Mixing Street and Online Players

CAN YOU SEE ME NOW? (CYSMN) is a game of catch, but with a twist. Online players are chased through a virtual model of a city by up to four street players, who must run through the actual city streets in order to capture them. The game accommodates up to 15 players at a time, who access the virtual city model over the Net. The four street players, referred to as "runners," are professional performers, who chase online players through the city streets using hand-held computers with wireless network connections (using 802.11b) and GPS receivers.

The online players can move through the virtual model of the city at a fixed maximum speed, can access various views of the city streets, can see the positions of other players and the runners, and can exchange text messages with one another. As the runners move through the city they can see the positions of the online players and other runners on a hand-held map. They can

University of Nottingham (www.mrl.nott.ac.uk) as part of the Equator project. It has toured cities throughout the world since 2001, including Sheffield, Rotterdam, Oldenberg, Cologne, and Barcelona. Ethnographic studies of the game have generated insights into how players experience uncertainty and into the process of orchestrating a live game from behind the scenes [5].

Uncle Roy All Around You is another touring game from the same team [2]. Here, however, players are on the streets and online. Street players (not performers) journey through a city in search of an elusive character named Uncle Roy, guided both by location-based clues from the game itself and also by remote online players who are able to track their progress in a parallel virtual model of the city and search for useful information such as the location

Figure 1. (top) Can You See Me Now? Runner on the street (left) and online view (right). Figure 2. (bottom) Uncle Roy All Around You: Street player (left) and online view (right).

also see the players' text messages, and can communicate with one another via walkie-talkies. Communication from the runners is streamed over the Net to the players, providing real-time descriptions of their experience on the street, including reports of traffic conditions, descriptions of local street scenes, and the sounds of the physical labor involved in tracking players down.

CYSMN was created by the artists group Blast Theory (www.blasttheory.co.uk) and the Mixed Reality Laboratory at the

of Uncle Roy's office. By mixing live action with digital content, the game is carefully designed to involve passers-by in the action. It also encourages street players to cross boundaries; for example, entering an office or getting into a limousine with a stranger. The overall theme of the game is trust—in strangers, online partners, and technology—and in the end, street and online players are invited to make a year-long commitment to help a stranger if called upon. C