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AI in Video Games: The Next Big Labor Strike



Fresh off the heels of strikes by both the Screen Actors Guild – American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) and the Writers Guild of America (WGA) that effectively halted the making of movies and TV shows for much of 2023, Hollywood’s next big labor dispute is brewing.

On July 25, 2024, [SAG-AFTRA announced a strike of members working under the Interactive Media Agreement](#) (IME). The strike was effective at 12:01 a.m. on July 26, 2024. Unlike the TV/Theatrical contract, which was the subject of SAG-AFTRA’s 2023 strike and covered actors and performers in theatrical motion pictures and scripted dramatic content produced for television and new media platforms, the IME covers the rights of voice actors, performers, motion capture artists, and others involved with the production of video games. SAG-AFTRA and the video game company signatories to the IME have been in extensive negotiations since October 2022. Those talks continued in September of 2023 after SAG-AFTRA members voted in favor of issuing a strike authorization.

At issue in the IME strike are many of the same issues present in the 2023 strike of the TV/Theatrical contract: A.I. transparency, consent, and compensation to performers. Although the gaming studios felt that the parties were close to an agreement on AI issues, the union expressed concern that the agreed-upon AI protections did not clearly extend to all performers, such as motion capture performers.

The Guild’s [official strike bulletin](#) includes a long list of services that SAG-AFTRA members working under the IME may not perform. In addition to not being able to perform these services in struck video games or in ancillary content related to struck games (such as “downloadable content,” season passes, character drops, or special events), the union has directed SAG-AFTRA members to refrain from auditioning for, or authorizing the use of their voice or likeness in, a struck game, as well as promoting or publicizing struck games. During the strike, members also are precluded from “negotiating and/or entering into and/or consenting to . . . agreement[s] to perform covered services in the future.”

Although the strike is against specified game studios, certain games from struck studios may not be subject to the strike and may be permissible for SAG-AFTRA members to work on, such as if the games are covered by an Interim Interactive Media Agreement or certain other agreements that are not subject to the labor stoppage. Here is a [link](#) to determine if a particular game is struck. Non-union actors can freely work for struck companies or games but should note that the Guild has stated that their participation may “jeopardize [their] future membership in the union.” The Guild’s last strike against the video game company signatories occurred in 2016 and lasted over 180 days.

Authors

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