

Chhupa Rustam (छुपा रूस्तम)

Game design document: a cup game for a newspaper app

The brief

The brief was to make a game for a newspaper app. It had to be set in an Indian context and made for Indian players. So right from the start I knew my players would be people who open the app to read the news, not people who are looking for a game.

Finding out who the players are

I started by talking to people. I spoke to about 13 people between the ages of 20 and 50. Most of them did not play games at all. The ones who did were mostly the younger adults; the older people played much less.

Then I read a few articles about who reads newspapers. They said that around 75% of newspaper readers are above 35 years old. This was the most important thing I found, because it meant the game had to work for someone above 35 first.

From my survey I saw that the people above 35 who do play games stick to very simple ones: puzzles, arrow games, sudoku and maths games. In all of them you only tap or swipe.

What I took away from this

- Keep the mechanic very small. Tap or swipe, nothing more.
- It should be easy to understand the first time you see it.
- The rewards should feel good, so people want to come back.
- For replay, people want to compare their progress with others.

Coming up with the idea

I had a few ideas. A puzzle game and a maths game both fit the players, but every newspaper app already has them. Mine would just get lost among those.

I also thought of a multiplayer game with rock-paper-scissors logic. The problem was that you need another person to play, and someone reading the news with a few free minutes usually wants to play alone.

So I started looking for something that tests your patience and concentration. That is when I remembered the three-cup game I saw at a carnival. The man hides something under one cup, moves the cups around, and you have to say where it is. Almost

everyone in India has seen this at a mela. It needs only one tap, anyone understands it, and it gets harder just by going faster. That became the game.

The game

"Chhupa Rustam" is a Hindi saying for someone who hides their talent, a hidden champion. *Chhupa* means hidden, and in the game the gem is hidden under a cup, so the name fits. The cups are run by Rustam, a street magician in a turban.

Each level goes like this:

1. Rustam shows you the gem under a cup.
2. The cups cover it.
3. The cups are shuffled.
4. You tap the cup that has the gem. If you pick the wrong one, you try the level again.

There is no timer while you watch, so anybody can play. The whole skill is keeping your eyes on the right cup.

Points

The faster you tap after the shuffle stops, the more points you get.

Time to tap	Shown as	Points
Under 0.8 seconds	LIGHT SPEED	300
Under 1.4 seconds	SUPER FAST	200
Under 2.4 seconds	FAST	150
Slower than that	GOOD	100

Clearing a level in the first try gives 100 extra points. Later levels are worth a little more (2% more per level). You also get one to three stars depending on how fast you were and whether you got it in one go.

How it gets harder

The game does not end. It starts with just two cups and adds one new thing at a time, with a small tip when something new comes in. In the early levels all the cups are the same colour, so the colour never gives away the answer. The shuffle gets faster until around level 50. After that it stops getting faster and new twists come in instead.

Level	What changes
1	Two cups
4 to 17	Three, four, then five cups
13	A bomb under one cup. Tap it and you lose
21	Two colours of cups with a gem in each. You have to find both
39	Two rows of cups
51	Lights out for a second during the shuffle
57	Three cups move around in a circle
63	The whole table turns
69	The gem jumps to another cup once
75	Only a few seconds to tap
81	Three colours and three gems
91 onwards	A mix of the twists, different in every level

Language

When the game opens for the first time it asks "Choose your language" (अपनी भाषा चुनें). You can pick English or Hindi, and you can change it later in settings.

I added Hindi because most of my players are above 35, and a lot of them read the news in Hindi and are more comfortable with it than with English. Every word in the game is in both languages, including the tips and the ranking. Even the logo changes with the language.

One problem I had was that Unity's UI does not join Hindi letters properly. To fix it, the Hindi text is prepared in advance with a small tool and comes with its own font, so the matras show correctly.

Indian setting

The cup game itself comes from Indian fairs, and I wanted the places to feel Indian too. You can play on different tables, which you buy with the coins you earn:

- Aangan courtyard (free, the default)
- Palace (600 coins)
- Diwali mela (1,200 coins)

- Kerala backwaters (2,000 coins)

Rewards

Every level gives coins: 10 coins, 5 more for each star, and 10 more the first time you clear it. Sometimes you also get a free hint. A hint takes away one empty cup, which makes the choice easier.

There is also a daily reward for opening the game on consecutive days. If you miss a day, it starts again from day 1.

Day	Reward
1	50 coins
2	1 hint
3	100 coins
4	3 gems
5	150 coins and 1 hint
6	5 gems
7	300 coins, 10 gems and 2 hints

The India ranking

My research said people replay a game when they can compare themselves with others. So the game has one ranking for all of India, the leaderboard.

How it works

- When you start, the game asks for your name. That name shows on the ranking.
- Your score for the week is your best score on every level you played that week, added together.
- The ranking shows the top 50 players, your own rank, and how many levels each person has finished.
- If there is no internet, the game still works. The ranking just says you are offline and gives you a button to reconnect.

When it resets

The ranking resets every Monday at 12:00 midnight, Indian time. Everyone starts again from zero and a new week begins. The ranking screen shows how long is left, for example "New week in 4d 23h". The old weeks are saved on the server.

Why every week

If the ranking never reset, the people who started early would stay on top forever and a new player would have no chance. With a weekly reset, anyone can get to the top this week. It also gives people a reason to come back every Monday and play the old levels again. And newspaper readers are already used to weekly things, like the Sunday puzzle, so a weekly ranking fits the way they use the app.

Chhupa Rustam (छुपा रस्तम), made in Unity for Android and the web.