So that's the benefit of being a mega corp. However, they divide it up internally. It all comes out of the same bank account, but it's all divided up. And so Sony's version of this, they have it segmented between PlayStation Plus, the online service gets you a few free games a month, and you can play your games online with friends and get exclusive discounts. That's the equivalent to gold, Xbox Live Gold, which Microsoft still sells, but is included with Game Pass Ultimate. So they still have their segmented plans as well. And then there's PlayStation Now, which is kind of the XCloud/Game Pass version of the service, which is a library of games, first and third party games, that you can stream. And the last time I tried it was in a beta on the PS3 with the Puppeteer, and it did not run well, but that was again, beta at launch, PS3. - Here's the thing too though. It's PlayStation Now, and I think the biggest benefit of the subscription rebranding is that PS Now, I don't own it, but it doesn't require the cloud anymore, except for PS3 games. Like you can just get PS Now and it works like Game Pass, where it's like you can just download these games on your PS4. - Sure. - But I think those early years of PS Now really hurt it, people kind of got that that stigma is a bad game streaming service so people don't understand that it's the it's like a it's the closest thing they have to game pass so i think it needs a rebranding yeah yeah and so i i still think it needs day one games to truly compete with game pass but sony won't do that because like i said they're stubborn i i could see it though i could see the day one first party game thing in exchange, so what do they trade off here? They could have fewer third party games or fewer third party day one games, examples of like Back 4 Blood was day one on Game Pass or what was that most recently, another one that was like big, anyway. Rainbow Six. Rainbow Six, thank you. of those sorts of deals, they could still have third party games of course, but they have their own games or day one, and Sony leverages their quality, which is definitely higher than Microsoft's, at least for their first party launch, their games and stuff. Also though, depending on your audience, if you're looking for a multiplayer game, Halo is clearly

the option, but Halo is also free, so maybe that's not a great example. And so it's this interesting market of Sony needs to rebrand, repivot their services because they offer the same types of services but it's confusing. There's just no brand necessarily recognition especially like the PS Now side of it. It has a negative stigma to it from those early years but it essentially functions just like Game Pass does. Logan used it for our God of War season and had no problem running PS3 games on his PS5 through the cloud. Now, that's those are PS3s in some building somewhere running these games, which is wild to think about because no one has cracked that cell processor like that is a that haunts them to this day, the cell processor does and that makes backward compatibility just so difficult for them but I think that's the angle that's the part of it they could they may not have PC titles day one you know they're clearly more comfortable with PC titles it's essentially they've realized kind of the money they're leaving on the table we've got was it stays gone technically Death Stranding God of War is now that horizons your dawn it's coming and chart it's coming clearly they're more comfortable with it, will Ragnarok come out to PC day and date with the console release? - No. - No, they will leverage their platform first and then rake in the money on PC later. Eventually maybe those could be closer. They made the purchase of Nixus last year, PC port studio, they now have that kind of capability in house, which is good for Sony to have that. So maybe this is something we see more common going forward here, like more PC titles, day and date with their PS5, PS4 counterparts? Could PSVR2 hook up to PCs? Technically possible, just based off the technology in the headset. Will Sony allow that to happen? I don't know, probably not, which would be really unfortunate from that angle. It's just, this is an interesting time where Microsoft is leveraging their strength of money and smart decisions that garner the goodwill of consumers and are just the right types of moves. When you sit down and look at it, the most accessible console to their own back catalog of games is the Xbox, which is the youngest out of the big three hardware providers today, which is just baffling. And leaning into that has been great for them. And now they're leveraging their billions of dollars to just buy the library, instead of producing it in-house. 