

ARTHUR GRADSTEIN

Creative Director · Mobile Narrative & Romance Games · Interactive Fiction

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SUMMARY

Creative director with 20 years in story, the last nine in mobile games. Conceived *Episode: Reality Stars* and led it through a turnaround to worldwide launch: 3.3M+ players, Apple Game of the Day. Before it, won greenlights for two romance RPGs and killed both when they proved dead ends. Wrote *The Kiss List*, then Episode's onboarding story (150M+ reads, +5% app-wide ARPDau); Nickelodeon head writer by 25 (*iCarly*, then *Victorious*). Conceived a stealth full-motion-video game; its engineering and game design belong to Pocket Gems' co-founder and CTO, and its content, creative and AI production pipeline are mine.

EXPERIENCE

Pocket Gems

San Francisco, CA · 2017 – Present

Creative Director, Narrative Games

Jan 2023 – Present

- Conceived *Episode: Reality Stars* (free-to-play collection RPG, scripted reality show, dating sim) at a 2021 hackathon and held its vision for a 40-person team: final say on all story and character, fantasy sign-off on every spec and mock, and ownership of retention targets.
- Led it to a December 2025 worldwide launch that beat its retention and monetization targets: 43% D1, 9% D30, 3.3M+ players in ten months, 110K+ peak daily players, Apple Game of the Day.
- Led the year-long turnaround with design: every episode rebuilt around a main event, each scene ending on a cliffhanger at one of design's new power checks. With retuning and new value packs, 30-day revenue per install rose about 4.7× and D30 about doubled (test markets, mid-2023 vs. late 2024).
- Kept the team going through that year with a new vision doc and made the case for the game at the 2025 company kickoff. A bouncer scene written in front of the first-session pack (the bulk of day-one sales) lifted its conversion from 3–4% to 10%.
- Designed two core modes: PR Showdown, the async PvP/E styling duel, and VMS Live!, a real-time 10-player fashion battle (daily sessions up about 8% and median playtime 10–16% against a holdout). Six seasons in, still co-lead VMS Live! and review every new feature.
- Managed four direct reports, each leading contract writers and directors (one led up to eight directors and three writers on *Reality Stars*); coached one to lead *Secrets by Episode* for Netflix and promoted another, later recruited by Netflix Games.
- Ran *Reality Stars* as executive producer while the team was small, then led its content pipeline: templates, tools and AI-assisted directing skills cut the average directed scene from five days to 2.5; a directing studio I sourced took productive directors from about 2 to 8 at over 40% lower cost.
- Conceived a stealth full-motion-video game and lead its content and AI production: its seven-person team delivered 672 AI clips (about 92 finished minutes) in 18 weeks, and one shared process more than doubled weekly output, from 22 to 50 delivered clips.
- Hands-on with generative AI in production since 2024 (AI-assisted directing on *Reality Stars*); running the stealth game's AI production since 2025.

- Asked to write premium-choice lessons for top creators, made the case to rebuild Episode Academy from lesson 1 instead. After the Aug 2024 handoff, launches in the top two performance tiers rose from 21% to 44% (2025–26), and authors with one from about 9 a year to 17.

Senior Manager, Story Lead (promoted from Manager, 2020)

Jan 2017 – Jan 2023

- Wrote and executive produced *The Kiss List*, then Episode's onboarding story, in a new interactive-fiction format with a core loop, micro-games and collection: 150M+ reads, 8% more revenue than the story it replaced (about \$1M a year), higher app-wide retention and +5% ARPDAU.
- Codified and taught the format to the studio and UGC creators; the next two onboarding stories built on it, each beating the last.
- Co-led *Pitch Perfect: In Deep Treble*, Episode's licensed-IP adaptation with Universal: managed studio notes and produced an original album of a cappella covers. Sole lead on its eight-episode Part 2, greenlit when projections showed revenue still on the table.

Stolen Duck Productions, Inc.

Los Angeles and San Francisco, CA

Founder and Principal

2010 – 2016

- Sold three live-action TV pilots (two to Nickelodeon, one to Disney XD) and the TV movie *Woodchuck Chuck* to Disney/MarVista; self-financed, co-wrote and executive produced the pilot *Shayna's Place* and sold its distribution rights to eOne.
- Co-founded Goodie Goodie, a family chore and reward app for iOS and Android, and ran it as COO from concept through launch (2013–2015).

Nickelodeon

Los Angeles, CA

Staff Writer to Head Writer and Producer

2005 – 2011

- Hired at 22; head writer on *iCarly* by 25, then on *Victorious* too, helping develop both from their pilots. Worked on 150+ episodes across four series, with a hand in every one, and was nominated for a Producers Guild of America Award.
- Ran the writers' room and the 12-person writing and script department, and led weekly production meetings with every department head.

SKILLS

Creative leadership	Creative and narrative direction, creative vision, player fantasy and experience, cross-functional leadership, roadmap and feature sign-off, KPIs, people management, hiring and outsourcing, mentoring, studio and IP partnerships
Narrative	Narrative design, interactive fiction and visual novels, romance, branching and episodic narrative, worldbuilding, story bibles, character and dialogue, voice direction, original and licensed IP, TV comedy, writers' rooms
Game design	Free-to-play (F2P) mobile core loops, gacha, collection and progression, async PvP/E, prototyping and playtesting, live ops, retention and monetization
Content systems	UGC and creator ecosystems, curricula and workshops, greenlight process, slate programming, scene templates, production pipelines
AI and tools	Claude Code skills; Seedance, GPT Image, Nano Banana and ElevenLabs; Unity, Naninovel, Spine, Final Draft, Photoshop, GitHub

EDUCATION

The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania · B.S. Economics (Marketing and Communications), 2005