

Iraqis find escape, success on a virtual battleground

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Iraqis tap away at computers and mobile devices at co-working space The Station in Baghdad

Bashar Abo Khalil's PUBG character dashes around a wall in a pink dress and samurai helmet, thwacking an enemy with a frying

pan—standard fare in the mobile game that is a mega-sensation in Iraq.

The online star, known as G2G, is one of many Iraqis hooked on PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds—a battle royale first-person shooter game that's reminiscent of the book and film series "The Hunger Games".

The mobile version of the game has become so popular in Iraq, where 60 percent of the 40-million-strong population is under 25, that the country's youth have been dubbed the "PUBG generation".

Iraqis across the country are spending hours every day on the game's virtual battleground, socialising via its live chat, playing competitively or even falling in love.

Abo Khalil, 31, said he used to play for hours to "stop thinking about problems".

"When you're playing the game you can become closed off to the rest of the world. It can be like a drug," he added.

Now based in Turkey, he earns a living streaming games and making videos.

Fan Dalya Waheed said she plays PUBG for an hour or two a day with friends she met on the game, and has even set up a gaming hub at the electronics reseller where she works.

"It's really easy to meet people on PUBG," said the woman in her thirties, who lives in Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region.

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