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# Tech Decoded

17 October, 2025



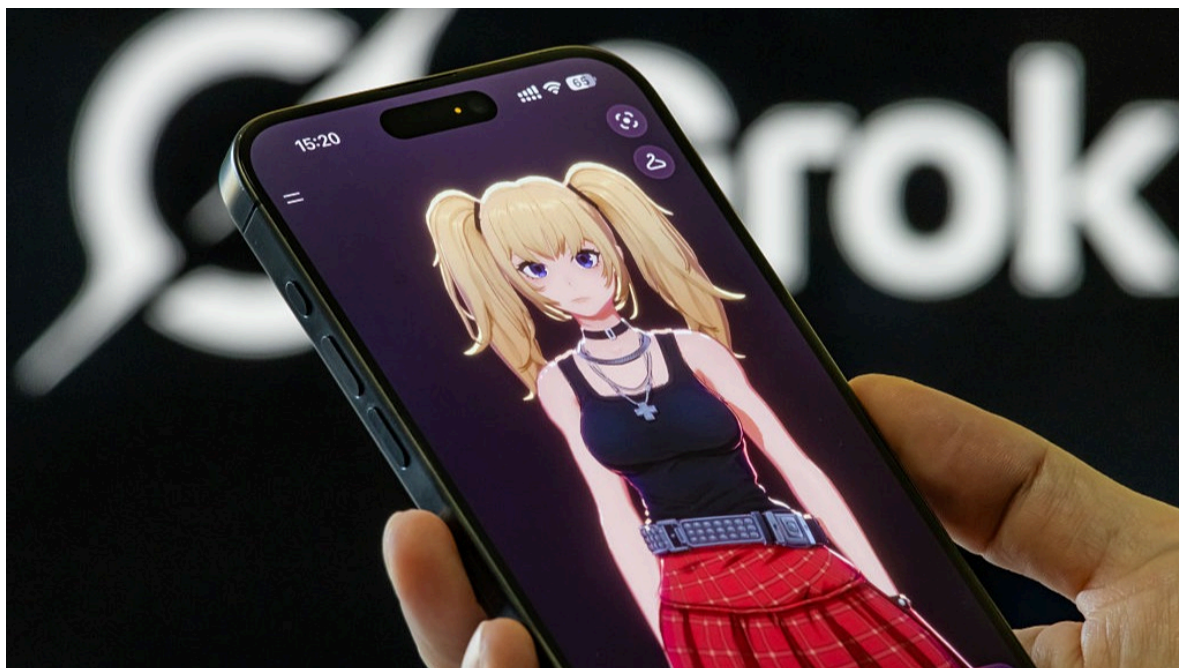
**Daniel Thomas**

Editor, Tech Decoded

Hello. The idea that people might have romantic relationships with robots has been talked about in science fiction for decades. But recently it appears to have become reality, as a growing number of people say they have formed emotional bonds with AI chatbots. I explore how seriously we should take the trend, and what the long-term implications might be. We also bring you news of Spotify's latest experiment with AI and how drones could be fitted with Tasers.

## THE DOWNLOAD

### The rise of chatbot romance



Ani is one of the explicit chatbot companions unveiled by Elon Musk's AI company, xAI, in July. Credit: Cheng Xin/Getty Images

Not a month goes by, it seems, without a jaw-dropping statistic being published about people having romantic relationships with AI.

In October, the non-profit Centre for Democracy and Technology found that one in five US school children aged 14-15 reported that they or someone they knew had made such a bond. And a peer-reviewed study in August suggested one in four young adults had engaged with AI chat technologies to "replicate romantic interactions".

Research in this area is developing, but something seems to be going on. As of October last year, romantic chatbots **had been downloaded more than 100 million times** on the Google Play Store alone.

According to news reports, some people view these apps as a bit of fun to be enjoyed alongside real-world relationships, but others appear to take them seriously.

A number of women recently told the UK's Guardian newspaper under condition of anonymity that their AI companions added pleasure and meaning to their lives. The women reported creating AI-generated avatars of partners, having back-and-forth conversations about their interests and personal problems, "sexting" and forming emotional bonds.

Big tech firms are leaning into the trend, with Elon Musk's xAI recently launching two sexually explicit AI companions and OpenAI saying this week that future versions of ChatGPT **would allow erotica for verified adults**.

