Sensor Tower

How to Prepare Your Live Ops for the Holiday Season

Discover how top games structure Live Ops, what's new, and how to build a scalable system that performs.

Deconstructions
by Sensor Tower

Deconstructions, Sensor Tower's state-of-the-art platform for analyzing Live Ops, enables you to dive into a rich repository of events, updates, and monetization offers across hundreds of top games. Whether you're designing a new offering, reengaging existing players, or optimizing your monetization tactics, use **Deconstructions to secure your competitive edge in the mobile gaming world.**

This report gives you a preview of the rich insights available in-platform — use these evidence-based recommendations to move with confidence, and revamp your strategy ahead of the holiday season.

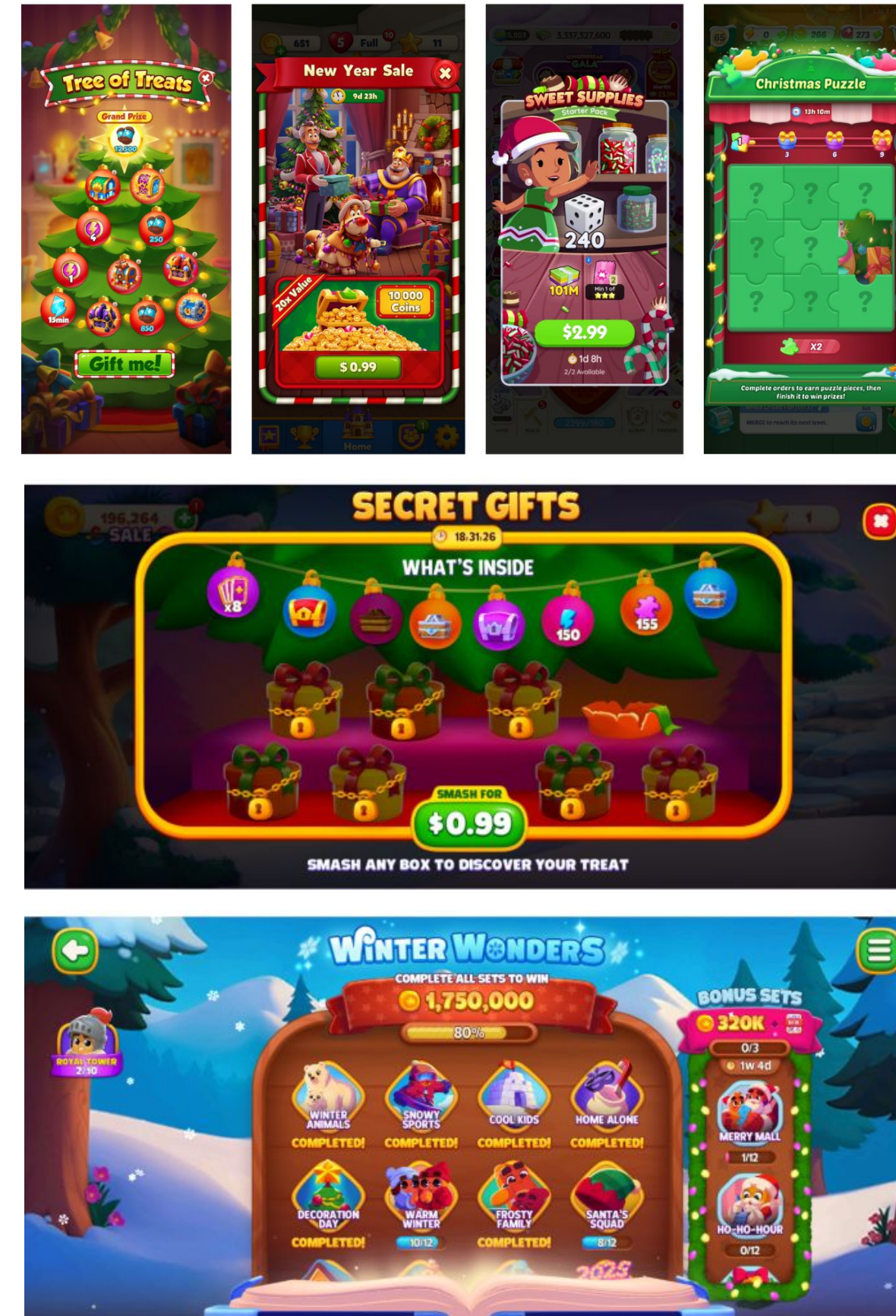# How to Prepare Your Live Ops for the Holiday Season

We're entering the Holiday Season – Thanksgiving, Black Friday, Christmas, New Year – the weeks when players come back, spend more time in the game, and are naturally more open to rewards and special events.

It's also the moment when teams wrap up the year, review what worked (and what didn't), and look for growth levers before Q4 closes. And Live Ops is one of the few levers that can still move the needle effectively

But here's the key idea: Live Ops shouldn't be a holiday trick. It should be a system.

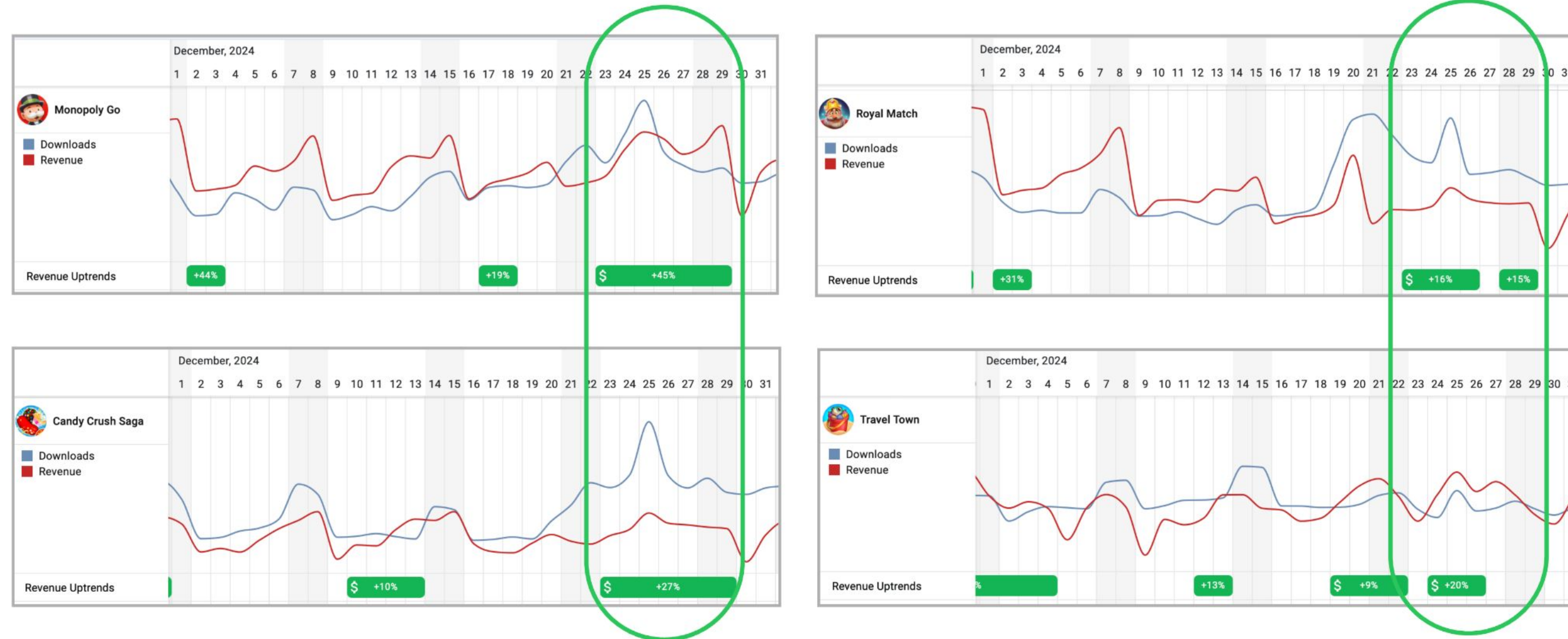Seasonal events only amplify a foundation that already works.

This guide breaks down how TOP games structure Live Ops, what's NEW this Season, and how to build a scalable system that performs during the holidays.

Why the Holiday Season Deserves Special Attention

Major holidays are always worth extra attention – they bring more than just festive decorations.

- People are in a better mood, surrounded by a special atmosphere, and most importantly – they have more free time. For many, this is also the season of year-end bonuses and gift spending

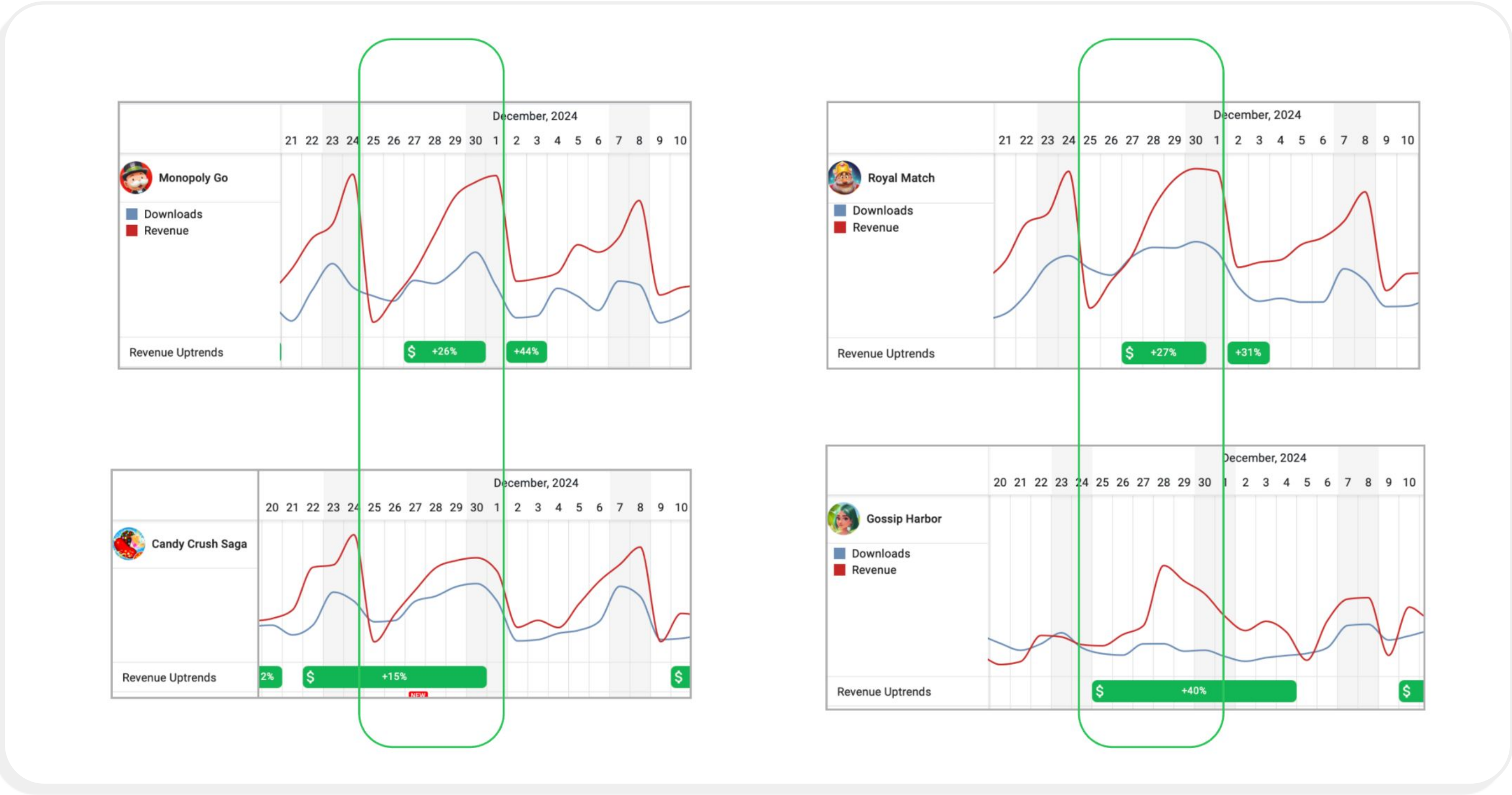- → This combination naturally drives **stronger engagement and higher spending**

As seen to the left, Top titles that planned their systems strategically – achieved **revenue uplifts from 16% to 45%** during this period.

Let's take a closer look at the key principles behind that success.

Why the Holiday Season Deserves Special Attention

You can also look beyond Christmas – there are a few other major holidays worth paying attention to.

One of the key ones is the Thanksgiving – Black Friday period (28-29 Nov, 2024), which often acts as the kick-off to the festive season.