'Cause producing these things in-house is hard. I think they've learned that a lot over the last generation. - I think someone's probably made this analogy before, but it's Disney Plus versus Netflix, I think is kind of the way to look at it, where it's like one of them's soaking up everything can and acquiring enough stuff to be first party. Whereas the other one might not have as much overall. Like kind of like you were saying, I think how the Sony service is ultimately going to work is going to be like, okay, we may not have as much day one stuff, but like if you want the the highest quality games, they're on the streaming service. You know what I mean? Like, basically if their focus is like, let's get the most critically acclaimed games on our streaming service. That's the approach that I think could draw because obviously if you look at hardware numbers, PlayStation is beating Microsoft so if you can get those people to subscribe you could... you won't immediately but I think they could start going towards that 25 million Microsoft has but then when you get to that point the problem then is expansion whereas Sony needs the endgame with these streaming services is to get them on as many platforms as possible. So like does Sony service give you the PC version of God of War? Like Microsoft does, but like am I going to be paying like 60 bucks a month to play God of War but then I can't play it on PC? Like then that that makes the service less valuable in the consumers eyes. So I think those are the issues where Sony's kind of like a stubborn nature to stick to like paid releases will hurt them with the subscription service. I do think they need to... if Sony were to go like our games are day one on this service like I think that would make them a Game Pass competitor but for now it just kind of seems like a Disney+ situation where it's like you get all the best stuff like three months later. Yeah, whereas Netflix is like, you get the new Netflix movie the day it comes out. And it's... Microsoft just has the capability to take hits. They last longer. And so I do think, while I agree on the stubbornness part of Sony, they also have to be, to a certain extent, because they can't afford that many blows, so to speak. They can't just bleed as much money. - Yeah, it's Xbox dropped so low with the Xbox One that they know what the low point is for that brand. So as long as they don't drop back, it goes below that line. And I think the acquisition is kinda worrying from a business and political standpoint, but from a content and service standpoint, It's a great acquisition,

'cause it's just adding value to that service. Like I do honestly, like I know it's a meme, but like Game Pass is so good. Like these subscription services for games are really good. Like I even like Stadia. So like I-- - Do you have Stadia? - I still do, yes. - I have a Stadia controller in like Chromecast and stuff. I don't have the service. - Yeah. - I've had a few free months, but I haven't, I don't pay for it actively. - And yeah, like I don't think physical media or paid releases will go away, but like, just like it hasn't, it's made like, like Netflix and all these streaming services, like they've made the market smaller, but they haven't like killed theaters or DVDs. Like, I think it's going to be the same way where like you, people will still like, if you want the best experience playing a Sony game, like you will buy a PS5 and then buy a physical copy God of War Ragnarok and play it like that. But if you can then tell somebody, "Oh, well, you can pay for the service and then play God of War Ragnarok on your phone," that gives the service more value. I think it's going to be a very interesting year to see that play out, especially with the Spartacus rumors from earlier in the year, or was it late in December? I don't recall but there's last year it was last year the it's Xbox has done a lot to re like steer the ship from the Xbox one era Phil Phil has taken this what was thought to be a sinking ship to now a ship who's who's captain captain Is it Satya Nadella? Satya Nadella. Willing to spend half of their cash on hand into the future of gaming. There's a reason Phil Spencer got a name change to CEO of Microsoft gaming. It's like, Like it is the, I think where Microsoft's basically betting. Like we do say like, oh, it's like just a small part of a bigger business. But I think like the advantage I think Microsoft has over like Amazon or Google is that like Xbox I think is like a big boy at the table now where it's like, it's like, oh, we got Windows and then we have Microsoft. - Well they have the years of experience. - Yes. - They have the cache and you know, they know how to make games. I talk a lot about just how it's, you know, you can't say it anymore and you weren't able to say it last year or even the year before, but like you used to be able to say like, what exclusives does Xbox have? What's Halo, Gears and Forza? Well, it's obviously many, many more now and they've just, they've bought those, but you know, they are betting big on the future of entertainment and people and their own technology because you know, they're using their cloud streaming and server technology, Azure to push xCloud. So Microsoft has got this vertical integration to this insane level where now, because they own so many studios, they design the hardware and the backend, and they have such a foothold in the PC space, not so much on the store side of it. You can buy your games on the Microsoft store, but