Proponents say AI partners can have therapeutic benefits, allowing people to have deep conversations or explore desires in a non-judgemental space. But some psychologists warn they are a symptom of a loneliness epidemic, and may pose risks to vulnerable people. There are also concerns about children stumbling upon inappropriate content.

Either way, an idea once talked about as science fiction seems to have become reality - and it's not clear what the long-term consequences will be.

***The download:*** People do seem to be forming emotional connections with bots, but experts warn it's no substitute for the real thing.

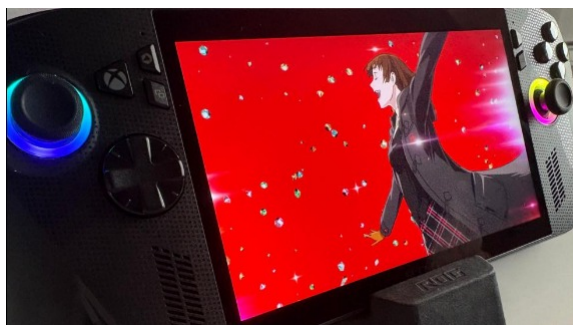
## TOP STORIES



## Spotify to launch AI music 'tools' with record labels

The streaming giant says it is working with labels like Warner and Universal to create "responsible AI products" that empower artists.

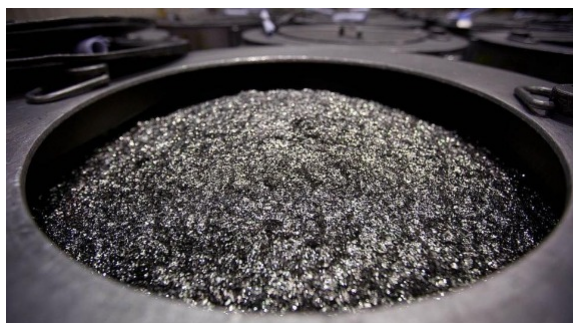
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## Microsoft releases first ever handheld console

Microsoft has finally released a handheld gaming device, but is the ROG Xbox Ally any good?

[Take a look >](#)



## Why the US needs China's rare earths

China has tightened its grip over the supply of minerals vital to the production of electric cars, electronics and weapons.

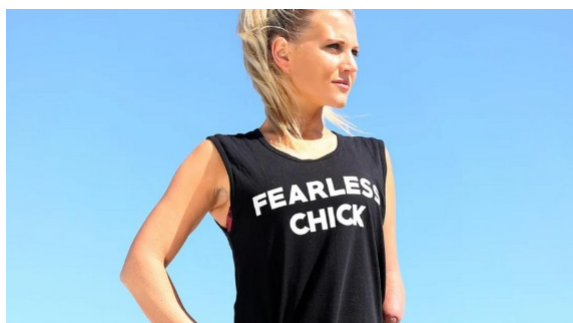
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## Bitcoin worth \$14bn seized in crackdown

The US government has charged the founder of a Cambodian business empire with allegedly masterminding a massive cryptocurrency scam.

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## AI couldn't picture a woman like me - until now

People with disabilities are calling for AI models to be more representative, after struggling find accurate portrayals of themselves on platforms like ChatGPT.

[Here's why >](#)



**SOMETHING DIFFERENT**



# The liquid air alternative to fossil fuels



Liquid air demonstration plants have been built in several countries, including here in Qinghai Province, China. Credit: Getty Images

An overlooked technology for nearly 50 years, the first liquid air energy storage facility is finally set to power up in 2026 in the UK. It hopes to compete with grid-scale lithium batteries and hydro to store clean power, and reduce the need to fall back on fossil fuels. But while the tech offers distinct benefits, the economics may be challenging, says one expert. [Here's how it works.](#)

## PODCAST PICK



## Drones with Tasers?

The BBC speaks to the founder of Axon Enterprise, maker of the Taser, about the tech's future and how it might be incorporated into drones.

[Listen here](#)

## And finally...

Some of the world's most treasured documents can be found in the archives of Cambridge University Library, from letters by Sir Issac Newton to Charles Darwin's notebooks. But increasingly these artefacts take the form of files stored on old floppy disks, such as mementos recently donated by the office of physicist Stephen Hawking. Accessing the disks can be tricky due to

formatting issues and physical deterioration, but the university has begun a project to rescue the knowledge stored on them. [Here's how](#).



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