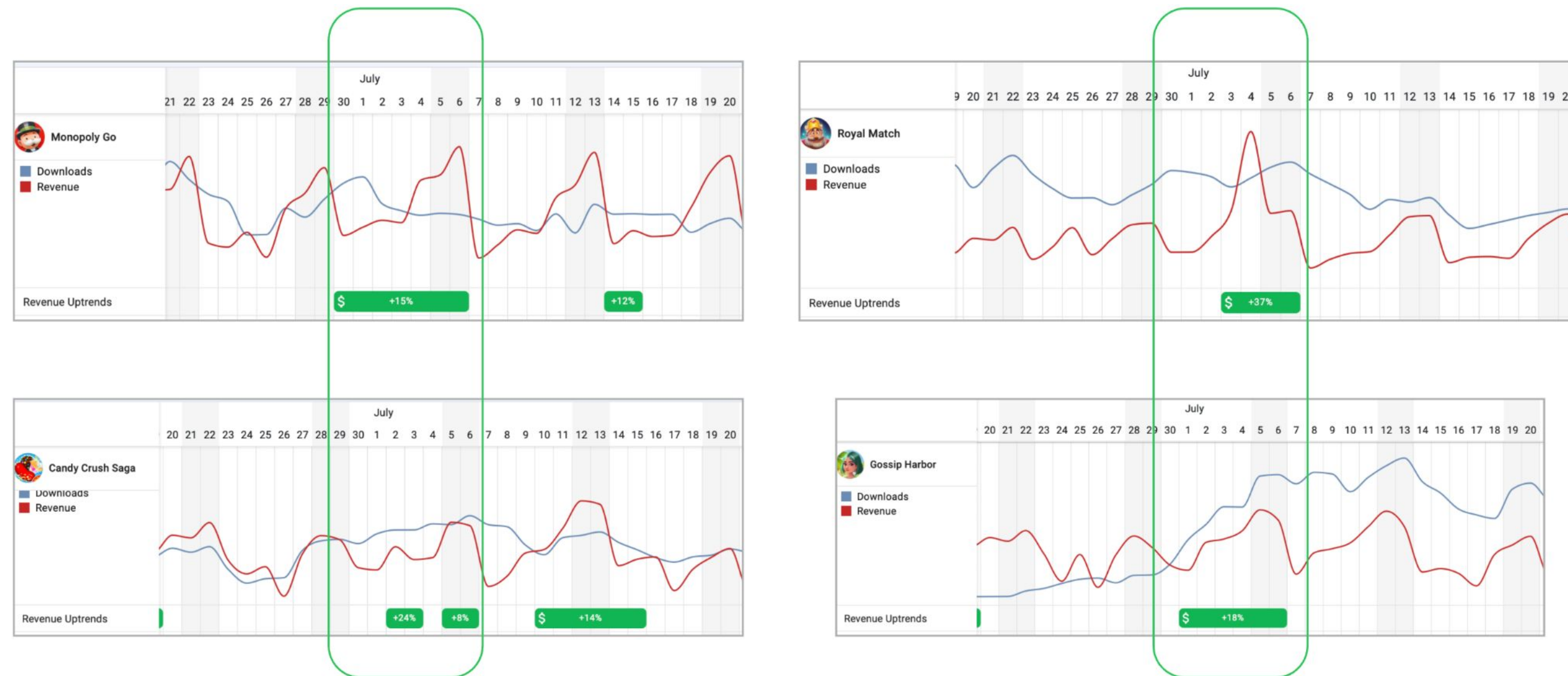**We analyzed hundreds of games**, and saw a clear trend:

Nearly all of them show **revenue growth between 15% and 50%** during this window.

To the left are just a few examples illustrating that spike.

Why the Holiday Season Deserves Special Attention

Another key holiday to keep in mind is The 4th of July: Independence Day in the USA.

It's an important date for most games, since the majority of most of the mobile audiences are US-based.

This holiday perfectly breaks up the summer season, giving companies a strong reason to re-engage players.

During this period, many games refresh their visuals – adopting red, white, and blue color themes, fireworks, and other iconic American symbols to match the celebratory mood.

We used **Sensor Tower's Deconstructions** to analyze **hundreds of games and thousands of event** launches across different types and genres.

We discovered multiple patterns and correlations – and compiled the **best practices and insights** to help you build a strong **Live Ops System** and adapt it for the festive holiday season.

Infuse the Holiday Spirit

Start Celebrating Early

Christmas officially falls on December 24, but don't wait until then to celebrate with your players.
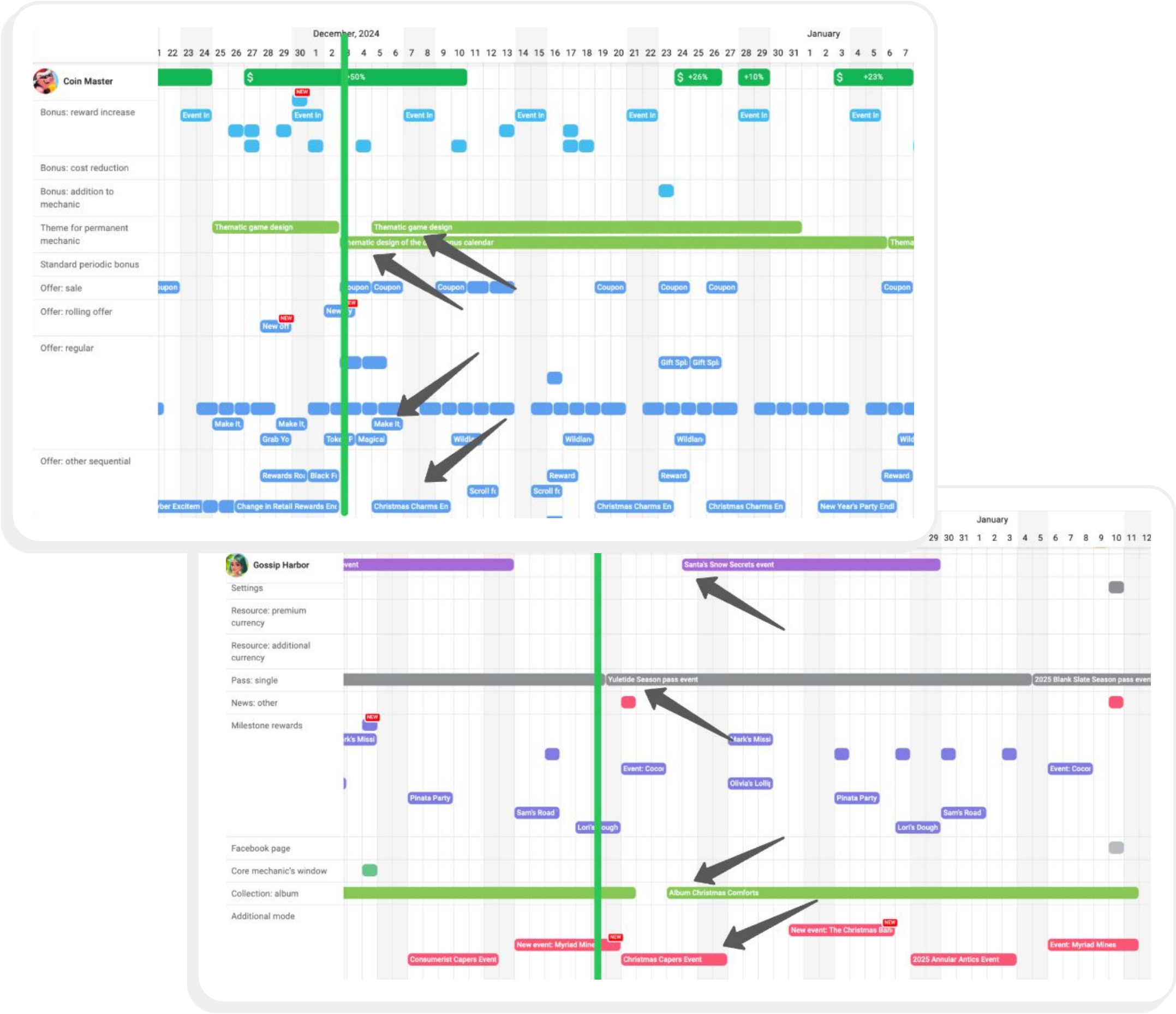
Start building that 'Holiday Mood' in early December – right after Thanksgiving and Black Friday wrap up.

For example, in 2024:

- **Coin Master** kicked off its Christmas events as early as **December 3**

- **Gossip Harbor** followed a few days later – around **December 7**

What does this mean for you?

It means planning should start way earlier – ideally in **August or early September.** And no, that's not a joke, it's how top teams actually do it.
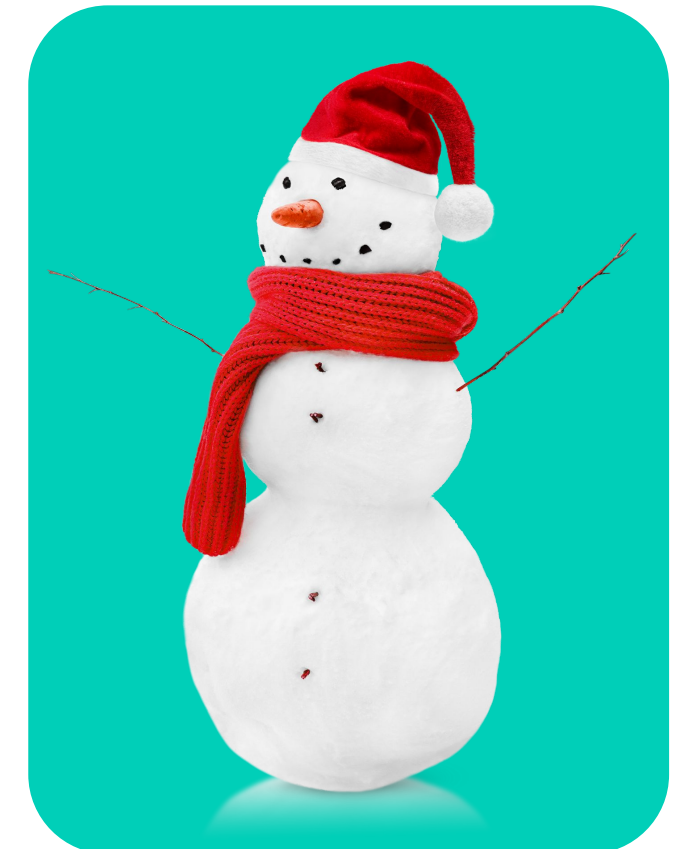
Set the mood

Give your top events a festive reskin – Christmas versions always feel special.

There's plenty of inspiration around: classic movies, other games, store decorations, even memes.

Respect your audience's traditions. And don't mix them up:

- Stockings, fireplaces, milk and cookies for Santa belong to Christmas
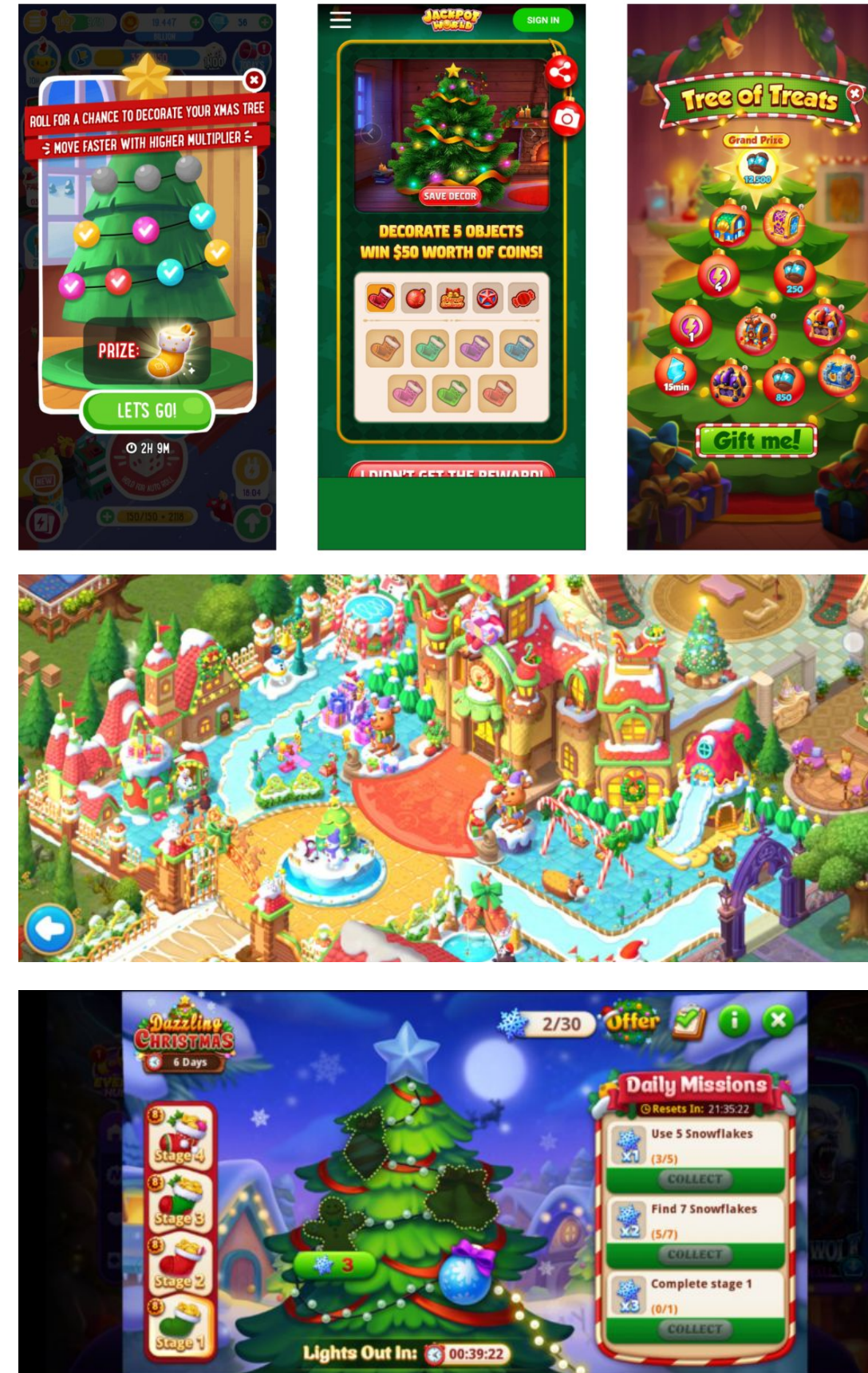- While disco balls, champagne, and midnight kisses belong to New Year's Eve

Decorate the Christmas Tree (or the Location)

Decorating a Christmas tree is one of the most recognizable and beloved traditions – and many games borrow this imagery to instantly create a festive, cozy atmosphere.

