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'Rest your best!': Pokemon Sleep game coming this year

Pokemon's last major smartphone hit, "Pokemon Go", had fans on the move hunting the lovable characters, but its next release will focus on a more relaxing activity: sleep. The Pokemon Company has revealed it will release "Pokemon Sleep" across most of the world in summer 2023, four years after it first announced plans for the game. "Turn your sleep into entertainment," the company said in a press release late Monday. Trailers for the new game suggest it combines a smartphone sleep

tracker with gaming. "Your adventure takes place on a small island where you'll carry out research on how Pokemon sleep. You'll work with a large Snorlax who lives on the island and Neroli, a professor who's studying Pokemon sleep styles."

"The longer you sleep, the higher your score in the morning, and the more Pokemon you'll see appear around Snorlax," the company said, urging players to "rest your very best!" Fans will also be able to buy a "Pokemon GO Plus +"-a

Pokeball-shaped gadget that users can place by their pillow, with Pikachu's voice offering "cute prompts when it's time to wake up or go to sleep".

The company's "Pokemon Go" game, which saw players track down the "pocket monsters" using their phones, was an international phenomenon. The free game uses satellite locations, graphics and camera capabilities to overlay cartoon characters on real-world settings, challenging players to capture and train the creatures.

But players were blamed for traffic accidents and other violations as they roamed the streets, buried in their phones. Pokemon has been a global hit since it was launched as a role-playing game in 1996 for Nintendo's Game Boy console. The franchise, whose slogan is "Gotta Catch 'Em All", also includes movies and a hugely popular animated TV show. — AFP



'Ant-Man' stumbles but still tops N America box office

Disney's "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" fell off a cliff but managed to land on all six feet this weekend, topping the North American box office with an estimated \$32.2 million in ticket sales. Industry analyst Exhibitor Relations said the latest Marvel superhero film was down a sharp 70 percent from its strong opening weekend but still topped

the field. Paul Rudd plays the size-changing title ant and alter ego Scott Lang, while Evangeline Lilly is heiress Hope van Dyne and the Wasp.

In second, at \$23.1 million, was a new horror comedy with a different sort of star: a drug-crazed bear. Universal's "Cocaine Bear" is based, if loosely, on the true story of a black bear that finds a large cache of lost cocaine in the Tennessee woods-and eats it. Chaos, gore and wackiness ensue in a movie that also stars Keri Russell of "Felicity" fame. Exhibitor Relations playfully calls the film "Jaws in the Woods on Crack."

In third place was another new release, Lionsgate's "Jesus Revolution," at \$15.5 million. Joel Courtney and Kelsey Grammer star in the story of the Jesus movement in California in the 1960s. "This is a very good opening for a Christian drama," said David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research. "Critics are generally lukewarm about these movies, but when they work, audiences are enthusiastic, and 'Jesus Revolution' is working."

Fourth spot went to 20th Century's blockbuster "Avatar: The Way of Water," adding a respectable \$4.7 million in its 11th week to a global total now over \$2.26 billion. And in fifth, also showing durability in its 10th week in theaters, was Universal's family-oriented "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish," at \$4.1 million. Rounding out the top 10 were:

- "Magic Mike's Last Dance" (\$3 million)
- "Knock at the Cabin" (\$1.9 million)
- "80 for Brady" (\$1.8 million)
- "Missing" (\$1 million)
- "A Man Called Otto" (\$850,000)—AFP



In this file photo US actor Paul Rudd and his wife, writer Julie Yaeger, arrive for the World Premiere of Marvel's "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" at the Regency Village Theatre in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Fourth season of 'Succession' to be last for megahit show

Fans of HBO juggernaut "Succession" will soon bid a final farewell to the family business drama which will end after its upcoming fourth season, according to the show's creator. "I've never thought this could go on forever," Jesse Armstrong told The

New Yorker magazine in an interview published. "The end has always been kind of present in my mind," added the show's screenwriter and producer.

"I got together with a few of my fellow writers before we started the writing of Season 4, in about November, December, 2021, and I sort of said, 'Look, I think this maybe should be it. But what do you think?'" Armstrong recalled. Riding high on both popular success and critical acclaim, "Succession," produced by HBO, is a dark and gritty chronicle of patriarch Logan Roy and his children, a powerful family tearing itself apart to gain

control of a media conglomerate. The first episode aired in 2018.

The show has won a slew of awards, including Outstanding Drama Series at the 2022 Emmy Awards, television's equivalent of the Oscars. The series is fiction, but was inspired by media moguls Sumner Redstone and Rupert Murdoch. Murdoch's News Corp is one of the world's largest media empires and includes the Fox network as well as The Times and The Sun newspapers in Britain. — AFP



'A Thousand Splendid Suns' opera spotlights Afghan women

Minutes before Afghan filmmaker Roya Sadat entered her first Seattle Opera production meeting for an adaptation of the novel "A Thousand Splendid Suns," she learned that her hometown of Herat had fallen to the Taleban. The celebrated director's first foray into opera started out as a look back at a painful chapter in her country's history through Khaled Hosseini's story of two women whose lives are marked by the Taleban's brutal and repressive rule in the 1990s.