like Steam is dominant and Epic Games is coming in and is stirring that pot there. But they have this vertical integration to impact so many IP and franchises. Nadella's comment in like their press release announcement was quote, "Gaming is the most dynamic "and exciting category in entertainment "across all platforms today and will play a key role "in the development of metaverse platforms," end quote. And so they clearly, this is a long play for them, investing in kind of this next wave of interacting online. Is there idea and hope? - Yeah, I mean, it's like, I mean, I'm of the belief that gaming was already doing the metaverse. And so yeah, like for a company like Microsoft, like if they, I mean, I don't think that Microsoft's really going to like double down on doing like the, like, oh, it's a metaverse metaverse kind of thing. But I think if that's how you frame it to your investors, it looks better, or it's kind of you go-- - Sure, that's a hot word right now. It's, you know, that's exciting. - You could call Halo a metaverse, like Halo Infinite. Like, 'cause I go on there and I hang out with my friends. Like I know-- - I think Fortnite is-- - Yeah, Fortnite I think is like, yeah, the shining example where like, I think what makes it a true metaverse, I know this is a tangent, is like there's like a non-violent way where your avatars in the world can meet. Like I do, I technically, I think is like what qualifies it as a metaverse. But I mean like Microsoft has multiple multiplayer games that do that. Like if they wanted to, they can make a halo mode. Like that where your characters just kind of like walk around in the section. Like you could say Back 4 Blood's Hub is a metaverse 'cause you can see each other there. So like, yeah, like I said, to me metaverse is like a nebulous term used to mostly just court investors. But yeah, it's just, I think, I think that's kind of speaking to the rising value of gaming where Microsoft sees like, Oh, investors like metaverse, we already have all these metaverses right here. We can acquire more by spending our budget on like on Activision. So they basically just doubled down on IP. And then you're, when you own

everything, you're bound to get the next fortnight eventually. - Eventually, if you can, if you just spend it all, you'll eventually get something out of it. - Yeah, and yeah, I think this is the end game with the service is like, it's a, I don't necessarily want to say it's like quality over quantity, but it's like, when you have quantity, there's bound to eventually be something that hits on it. And I think you've seen the hits like Halo Infinite's done like 20 million players. I think they've said like, Halo's been a huge hit and it's free to play and it has like a monetizable battle pass that's controversial, but I'm sure it's making butt loads of money. So. - Yeah, and when you have the most expensive game engine developed, you want your money back. - Yeah, and once the steal's complete, all that Call of Duty money is gonna go into Microsoft's bank, all the Diablo and Overwatch money into Microsoft's bank. - All the Candy Crush money. - Yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah. - Candy Crush is two billion a year. - Yeah, so that's the thing, it's like, I mean, it's gonna, even if it doesn't pay back through Game Pass, like Microsoft is going to see that money somewhere. So that's what makes such like a, that's why they're willing to go like, okay, let's empty out like a lot of our money. 'Cause then they know like a bunch is gonna come back in. And then the hope is that that's been sustained. So then you're making even more. And then you have, then the money coming in is from a source here investors like, so then investors will go like, oh, Metaverse, NFTs. And then you'll just be doing well. and it's a service so it's not finite. Game Pass will never quote unquote be outdated hardware. It will just move on to the next thing. It's all being handled on a backend. Instead of buying a console every seven years, you're just paying for a subscription for seven years and they make way more money off of you that way than the one 400, 500, \$300 fee that you pay once every seven years. And so it's just keeping income coming in. Yeah, it's a steady stream of revenue versus multiple quick hits. And I do think, and I mean people still, I think that's why the option won't go away. Because Microsoft doesn't mind if I go out and spend 60 bucks on Halo Infinite, because I want it physically. They're still making money when I do that. They don't care if I play Psychonauts 2 on PS4. They're still making money when I do that. Like yeah, they're making a bit less than played natively through game pass, but like it's that's that's where Microsoft gets scary It's just because because they have their foot in so many pots where it's like it's their feet in so many pots where it's just kind of like it's going to be a thing where like they don't really care where the money's coming from as long as it's Coming from this source and to to them. So it's just kind of like cast as wide of a net as possible that's as