- Players complete challenges or tasks to add ornaments, lights, and gifts – each action visually showing progress and celebration

Another variation is Location Decoration – where players gradually add new festive details to their town, yard, or room, watching it come alive with every completed milestone.
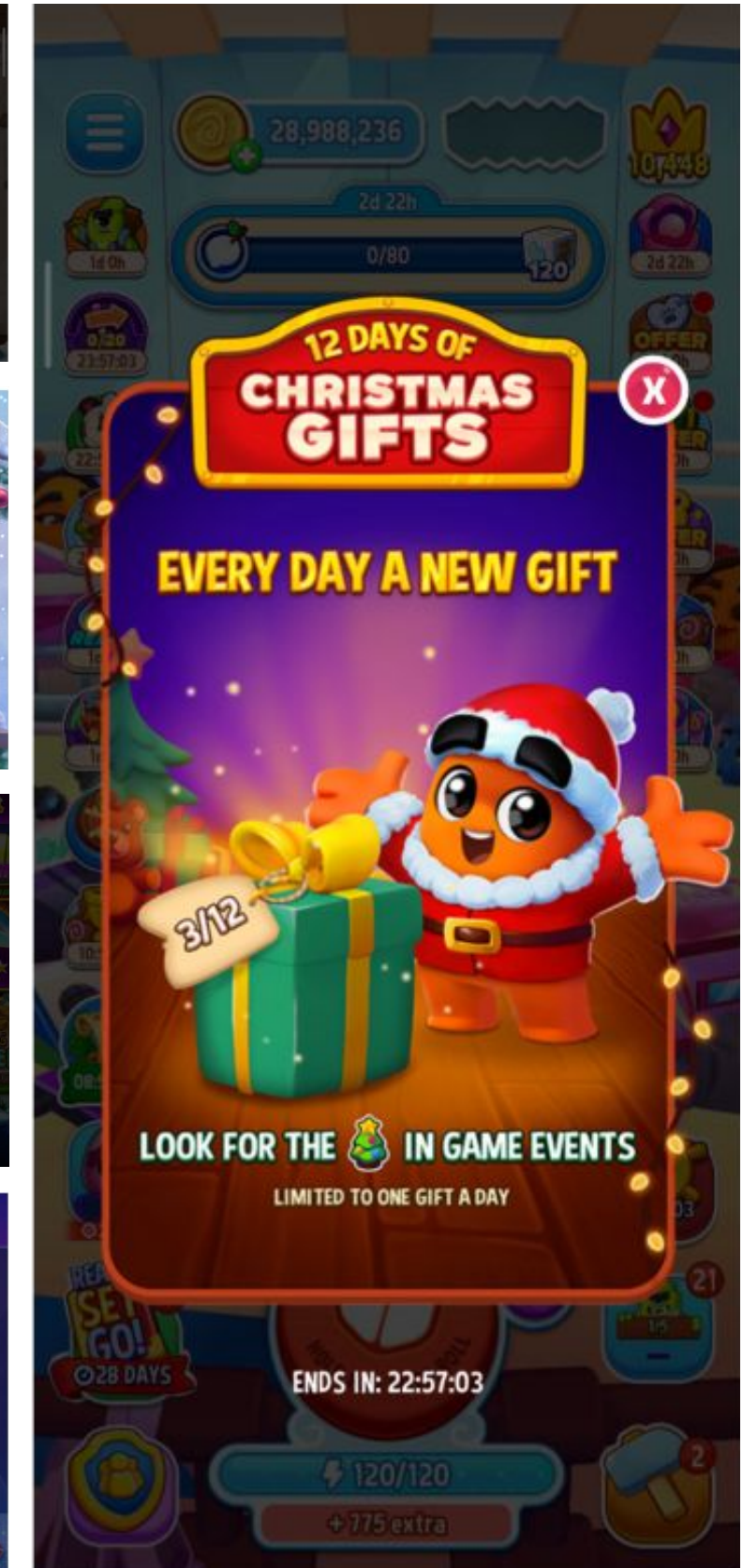
Advent Calendar / 12 Days of Christmas

Another timeless tradition that fits perfectly into Live Ops. Players return daily to Unwrap a new Surprise.

- **Daily surprises create a ritual:** players start each session with a positive reinforcement, which instantly boosts mood and increases the chance they'll stay and play longer.

- **Lifehack: Your "gift" doesn't always have to be a reward** – it can also be a Bonus on Purchase (like a special discount or bundle) or even the launch of a new event.

Whether it's a classic **Advent Calendar** or a "**12 Days of Christmas" countdown**, the idea is the same: create a daily ritual that keeps players excited to come back – and rewards consistency with growing value.

Other Classic Decorations

And of course, you can weave other Christmas traditions right into your existing events.

They don't need to become standalone features – just small thematic touches that add charm and familiarity:

- Gingerbread cookies
- Letters to Santa
- Santa's Workshop
- Milk & Cookies for Santa
- Christmas decorations, red-and-white candy canes, and more

Don't forget about your App Icon

Have you ever seen your DAU spike unexpectedly after a release – even without major changes inside the game?

It often happens right after an **app icon refresh.**
A festive icon on the home screen catches attention and subtly reminds your existing audience to come back.

So, don't skip this step – give your icon a seasonal touch and let it work as a small, silent reactivation tool

Festive events bring energy, excitement, and a short-term boost
– but their real power lies in how well your core
Live Ops system supports them.

Think of holidays as amplifiers:
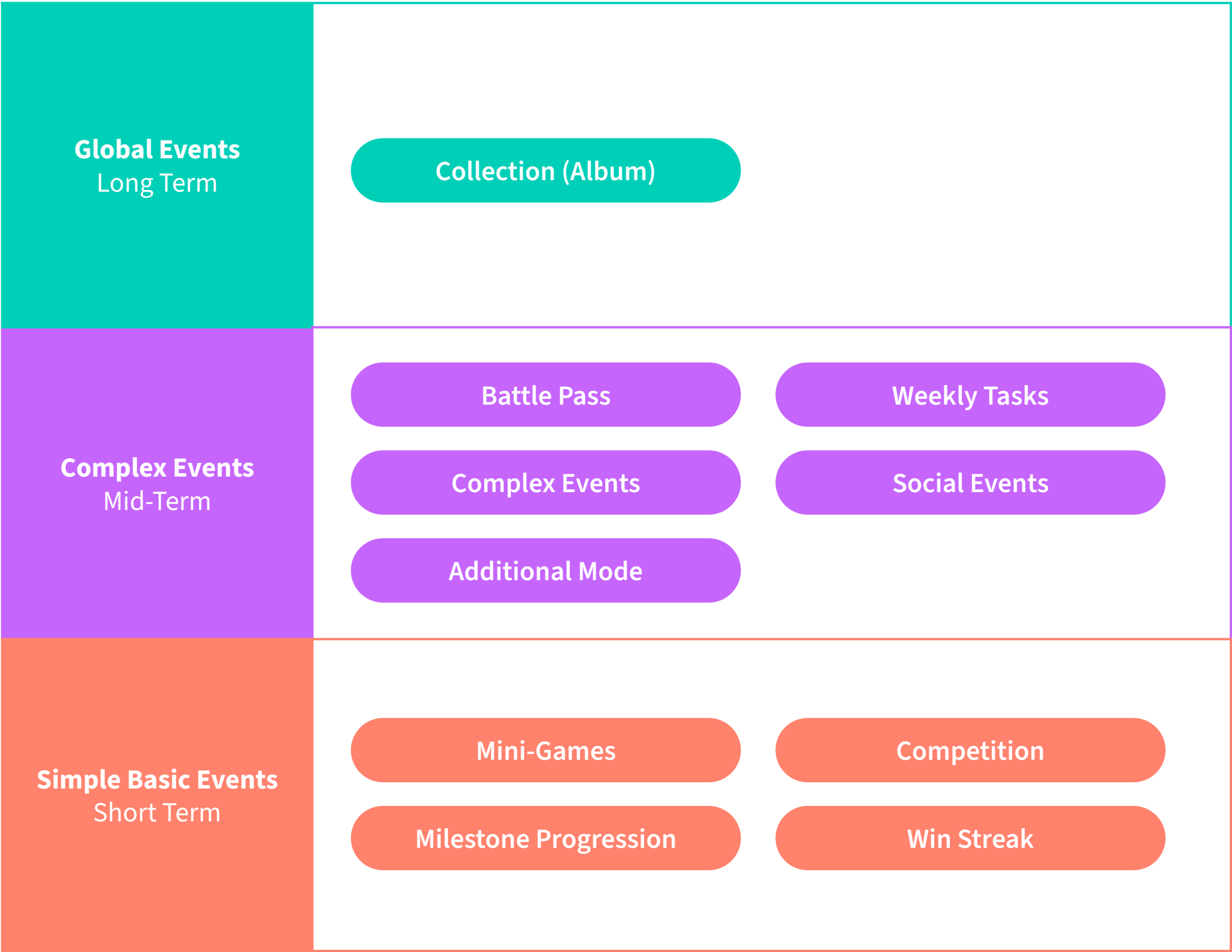they don't replace your foundation, they magnify it.

So before the next season hits, let's explore what makes a strong,
scalable Live Ops system that can perform year-round

Building Your
Live Ops System

Building Your
Live Ops System

The Live Ops landscape can be grouped into 3 main layers:

- **Global Events (Long-Term)** – the overarching structures, seasonal or always-on, that hold everything together

- **Complex Events (Mid-Term)** – system-level events that reinforce and connect other activities

- **Basic Events (Short-Term)** – engagement loops built around milestones, mini-goals or streaks

Global Events Long Term	**Collection (Album)**	
Complex Events Mid-Term	**Battle Pass**	**Weekly Tasks**
	Complex Events	**Social Events**
	Additional Mode	
Simple Basic Events Short Term	**Mini-Games**	**Competition**
	Milestone Progression	**Win Streak**

Simple Basic Events (Short-Term)

Main Characteristics:

- Short in duration - usually 1-3 days

- Focused on Short- and Mid-term Goals

- Core principle: Play the main loop → Progress the event

- Typically use a soft difficulty curve (easy start → harder finish, with 'sawtooth' pacing)

- Built around frequent milestones so players hit several milestones within a single session

- Work best when progress is visible and supported by 'almost there' nudges

- Ideally use asynchronous progress, so reaching a milestone in one event already partially fills the next

They can be presented in different thematic wrappers, but usually fall into four Main Formats:

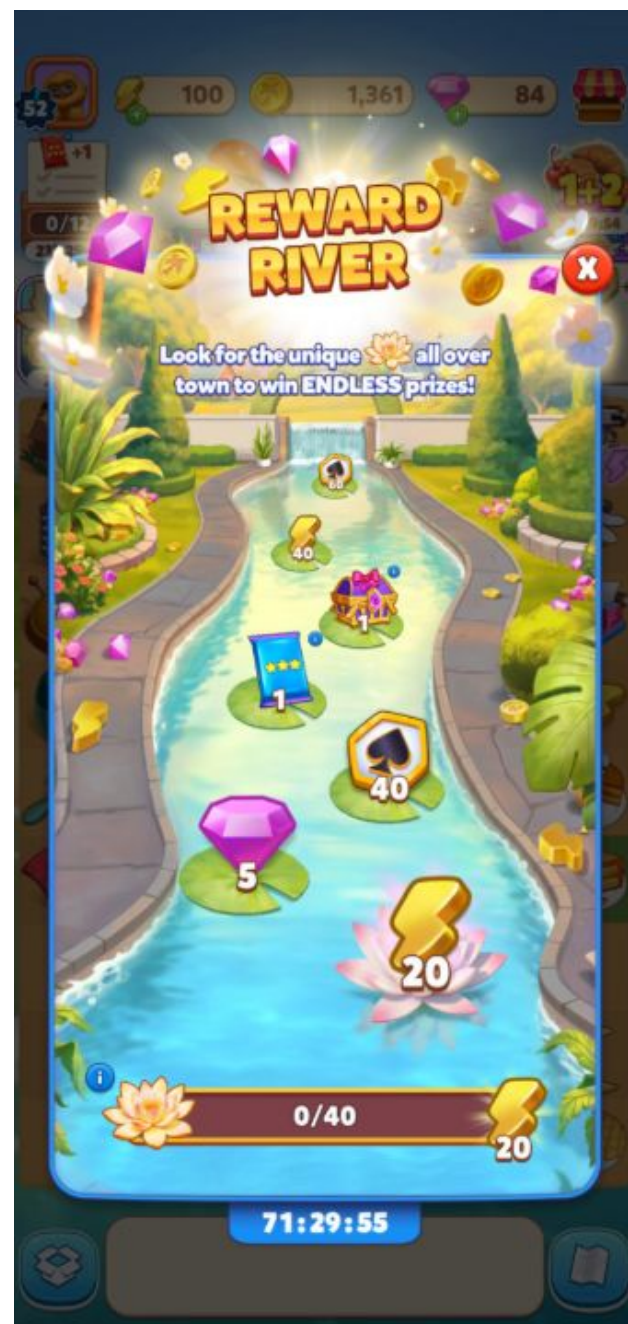- Milestone Progression

- Win Streak

- Competition

- Mini-Games

These events typically serve as the starting point for most Live Ops systems:

| Simple Basic Events
Short Term | Mini-Games | Competition |
| | Milestone Progression | Win Streak |

Milestone Progression

The simplest and most intuitive type of event – a sequence of milestones, each with a reward.