But the surge back to power of the hard-line Islamists in August 2021 brought the story roaring back to the present for Afghan women. And it added new weight to the production, as the Taleban again placed an ever-tightening vice on women's liberties, despite vowing a departure from their infamous first reign. For Sadat, the Taleban return changed both her world and the one she wanted to create on stage.

"When I started I thought, let's try to have more symbolic elements and move between surreal expression and realities," she told AFP ahead of the opera's premiere on February 25 in Seattle, Washington. "It wasn't just something that changed emotionally for me. There was a change to what I was thinking for the structure of the opera and I decided I should use more realism and bring out the reality of the situation," in everything from colors, to costumes and set design.

It's a reality Sadat is intimately familiar with, having pushed boundaries to create under the first Taleban rule when arts

were harshly controlled, before becoming one of the country's first women filmmakers after their ouster in 2001. Her most successful films-including "A Letter to the President" and "Three Dots"-focus on women and their perseverance in the face of extreme odds.

It's a theme that courses through "A Thousand Splendid Suns" for Sadat, who said the opera is a narrative of the resilience of women, who are "always the



Performers Maureen McKay (left) and Karin Mushegain during a dress rehearsal for "A Thousand Splendid Suns" in the Marion Oliver McCaw Hall at Seattle Center.

first to suffer" from conflict and political violence. "Right now the only strong dissidence is from women in Afghanistan," she said. "Even if the Taleban tortures them, even if they ban them... they have their voices." With the opera, "We're asking to please listen to this voice."

Weaving musical traditions

Voices take center stage in more ways than one in this iteration of Hosseini's 2007

bestseller. Composer Sheila Silver was first drawn to the story as rich material for opera nearly 15 years ago, because of the characters of Laila and Mariam and the bond they form as their lives are upended by familial and political turmoil.

"Opera is larger than life and they're larger than life," Silver said. "Their resilience and their love for one another sustains them and they survive through the power of their love." Drawing inspira-



Performers Maureen McKay (right) and Karin Mushegain during a dress rehearsal for "A Thousand Splendid Suns" in the Marion Oliver McCaw Hall.

tion from the story's setting as she went to work with librettist Stephen Kitsakos, she wove Western operatic tradition with music at home in Afghanistan.

Silver studied Hindustani music traditions-which she described as "the classical music of Afghanistan" associated with the country since the 16th century-and incorporated its melodic and harmonic structures. The opera opens with one of the tradition's foundational drones under intertwined cello

and bansuri-an ancient bamboo flute and one of the instruments added to the orchestra that create a sense of place even without sets or costumes.

'Intersection of cultures'

Creating an experience true to the story's context was a priority, with Afghan cultural consultant Humaira Ghilzai brought on board in 2016. In a medium where performers' voices are paramount, she consulted on elements including body language so as not to have "a bunch of people in Afghan dress walking and talking like Westerners" and to help draw the audience into "a different world."

Along with contributing to a slate of Seattle Opera events highlighting Afghan art and culture alongside the production, she has worked to bring the Afghan community into what-as it was for her-may be the unfamiliar territory of the opera house and encourage further "intersection of cultures." She said with Sadat's involvement, the work of imbuing the production with authenticity was shared.

But with a heavy sense of responsibility, she wanted to draw attention to the "heartbreaking" situation in the country her family fled in 1979 during yet another violent chapter in its uneasy history, she added. "I feel the weight of the world on my shoulders with this production because the world has turned its gaze away from Afghanistan." — AFP

Uzbek singer handed stage ban after 'immoral' video

Authoritarian Uzbekistan has temporarily barred a popular singer from performing after videos circulated online of her singing in high-heeled boots, nude leggings and an oversized shirt. Artists in the Central Asian Republic of Uzbekistan can only perform with a license from the government, which is accused of trampling basic freedoms despite also undertaking some reforms.

"The singer Kaniza has recently published videos on social media in which she behaves obscenely, contradicting behavioral ethics, promoting immoral ideas and offending viewers," said Uzbekkonzert, the government institution responsible for licensing, said Monday.

Kaniza's agent told AFP the singer had "simply sang two songs at a restaurant opening." Her suspension is a "one-month warning so she has time to reflect and draw the right conclusions," the culture ministry told AFP.

"If in one month she says she has understood and promises not to post such videos again, then her (license) application will be considered," it added. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who came to power in 2016, has promoted reforms unthinkable under his predecessor, an infamous rights abuser in the ex-Soviet region. His government however remains authoritarian and restricts freedom of expression. — AFP



Uzbek singer Kaniza



Performers Maureen McKay (left), John Moore and Karin Mushegain during a dress rehearsal for "A Thousand Splendid Suns" in the Marion Oliver McCaw Hall at Seattle Center in Seattle, Washington. — AFP photos



Performers Maureen McKay (left), John Moore and Karin Mushegain during a dress rehearsal for "A Thousand Splendid Suns" in the Marion Oliver McCaw Hall at Seattle Center in Seattle.