8 great Apple Arcade games for your iPhone or iPad

Apple Arcade remains one of the best deals in gaming — even after getting a price bump. Since launch, the service has steadily grown with a mix of original mobile releases and App Store classics, none of which are burdened with the ads or in-app purchases that so often plague smartphone games. 2023 was a particularly strong year for new additions, with everything from daily word games for the *Wordle*-obsessed to cozy adventures to relax with. If you just picked up a new Apple device, or are using the subscription service for the very first time, here are some great places to start.

Zach Gage and Jack Schlesinger have partnered on a number of great mobile puzzle games — including *Good Sudoku* and *SpellTower*, both of which are also available on Apple Arcade — but *Knotwords* might be my favorite. It combines the structure of a classic crossword puzzle with the guessing inherent in *Wordle*. You're presented with a grid that looks like a crossword, but instead of clues, you're given letters that can only be placed in certain squares. From there, you have to work out the words that fill up the puzzle. *Knotwords* has a huge number of puzzles, including daily ones that are a perfect companion to your morning coffee.

There was really nothing like *Downwell* when it first debuted in 2015, and all these years later not much has changed as the game hits Apple Arcade. It's sort of a platformer, but one that asks you to move down instead of forward. You play as an unlucky pixel art character who is perpetually falling down a well full of platforms and enemies, aided by a pair of boots with guns on them, so that you can both kill bad guys and slow

your descent when necessary. *Downwell* is dark, weird, and very tough – and also very hard to put down once you get into it.

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>*Stardew Valley*

Speaking of cozy games, the mega-hit *Stardew Valley* is now on Apple Arcade. For the uninitiated, it’s a sprawling farming / life sim with an incredibly open-ended structure, so that you can do what you like at your own pace. The game originally debuted on PC, but it’s a really great fit for playing on the go, when you just have a few minutes to water your crops or woo the NPC of your dreams.

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>*Ridiculous Fishing EX*

One of the App Store’s early hits returned this year with a remastered version. The core of *Ridiculous Fishing* remains the same as always: you use increasingly devious tools to plunge down into the depths of the ocean gathering fish, before eventually flinging them into the air and… shooting them. It doesn’t make a lot of sense, but it’s tense and fun in the way the best arcade games tend to be. The new edition has updated visuals, along with a few other tweaks including an in-universe version of TikTok solely about fish.

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>*Puzzle & Dragons Story*

The *Puzzle & Dragons* series has been around for a while, and it offers a nice mix of match-3 and RPG gameplay. Imagine *Bejeweled*, but you’re fighting monsters inside of a dungeon. The Apple Arcade version adds more story elements — which you can probably guess from the title — but the more important change is the removal of microtransactions. The series has a bit of a *Pokémon* vibe, as you collect monsters to create the ideal team, but in the main game that typically requires spending cash on a virtual gacha machine. With that real-money element taken away, the game is a lot more fun — and even harder to put down.

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