Pac-Manhattan
Video gaming hits the streets of NY

BY ABUL TAHER

IT WAS the original cyberspace game of the 1980s that took youngsters off the sports field and into the computer room.

Kickavoids on the streets, skateboarding contests and BMX racing were consigned to the history books as youths turned to solitary creatures who roamed the virtual world rather than the real one.

For many, Pac-Man is a reminder of a missed youth. For others, it was the forerunner of much better things to come.

But now the legendary computer game that kicked off a multi-billion-pound industry seems to have gone full circle.

Instead of playing on a machine, gamers are acting it out on the streets of New York.

Dressed as Pacman and four ghosts – Inky, Blinky, Pinky and Clyde – they race through the Manhattan streets, taking orders from controllers on mobile phones.

The controllers use a map of the city to tell the players where to go, turning New York’s urban grid into a reality game board.

Frank Lantz, who developed the game with students at New York University, said: “What this game does is make the players physical and social experiences that you don’t really find in computer games. We are invading a public space and changing it into a game space.”

The creators of Pac-Manhattan studied the work of British creative artists Blast Theory whose game Can You See Me Now? and Uncle Roy All Around You allowed online players to communicate with runners racing through cities in search of clues.

Major companies have already approached Prof Lantz, who believes Pac-Manhattan is the next step in the evolution of computer games.

But he is aware that using real cities as game boards may have legal stumbling blocks.

“Playing Pac-Manhattan is like skateboarding – benevolent usage of public space,” he said.

For more details see www.pacmanhattan.com

THE RULES

FOUR players are designated ghosts and one Pacman. Each takes orders from a general in the control room.

The game grid is the area around Washington Square. Posts are placed at four crossroads to represent power pellets. Pacman must touch the posts to get powered up. He is told where the ghosts are, but the ghosts are not told where he is, only whether he is powered-up to chase them.

BUT DON’T TRY THESE AT HOME, FOLKS

DONKEY KONG

Equipment: Scaffolding, barrels, a mate, a girlfriend, cage, monkey costume (optional)

Method: Go to your nearest Wembley housing development and find a building with at least three levels of scaffolding.

Lock your girlfriend in a reasonably sized cage and position her and your mate at the top (you may want to ask her permission).

Get your mate to roll barrels down in your direction (try insulting his mother first, this adds a bit of spice). Your task is to scale the scaffolding and rescue the girl without getting taken out by the barrels. Simple Hint: Dressing up as small Italian plumber Mario is dangerous and should not be attempted.

ASTEROID

Equipment: Some mate, some rocks, tennis racket

Difficulty: Paralyzing

Method: 1. Find a wide open area as far away from any windows as possible.

2. Stand in a central position holding your tennis racket.

3. Get your mates to throw the rocks at you. All you have to do is prevent your mates from getting hit using your racket. Simple Hint: Try getting your mates to vary where they throw the rocks and attack in waves for a more authentic experience.

FROGGER

Equipment: A frog costume, a motorway

Difficulty: Fatal

Method: 1. Go to a nearby motorway or major A-road and put on your frog costume.

2. Take position on the traffic shoulder, where you feel confident, begin hopping across to the central reservation – no running, that’s cheating.

3. The aim is to successfully reach the far side of your selected motorway without losing any limbs or becoming roadkill. Hint: Avoid fast cars, the traffic will be moving too slowly – that is for beginners.
Hitting the streets to hunt down geeks

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BY ROSS MCDONAGH

BACK in the day, all you needed to play chasing was a pair of legs and he hope that your mum wouldn't call you in for dinner for a few hours.

Nowadays, if you don't have a GPS, PDA, walkie-talkie and digital camera, you haven't got a chance.

Interactive media artist group Blast Theory has brought its award-winning online chasing game, Can You See Me Now?, to the Docklands.

Online players are dropped at random locations into a virtual 3-D map of the IFSC, while Blast Theory runners search for them in the very real streets using GPS, tracking their vatar down as they flee online.

Tracked by satellites, the runners

hasn't been this sexy since the advent of Ms Pac-Man.

Up to 20 people can play online at one time, using their arrow keys to flee their pursuers, while sending messages and exchanging tactics with other players.

If a runner gets within 1.5 metres of your 'blip', they take a sighting photo of the spot where you were 'caught', and its game over for you.

Along with their own names, gamers are encouraged to give details of someone who they haven't seen for a long time.

When you get caught, runners announce they have spotted that person from your past, which, even if expected, is quite jarring.

According to Dicky Eton, of Blast Theory, this may encourage the player to get in touch with that old friend.

'They fill that empty space in the real world,' he said. 'There are no winners or losers.'

Among those taking part yesterday were the hopefully named never-get-tired, and US dancer Jessica Kennedy, who was caught by her twin sister and runner for the day, Megan, after just 7 min 58 secs.

'I walked around the area to familiarise myself this morning, but it didn't help,' she said after being caught.

Players can use any of the eight terminals at the CHQ building on George's Dock, or can play at home at canyouseemenow.co.uk/dublin.

Games run from 12pm to 3pm until Saturday.