'Simple' DOESN'T mean 'Weak.' When tuned correctly, this format is extremely effective.

Milestone Progression
A few hidden gems

Re-skin + re-frame often

The same event can feel fresh when the visual part changes. For example, the core mechanic across the 1-3 screenshots is identical – yet each event feels different thanks to theme and presentation.

Use a difficulty 'sawtooth', not a straight line – to create natural 'rest' moments between difficulty spikes

Start easy → ramp up → drop → ramp again (e.g. 60 → 200 → 80 → 250)

Great as a 'currency feeder' into other events.

Instead of paying out core currency, you can reward tokens for another event. This builds natural events synergy (like the example in the screenshot)

Choose your event difficulty curve wisely:

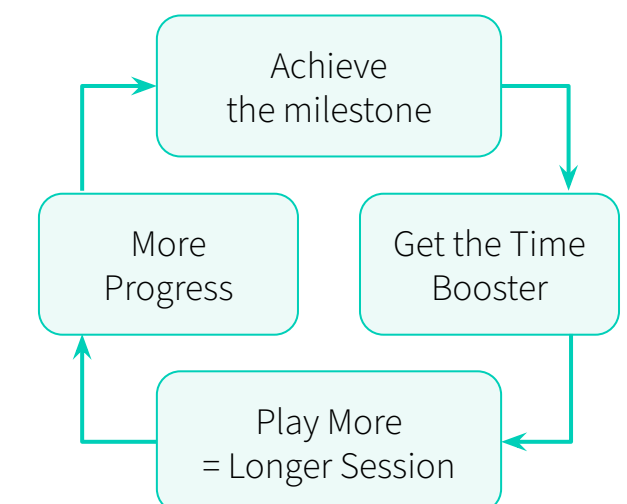For example, both linear and exponential curves saw success — the choice depends on your genre, audience, and how segmented your event experience is

Reward with timed boosters/lives

This creates a self-sustaining loop: progress → reward → longer session → more progress → next reward.
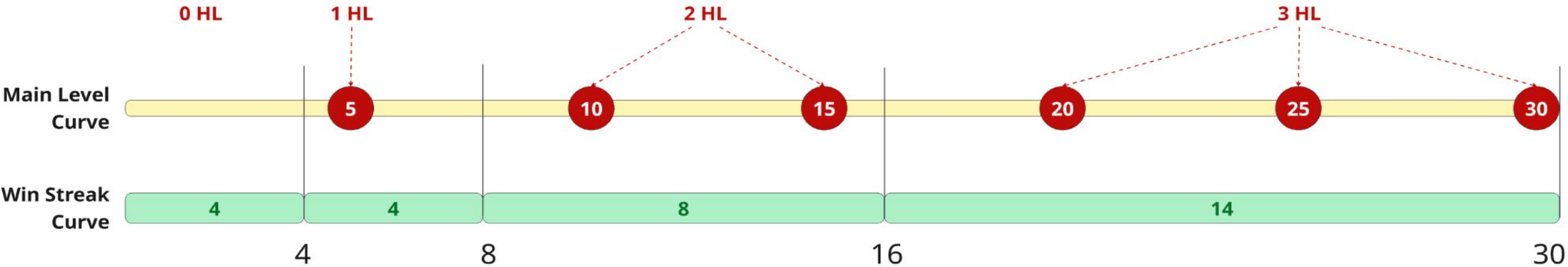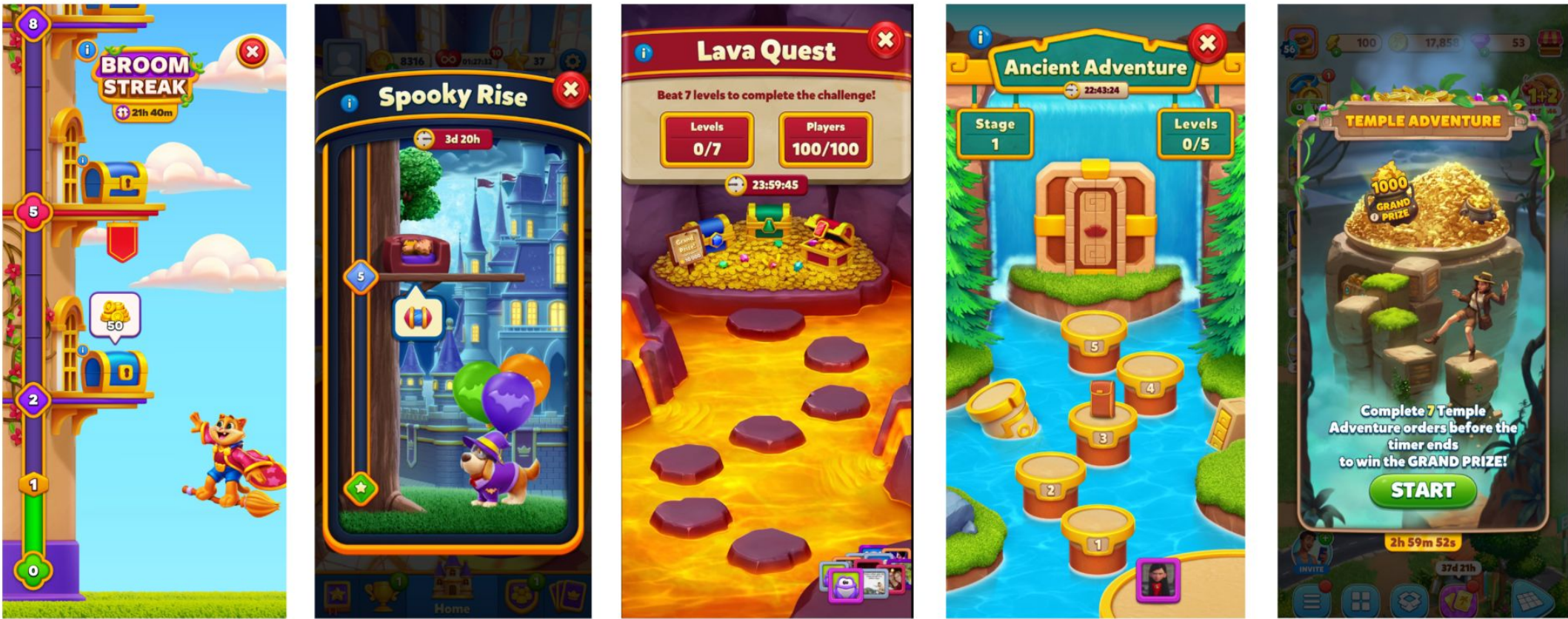
Royal Match uses this heavily – roughly every 2nd or 3rd reward is a time-limited benefit, designed exactly for this purpose.

Win Streak

If your game uses a level-based progression, win streaks are a must – they boost both engagement and monetization.
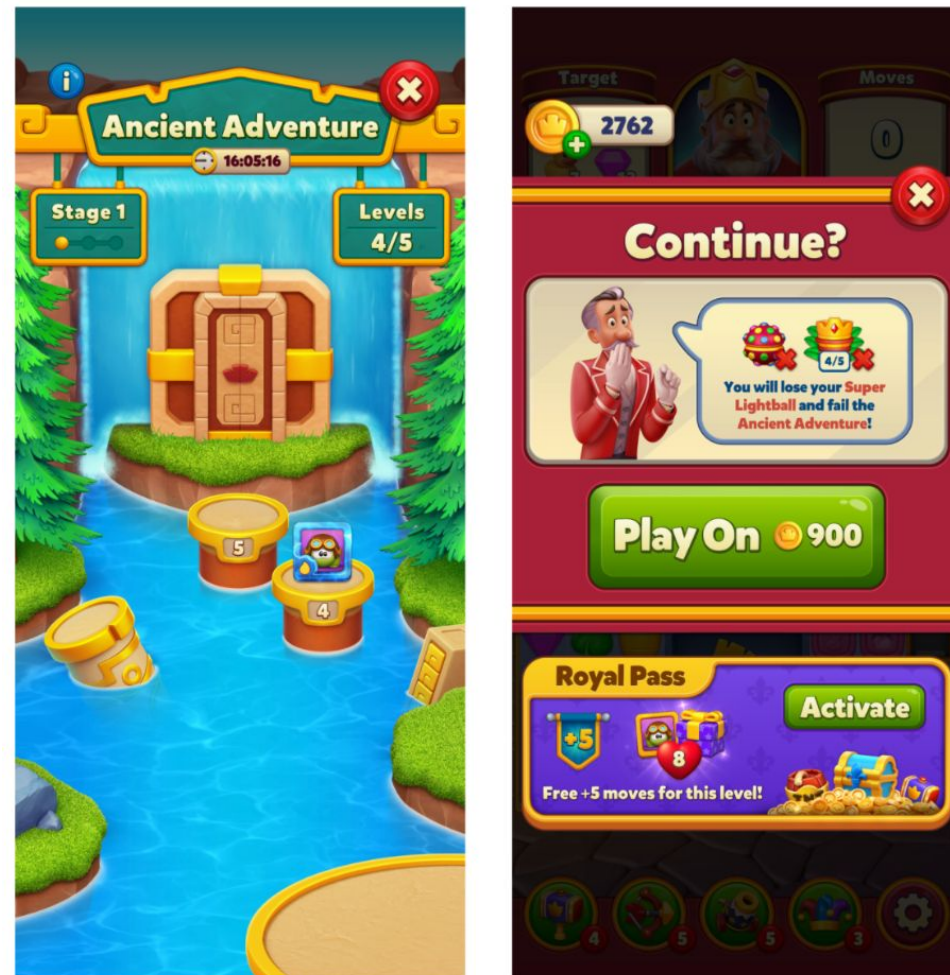
Tune milestone frequency to your difficulty curve If your game has a 'Hard Level' every ~5 stages, then a 4-step streak will feel easy – but an 8-14 step streak will require real effort and drive much higher commitment
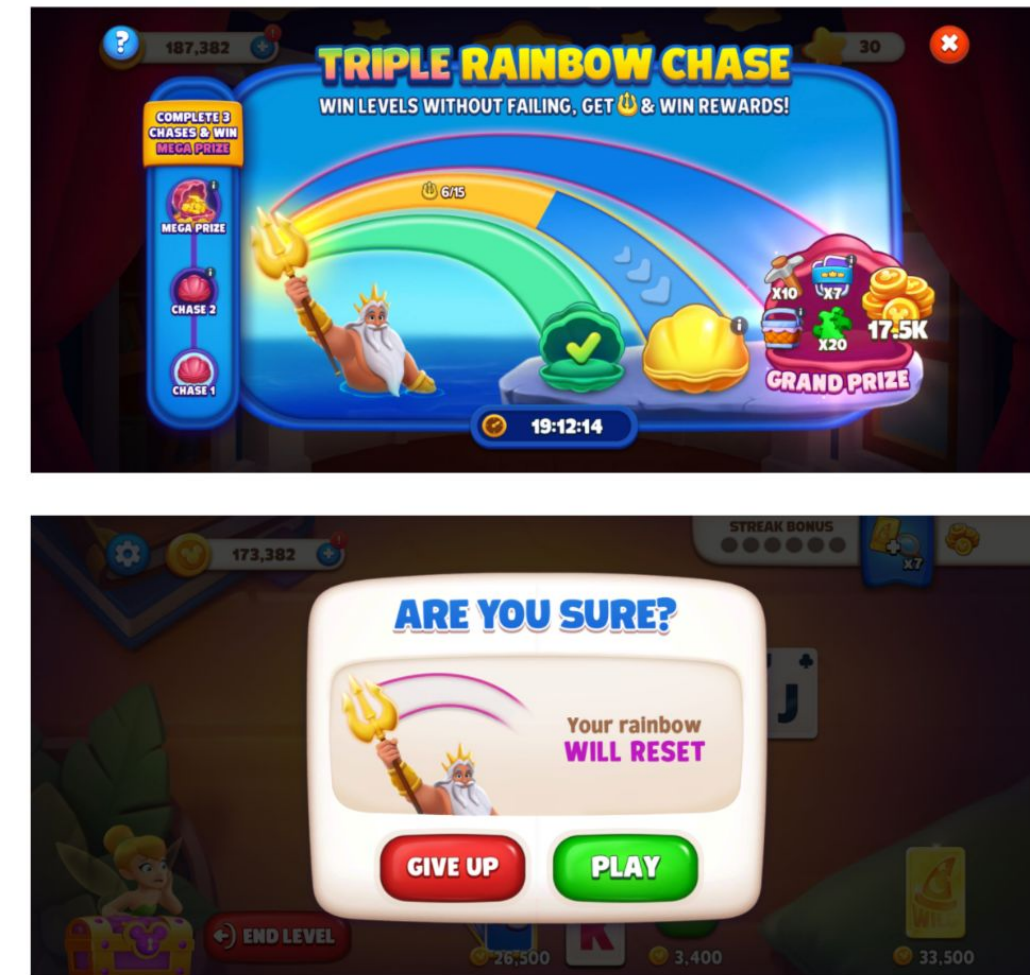
Win Streak (continued)

Always communicate 'Streak loss' clearly

Clear UX (Royal Match)

Potential for Improvements (Disney Solitaire)

In Royal Match, progress visibility is crystal clear – the player always knows exactly how far they've come: ex. 4/5 levels – losing progress feels tangible and painful

In Disney Solitaire, the visual feedback is unclear – whether it's 2/15 or 14/15 – the rainbow looks the same. This misses a key psychological trigger, since nearing completion naturally drives stronger motivation to keep going

New Interpretation of the Lava Quest

This format has already become a player favorite – and recently it has evolved even further.