attractive to people as possible. And then you're, like I said, you're bound to catch something eventually. - Yeah, and I'm sure they will catch something here within the next few years. They're definitely, they've definitely got a lineup on the horizon that is just, it's gonna be, they will reach that goal of having, you know, games, big titles out on Game Pass every month, every quarter, and so on. Like it's just, when you own this many studios and you're bringing in this many games and IP and all that stuff, it makes it more enticing. So it's just, it's interesting to see. Personally, I'm curious if I will eventually become a consistent subscriber. I currently have Game Pass now because I did the whole transition, I had about three years of a transition from gold to ultimate because I thought, hey, Halo's coming out at launch of the Series X, this'll be great. That didn't happen. (laughs) And so my Game Pass I think is up in August. And I plan to let that run out personally because Xbox is my Xbox exclusive console. I play my third party stuff on PlayStation. And there's not really games on Game Pass that I want to play. which I know I'm very much in the minority on this, but I'm not-- - What's your favorite non-Sony or Nintendo franchise? - At least the one on Xbox, I would say Forza, and that just came out, and I used Game Pass to play a few hours of it. - Exactly, so yeah, when the next Forza comes out, they're hoping that even if it's just like, "Oh, I'm gonna get the \$1 deal," like, they hope you're resubscribing. - They hope they get the dollar out of me, but it's-- Or you go out and pay them 60 bucks for the new Forza. - Which is probably what I'd do. - If that game for you was like Final Fantasy, then you go like, oh, Final Fantasy's on Game Pass, like let me go there. So. - You know, well really what it'll be, Thomas, is the Indiana Jones game. That's what I'll do. - Yep. Oh yeah, you'll see more IP like that. Yeah, like I said, it's, gaming I don't think is as bad as film, where it's like an IP matters, but like, 'cause I do think there's enough indie games new IP still happening in games. But like now you're going to see those Hollywood games on Game Pass where it's like like they did there

was like a Space Jam game on Game Pass last year that no one talked about. I remember that. Yeah there was like and then yeah like you mentioned there's stuff Indiana Jones there's stuff that were tied into IPs that then the the big businesses and the suits at those businesses. Disney's going to look at that and be like, "Oh yeah, I want to put my Star Wars game on Game Pass," because that's the subscription service. Just like people at first with Netflix were like, before they made their own, were like, "Oh yeah, it makes sense to put my movie on Netflix because it'll make money from that." So yeah, that's where Microsoft wants to be. They're fine if you you unsubscribe for a bit, but like, whenever you need to go back to daddy Microsoft to play Call of Duty, they'll be there. And you're either gonna pay them 60 bucks-- - They'll be there waiting, just hoping. - Or you're gonna renew your subscription, and then maybe just happen to play 50 games on their service, which looks good as data to their partners, so. - Yep, and in the end, they win, so. It's-- - Yep. Welcome to the dystopia, everyone. - Yeah, if you had told me back when I was graduating in high school when the Xbox One was launching that this is where they'd be today, I could not have, I would not have believed it. It is an amazing turnaround, it's a great story, you know, just to see it from Microsoft and from Phil and it's an exciting time to see where The whole industry is going because what we talked about, what will Sony do? Will Nintendo just be out here on this island doing nothing or will they let the Game Pass ship come and dock at Nintendo Island and come and go as it pleases? Who knows, it's exciting to see this year is gonna be big, especially around the summertime with E3 or whatever, it's a summer game fest or what have you. And every trailer is gonna say, launching on Game Pass, day and date on Game Pass. - You saw that last year. Last year I think it was literally like Diablo II Remastered and one other game were the only other games, and Battlefield were the only games not on Game Pass. - And now Diablo II will be on Game Pass. - Yes, yeah. And Battlefield 1942 will get added whenever it comes to EA Play. So yeah, that is the end goal. where like in 2023, I'll say 2024's E3, like they can fill that with IP from them, from Activision, from Bethesda, from partners in publishing, and then just from like other random deals here, indies. Like, so they basically went to like, from Xbox has no games to like, okay, we may not have the games like Sony has. Like, that's the other thing is like, Even with everything Microsoft's acquiring, like a Sony game is still gonna be a Sony game when it comes out. Like I'm sure when God of War or Agnurok comes out, it's going to be huge and all of that. And it's gonna be like amazing and 10 out of 10s and stuff. But it's like, Microsoft doesn't need to put