What's new in the latest versions:

- The event now has 3 stages, each one harder than the previous. As players progress → the commitment to finish keeps growing
- The social component is removed – instead, the final reward is a Picking mini-game with 1-of-3 prizes.
- Similar to Monopoly Go's style: Less predictability → more excitement, gambling feel
- Along the way, players also collect card packs, which creates an extra 'pull forward' through collection synergy
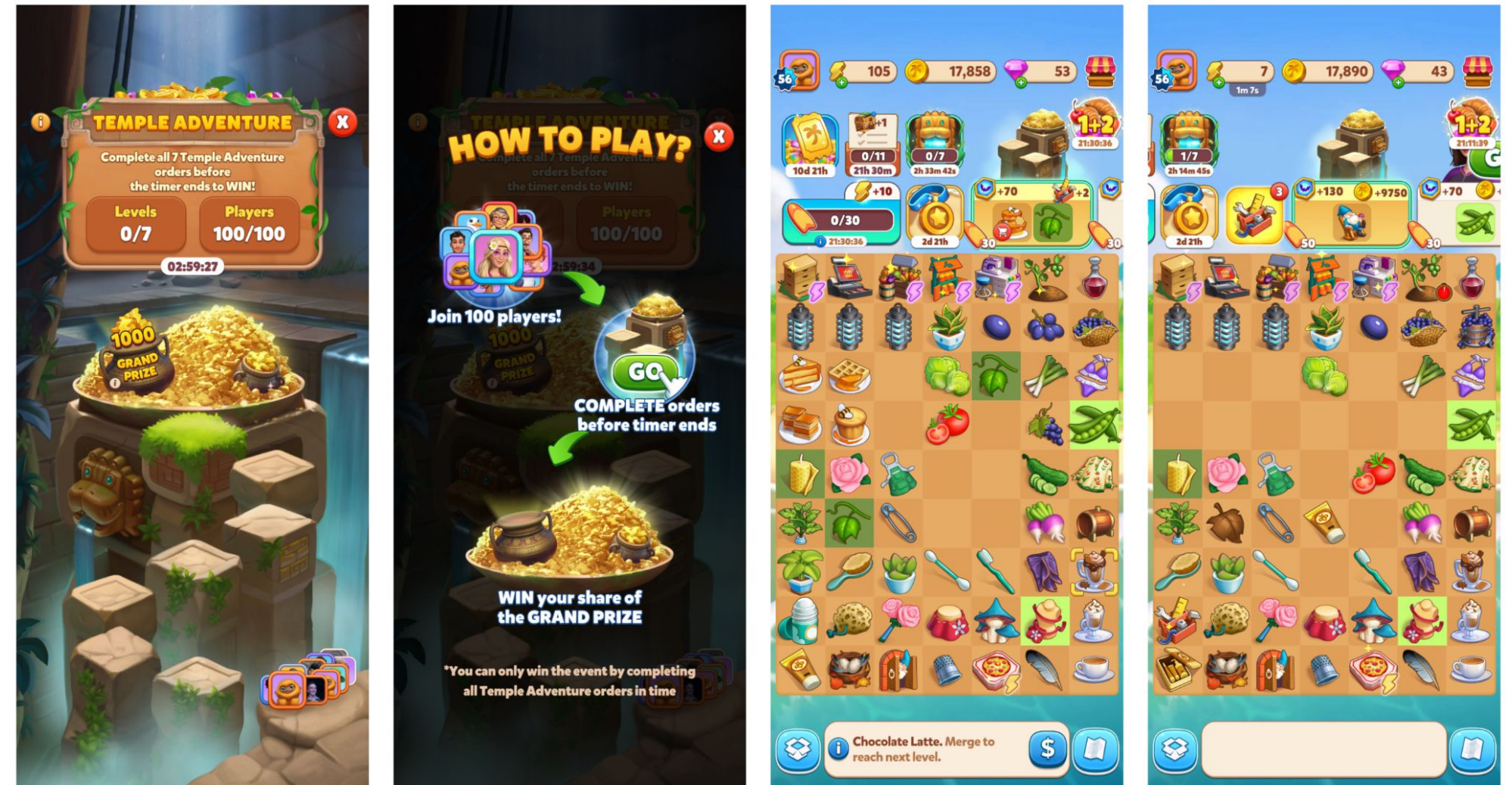
What if your game is NOT Level-based?

Travel Town and Gossip Harbor show a great workaround for non-level systems.

What's new in the latest versions:

- The core idea stays the same – step-by-step progression + competition with other players
- But instead of levels, the event uses Special Event Quests as the source of progress
- The integration is less 'native' or intuitive than in level-based games
- However, event quests still allow you to build a difficulty curve and even personalize progression per player

Competition Mechanics

Tournaments are a powerful motivator because they add social comparison on top of personal goals.
The player is no longer progressing 'for themselves only' – they're competing against others, which multiplies engagement.
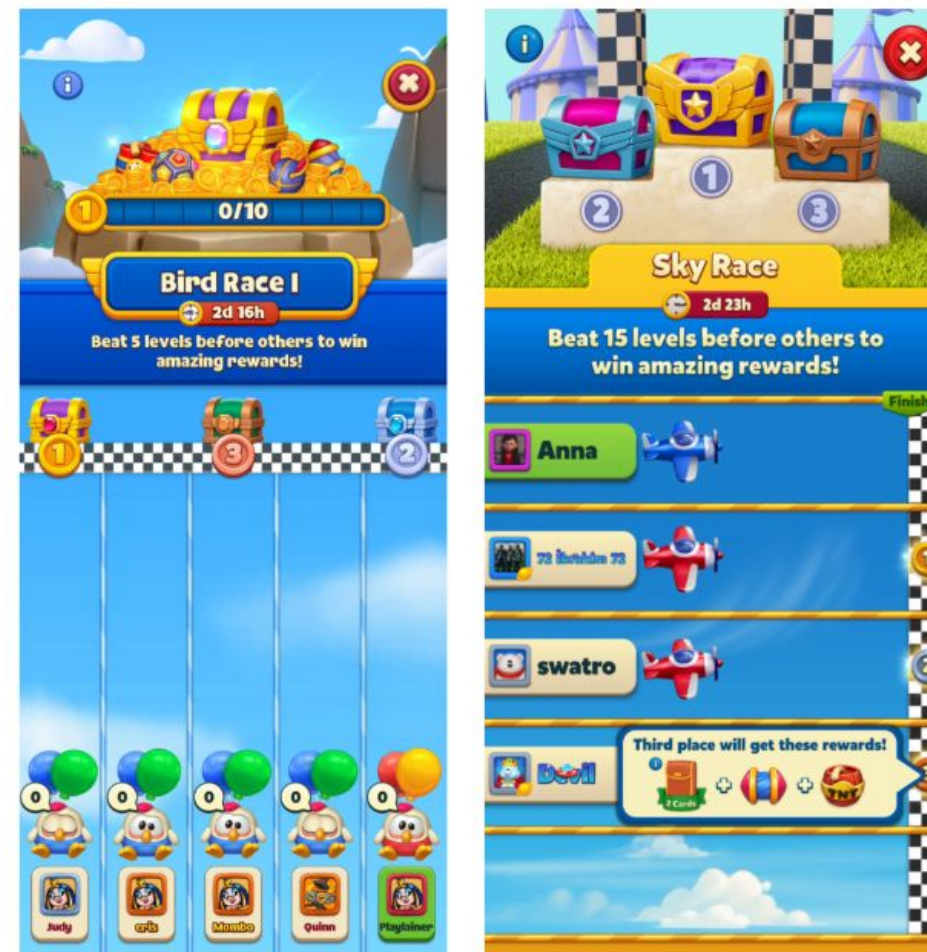
There are 3 common formats:

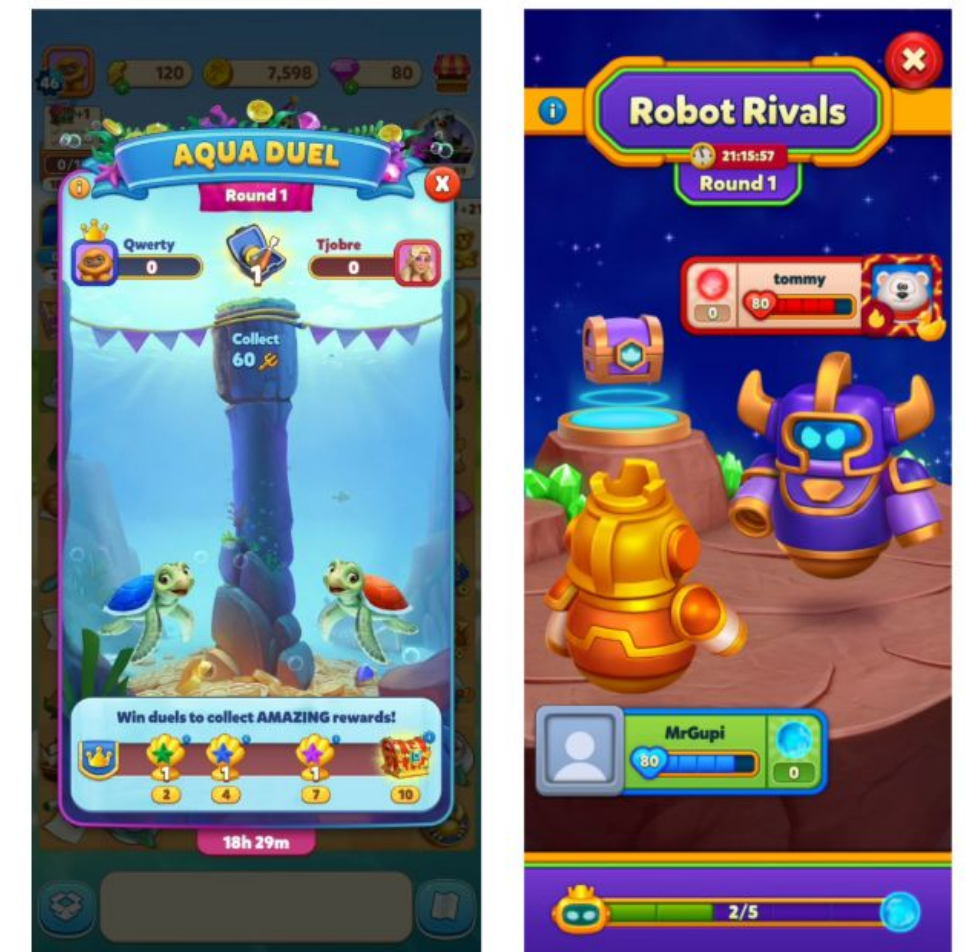**Classic Tournaments**
Leaderboard by collected points

Race
First to finish + reach a target

Duels
1v1 or small pool direct competition

Classic Tournaments

A classic format: players earn points through core activity, and rewards are granted at the end based on final placement.
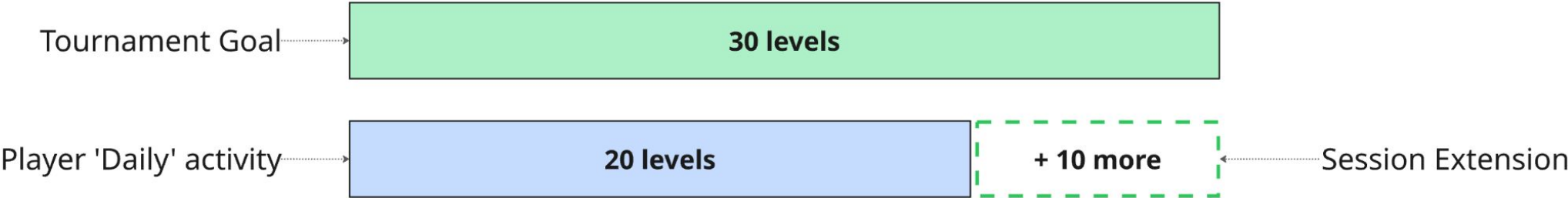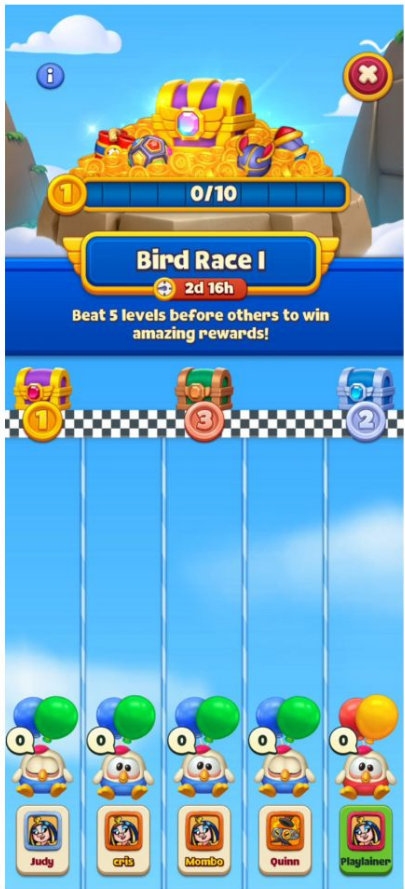
Hidden Gems:

- Add personal milestone progression. Since tournaments are long and rewards arrive only at the end, milestones provide positive reinforcement and more frequent touchpoints with the feature
- Poor interaction flow has killed many otherwise great Live Ops systems
- Use multipliers to boost monetization. Players always earn points, but maintaining a streak multiplies their reward – and clearly showing this in the lose pop-up amplifies the emotional (and spending) pressure.

Race Tournament

More dynamic and session-driven – goals are usually sized to be completed within a single play session or even less.

If your goal is to extend play sessions, this tournament format is a perfect fit

Tournament Goal	30 levels	
Player 'Daily' activity	20 levels	+ 10 more → Session Extension

Duels
(1x1 Tournament)

Duels focus the player on Direct, Head-to-head Competition – maximum attention on the opponent.

- Strong emotional payoff due to personal rivalry

- Easy to expand into a multi-stage experience: win one duel → instantly advance to the next.

  - Each stage can either maintain the same target for consistency or escalate — with tougher objectives, or stronger opponents – creating a natural sense of rising challenge and momentum.

Mini-Games

The category speaks for itself – these events are built around a light gameplay break using familiar or trending mechanics.

- Often based on nostalgic mechanics (like Zuma), current hits (Block puzzles), or chance-based formats where players can 'try their luck'

- These events stand out because they "Let players PLAY, not just fill a Progress bar". They add moments of real gameplay and interaction — quick sessions where players make choices, test their luck, and get instant feedback.

It's a reminder that even within Live Ops, players crave play, not just progress.
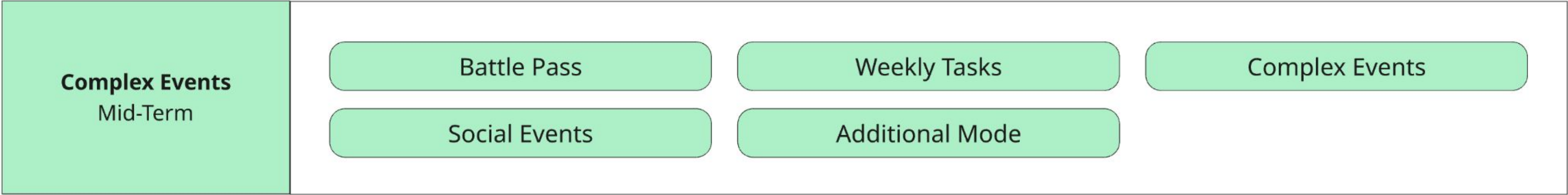
Complex Events (Mid-Term)

This next category is more systematic and goes beyond 'Play the core → Earn progress.'

What makes them different:

- They usually require multiple layers of activity, not just core gameplay – e.g. completing special quests, interacting with other events, or triggering meta-features.

- They run much longer – typically 5-14 days, which allows for build-up, Anticipation, and deeper Engagement loops.

- They often act as a Hub that connects smaller events into a bigger experience.

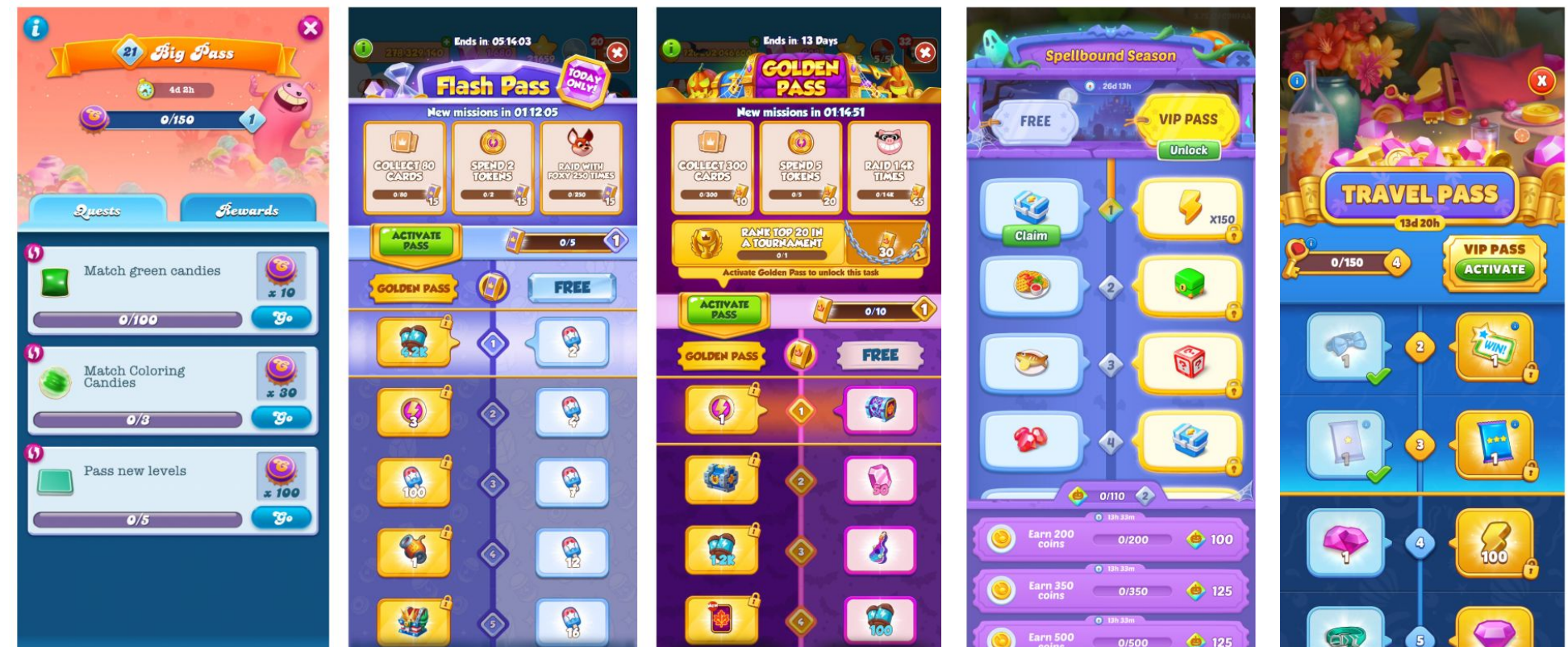Let's break down their structure and what makes them effective.

| **Complex Events** Mid-Term | Battle Pass | Weekly Tasks | Complex Events |
| | Social Events | Additional Mode | |

Let's break down their structure and what makes them effective.

Battle Pass

Battle Pass deserves a separate full breakdown – but here's the core idea in a nutshell.

The strength of the Battle Pass is that it works in both directions – as an engagement driver and a monetization driver:

- If a player buys the pass → they feel motivated to play more to 'get full value'

- If a player plays a lot → they are more likely to buy, because they already see how many rewards they are unlocking

Battle Pass (continued.)

The most important decision is HOW Players earn progress. There are 3 common models:

Special event quests
(ex. Coin Master, Candy Crush Soda Saga)

- Less common for Puzzle games, but popular in other genres
- Typically seen in games that rely on simpler daily challenges or have fewer Event types focused on diverse mission structures.
- In such ecosystems, special quests help add variety and depth to the overall Live Ops cycle.

Passive filling from core activity
(most of the market, includes Royal Match, Travel Town)

- The classic and simplest approach – progress fills naturally from playing the core loop.
- Most common in Puzzle and Hybrid-casual audiences, where clarity and smooth flow matter more than variety.

Achievement-style quests – one mission type with multiple targets, all progressing at once (ex. Gossip Harbor)

- One mission type – multiple goals, all filling up simultaneously.
  - This format isn't limited to Battle Passes – you'll see it in:
  - Daily Challenges (Travel Town)
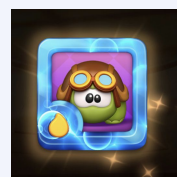 - Offer Challenges (Match Factory)
  - Weekly Events (Royal Match)

Games usually apply this type of currency accumulation to only 1 event at a time.

Overlapping multiple events with the same mechanic tends to confuse players and dilute the purpose of each, making the system lose its meaning.

Social Events (Cooperation)

This type of event is a great fit for large, even mature projects. All socially-driven features are primarily a long-term retention tool.

- The player progresses together with teammates. Without a full group, you simply can't win – radical, but very effective

- Social responsibility kicks in: when others contribute, you don't want to become 'the weak link'
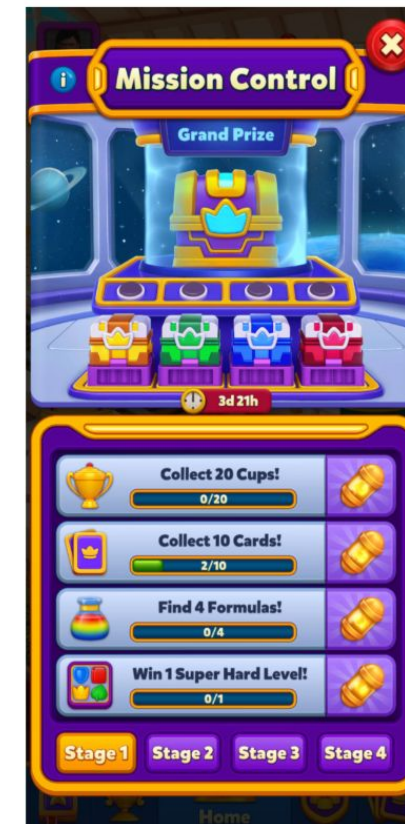

Choose rewards that signal prestige.
If your players are motivated by social interaction and recognition, use it not only as a mechanic but also as a reward – unique avatars, frames, or badges they can proudly display in leaderboards, tournaments, or clan spaces. Something that clearly says: "I'm special, I'm unique – I earned this"
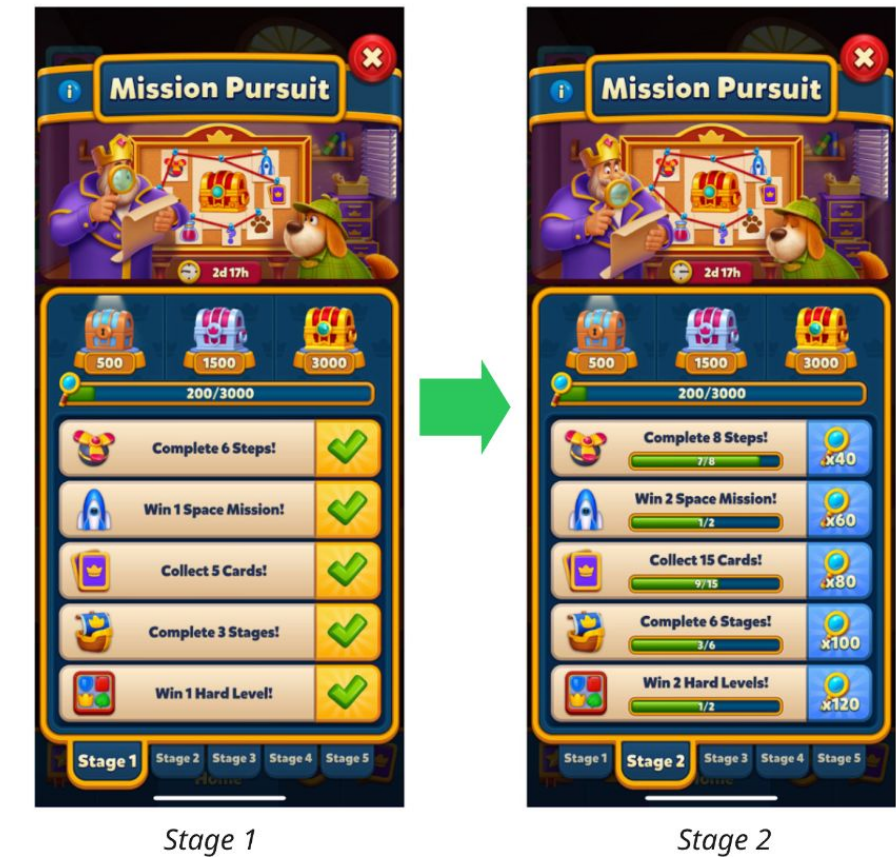
Weekly Quests

This feature is designed to keep players active for Several Consecutive Days – every new day pulls them deeper into the loop.