out two 10 out of 10s a year. It needs to put out 10, eight out of 10s that are cooperative games you play with your friends. and then you increase your revenue and subscriptions. - Yeah, they're definitely blazing their own trail and it seems like a lot of people are gonna have to follow that trail. It's not like we can go out here and do this. We have to do what they're doing. And so it's, this generation is off to a very great start and an exciting one at that. So I'm excited to see where it's going. Thanks for joining me, Tomas. - Yeah, no problem. It's great to be on here. We haven't talked like this in a bit since the color splash thing. - No, we haven't. - Anytime, I'm open. - I just wanna say again, congratulations on the new job over at Digital Trends. You're crushing it, dude. You're one of the people I know out here who's actually doing the job. You've been at it here for, you just tweeted the other day, was it six years? You joined Twitter and that led to you being at Dual Shockers. So yeah, it's not my six years is in May, but yeah, just for fun story to end on. Yeah, I joined Twitter on a whim in January, 2016, when I was in a junior in high school, just 'cause like there was some assignment we did in class that had funny answers. And I just like, was like, oh, I'll post these. And then on a whim, I decided to follow Dual Shockers, who I just like had happened to find the year before when I was looking at gaming news. And then I just happened to see them tweeting like, oh, we need writers. And then I was kind of persistent with that. And so then I got hired and I've been at it for five years. So yeah, that was since like May 23rd, 2016 when I was still in high school was when I started writing about games. But yeah, so it's just kind of a weird thing where it's like, we're like, obviously that was supposed to happen 'cause it was where I ended up. But it is just kind of funny to think like, well, that's why I tweeted that, was just kind of the thing. like the Twitter anniversary notification popped up and I'm like, oh yeah, if I hadn't just like decided to do this, like who knows what I'd be. Like I do think I still would've ended up working in games

somehow 'cause I think I did want to from an earlier age, but like joining Twitter then is kind of what like was able to set the path I would follow. - Yes, Twitter changes lives. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. - Yeah, no, it's not a Twitter endorsement, but just Twitter's role in my path. - Yes, the little blue bird, or white bird on a blue background. It's very exciting, congratulations again, and thank you for your insight here for this Microsoft Actors in Blizzard acquisition. I really appreciate it. Why don't you tell the people where they can find you online, and where to check you out? - Sure, yeah. So on Twitter, I am just my name @Tomas Franzese, T-O-M-A-S F-R-A-N-Z-E-S-E. It's mostly work related stuff, I'll post there usually. Sometimes just like opinions or takes on stuff. Like I've been tweeting about the NFL playoffs a bit, but you can follow me there. And then also if you wanna read my work, you can just type in Tomas Franzese, dual shockers or inverse. You can find all my articles from those. And then if you go on Digital Trends to the gaming sections or just type in Tomas Digital Trends, you can find that just my work. Currently I'm at Digital Trends. So you go to Digital Trends if you wanna read what I'm doing basically. And then my Twitter for everything else. - Awesome. If you wanna find links to anything that we talked about, you can just check them out in the show notes, including Tomas's article about answering all your questions about this big acquisition. So check out the show notes for that. If you'd like, you can follow me on Twitter at MaxRoberts143 and my writing over here at maxfrequency.net. If you wanna hear more of Tomas, he actually joined us on Chapter Select, which is a seasonal podcast that I do with Logan Moore. We bounce back and forth between a series of games to explore their evolution, design, and legacy. Tomas joined us in the season one all about Paper Mario for Paper Mario Color Splash. Tomas over here, he paid full \$60 price on the Wii U eShop in the year 2021, which shows his level of commitment when he is called upon. It's a good game, I like the game, it's good. So you can go check out that episode if you wanna hear more Tomas and myself and Logan talking together. But until next time, thank you all for listening. I hope you enjoy and have a wonderful rest of your day. - Bye. - Well, should I watch it real quick? - If you want. - I'll watch it real quick. You can listen to my reaction in real time. It was one of those things, like I was reading a book and in between chapters I like pulled up to it. Oh my God, duh, that scared me. Gosh, it was so loud. (laughing) Oh my gosh, I just put a heart attack. (laughing) - When I was waiting, I was playing Pokemon and my controller vibrated on the table. I wasn't expecting it, so I was like, what? - Oh my gosh, holy smokes. All right, volume's down. All right, I'll watch this now, good God.