How it works:

- Progress is cumulative across ALL days/stages – from the very start of the event

- But you can start collecting tomorrow's rewards only after fully clearing today's stage / at the beginning of the next day

- The quests don't just make the player play – they make them participate in other events, which multiplies activity across the whole Live Ops system

Royal Match Example

Stage 1   *Stage 2*

A great example is Royal Match: by completing today's tasks → the player is already 50%+ through tomorrow's progress, which makes it very hard to drop out

Additional Mode

These events are essentially 'a Game inside the Game' – they feel big enough to qualify as a secondary Core Loop.
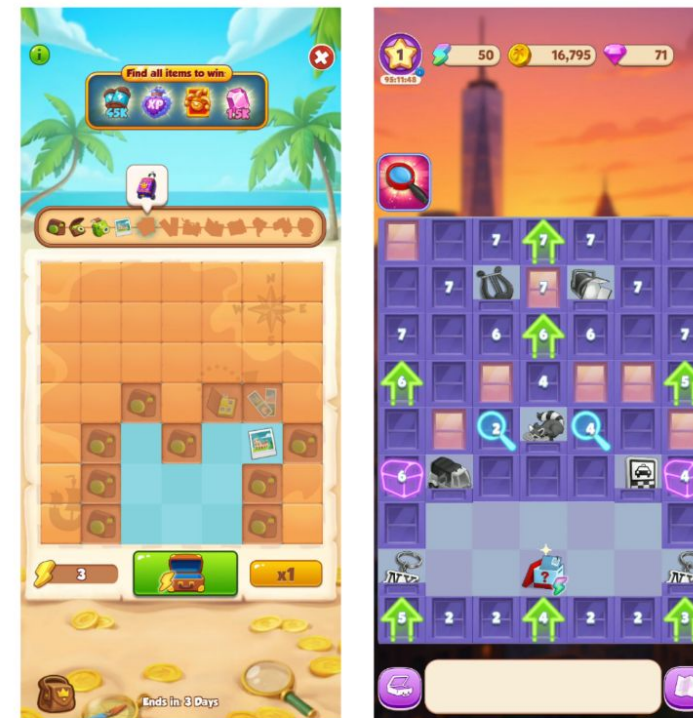
There are 2 main approaches:

1. Modified version of the existing core – typical for Merge games and Hidden Objects

2. A completely different core – Coin Master, Homescapes – new gameplay format layered on top of the main one

The tradeoff is development cost.

This format is usually used by: mature projects, with a polished and stable Live Ops system, where adding new revenue sources is harder within the existing loops. So, If your game is still early or mid-stage – think twice before committing to this kind of event.

Merge

Coin Master   *Travel Town*
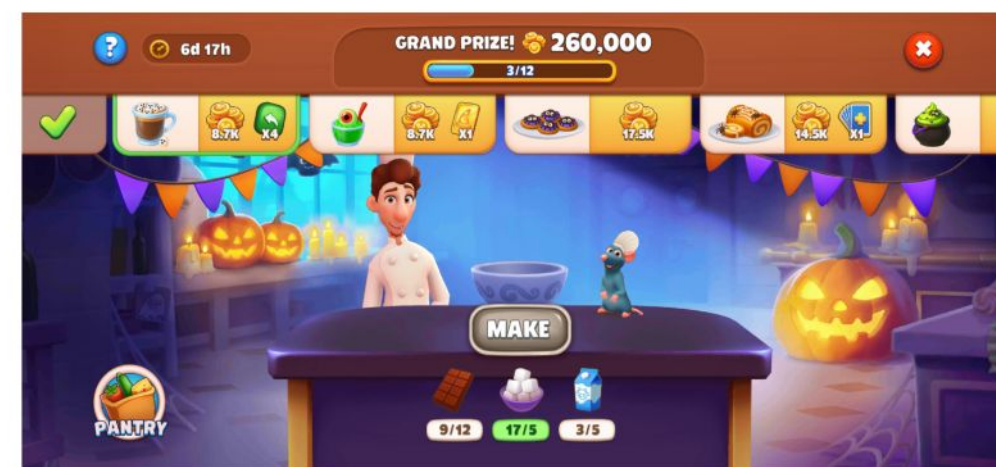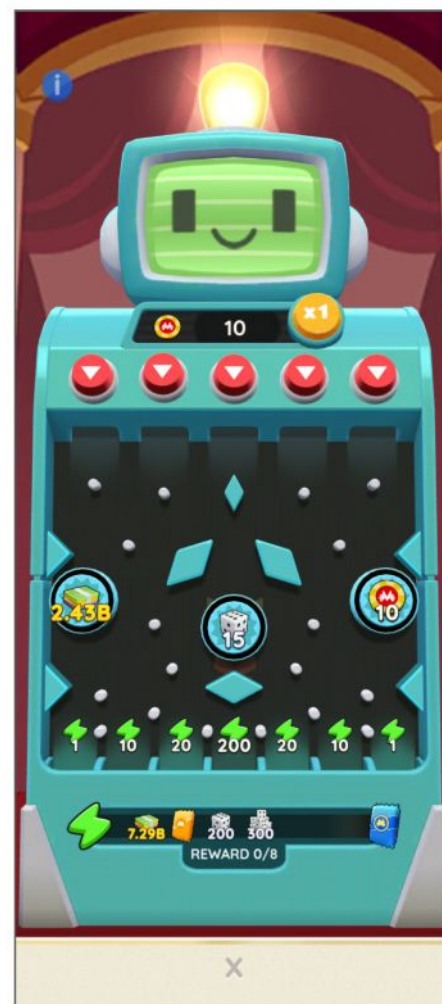
Expedition

Coin Master   *Homescapes*

Complex Events

The key characteristic of this type of event is that currency is earned from multiple types of activities:

- from the core gameplay (e.g. levels, daily quests)
- and from other events running in parallel

Because progress is sourced from different parts of the game, the event feels systematic, not isolated – it connects mechanics together and turns Live Ops into a broader game-wide experience.

Example 1: Disney Solitaire

Let's look at how different event groups source their currencies:

- **Group 1 (Short-Term)** – the player earns currency ONLY through core activity (=Level completion)

- **Group 2 (Mid-Term)** – the player can either buy it in offers or earn it from other events (Group 1 or 2)

- **Group 3 (Long-Term)** – currency can be purchased in offers or collected from any Events (Groups 1, 2, or 3)

  - Events in Group 3 DON'T reward currencies for lower-tier events (Groups 1 or 2).
    Instead, they either grant currencies for other Group 3 Events or reward only in-game currencies

Example 2: Royal Kingdom

A similar setup can be seen in Royal Kingdom – the player collects currency from various tournaments and events to use it in a Social Event.
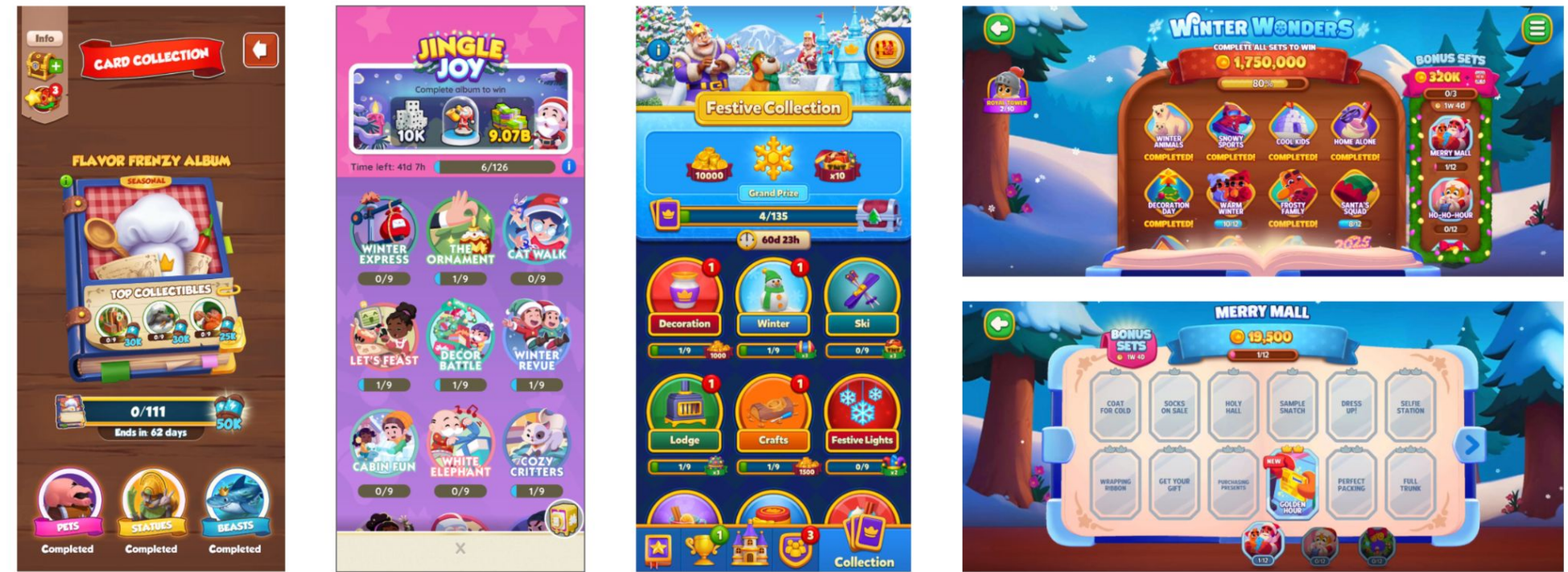
They can also earn a small amount of that currency from regular level completion, but it's much lower compared to what they gain through other events.
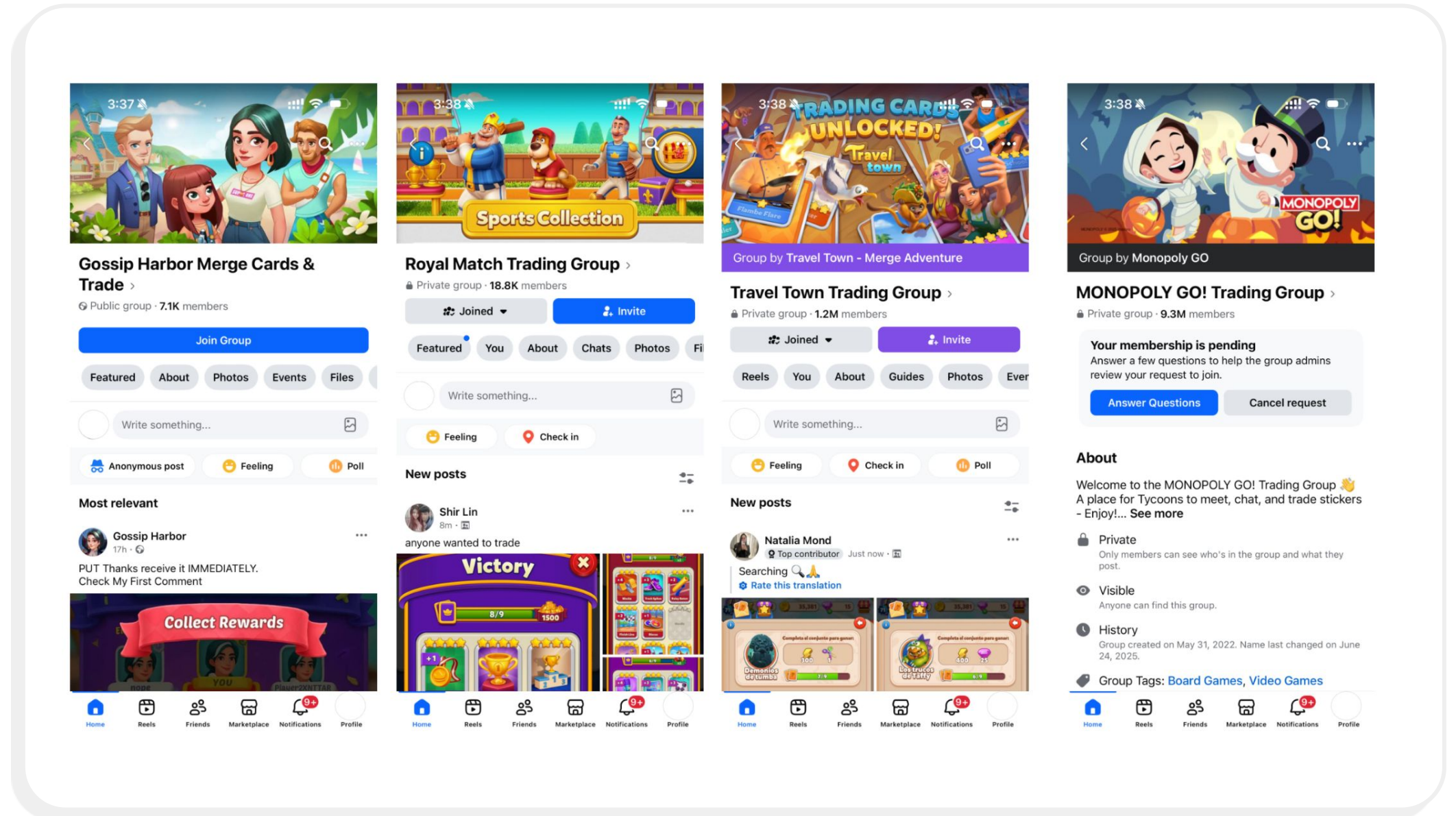
Collections:
Albums (Long-Term)

Collections are the final touch – a large-scale event that ties all other activities into one cohesive system.

- Long-term format – usually running for 1.5-2 months. Some wonder – Whether to make it permanent or seasonal? For your information: both Royal Match and Coin Master used to have permanent albums but later switched to Limited-Time Collections - and there are many reasons why this was a smart, monetization-friendly move.

- Card sources: EVERY part of the Game – core, features, events, purchases, offers, even social mechanics. That's why, if you already have a strong Live Ops system, a collection is a perfect next step.

Collections:
Albums (Long-Term)

- Main Mechanic = Gacha. One of the most exciting and universally loved mechanics. You know that feeling of opening your 5th pack, still hoping for that one missing card – pure gambling :D

- Motivation: Collecting. Many of us are completionists at heart – we love organizing, sorting, and completing sets.

- Leverage Social play. Let players request and trade cards with friends – it builds engagement far beyond the event itself.
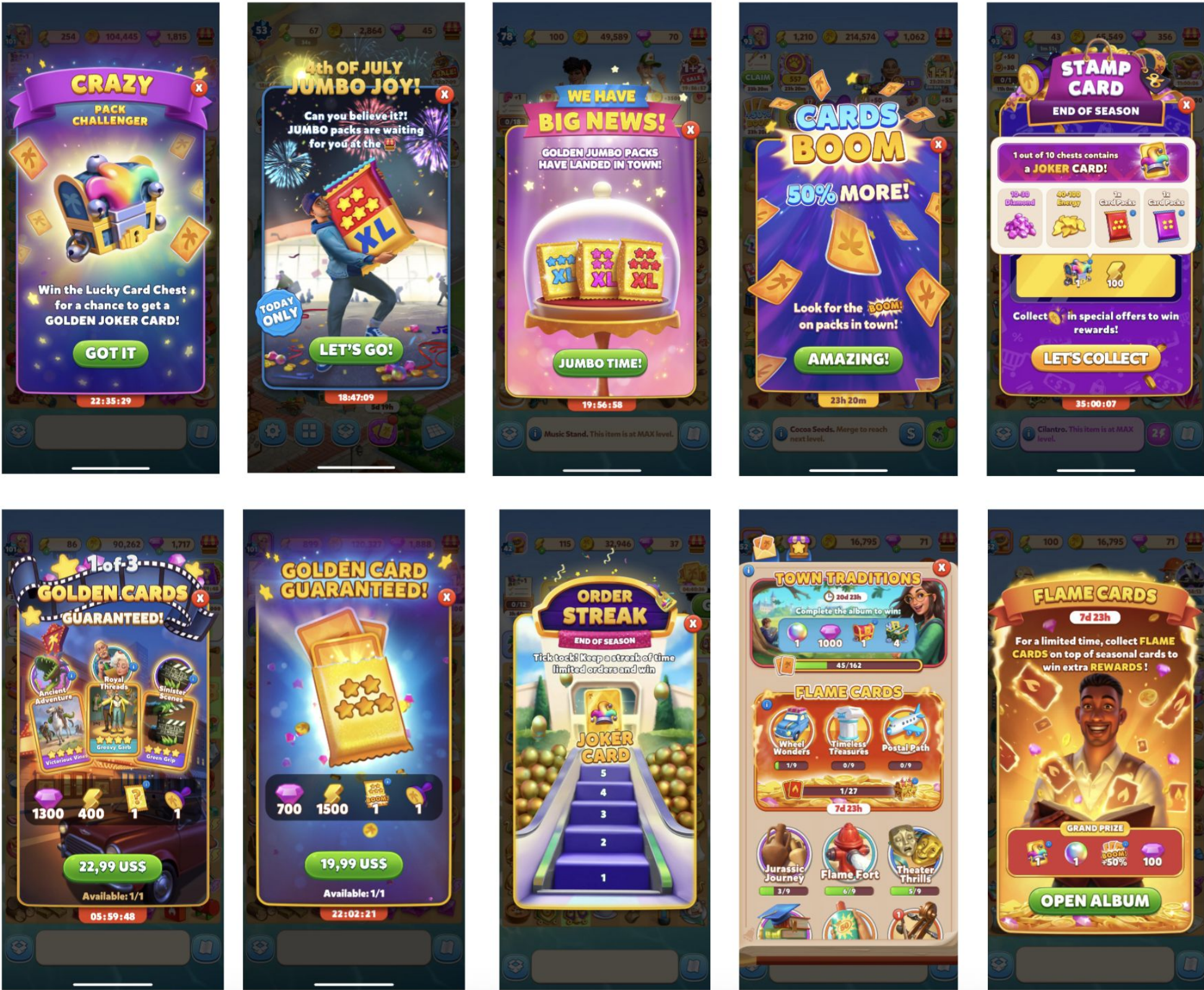
Collections:
Albums (Long-Term)

- A safe reward for your economy. When balanced properly, card packs are a perfect mix:
  - Highly valuable for the player
  - Yet safe and fully controllable for the game economy
- Balance cards and packs' rarity wisely. Use card tiers to highlight value – both in offers and rewards.
  - The more expensive the offer → the rarer the pack
  - The harder the milestone → the higher the pack tier. For example:
    - give 5 Star packs – only for completing the entire event,
    - while 1-3 Star (sometimes 4-Star) packs – work well for intermediate milestones.
- This way, you not only strengthen the event's motivation curve but also keep collections balanced – completed mainly by your most active and paying players.

Bring more variety and excitement with side and spotlight events.
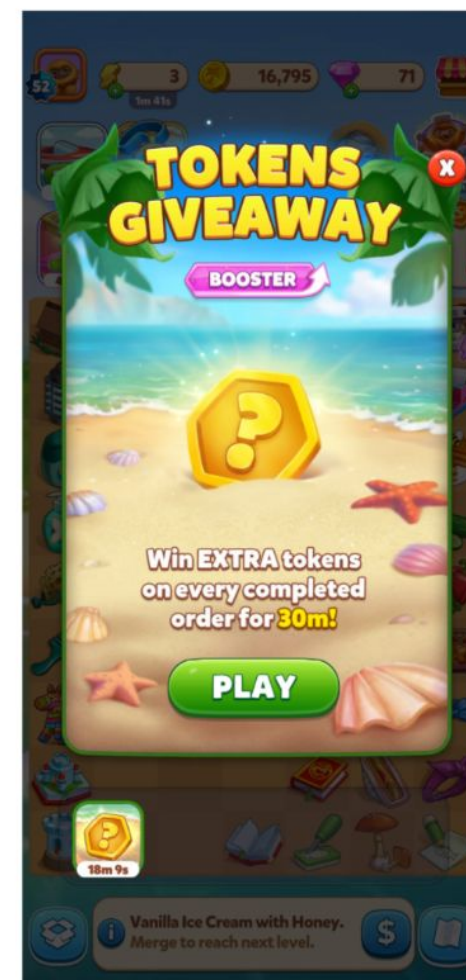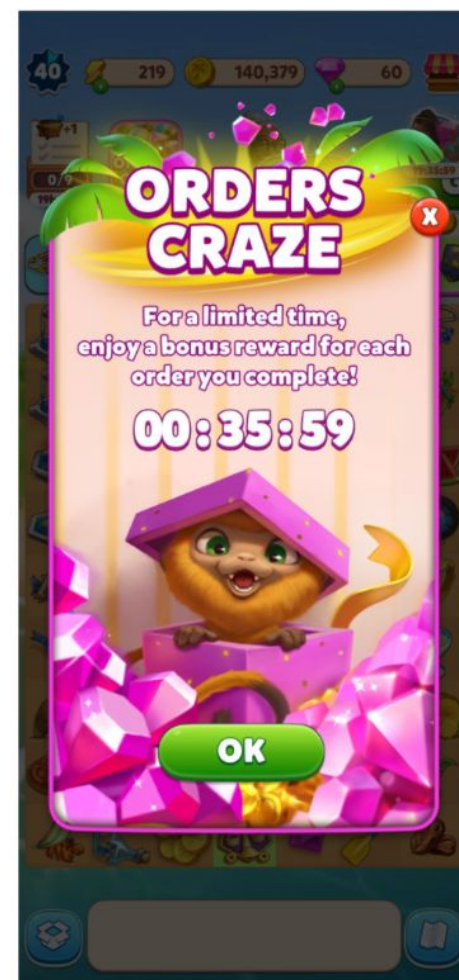
Bonus Events (Short Amplifier Events)

Small, high-impact events that amplify your existing Live Ops activity. They don't live on their own – they boost something else that's already running.

They're often used to extend play sessions or maximize player effort within a single session — for example, motivating players to complete more tasks while extra rewards are active.
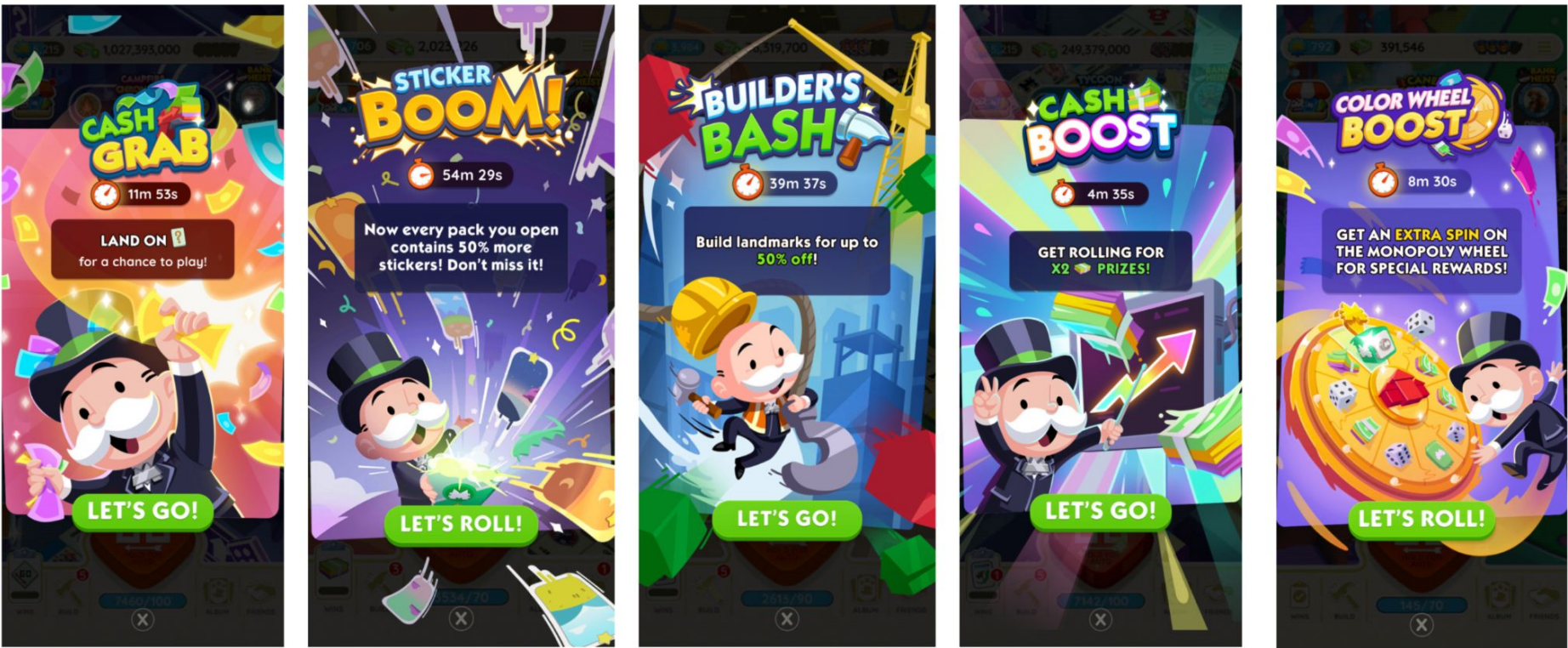
For example, the collection examples mentioned above are a great reference for this event type as well. Also, Travel Town features not only collection-focused bonus events, but a variety of others that amplify different parts of the game.

Bonus Events (Short Amplifier Events)

Another great example is Monopoly Go.

As you can see below, they run a wide variety of event types – and often have 3-4 of them active in a single day.

Final Thoughts

1

Start small, grow systematically

Begin with short-term events – master the rhythm, pacing, and player feedback. Then scale up into connected systems

2

Connect, don't scatter

Link events through shared currencies, layered goals, or thematic synergy. Each feature should amplify another

3

Diversify motivation

Mix competition, collection, streaks, and discovery – different players engage for different reasons

4

Personalize & Segment

Adapt timing, difficulty, and rewards to player behavior. Smart segmentation drives both retention and monetization

5

Celebrate smartly

Seasonal events like Christmas, Thanksgiving, or the 4th of July are not just decoration – they're strategic moments to Engage your audience and increase the Revenue

6

Think beyond the holidays

Festive peaks are temporary, but strong Live Ops systems turn that momentum into sustainable, year-round growth

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