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Pac-Manhattan

Video gaming hits the streets of NY



Are you game in Manhattan? The streets of the Big Apple are being used for a real-life version of computer game Pacman

BY ABUL TAHER

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

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

For many, Pacman is a reminder of a mispent 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 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 cross-roads 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.

the Manhattan streets taking their 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 real-life 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-qualities that you don't really find in computer games. We are invading a public space and transforming it into a game space.'

The creators of Pac-Manhattan studied the work of British creative artists Blast Theory, whose games '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

BUT DON'T TRY THESE AT HOME, FOLKS

DONKEY KONG

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

Method:

1. Go to your nearest Wimpey housing development and find a building with at least three levels of scaffolding.
2. Lock your girlfriend in a reasonably sized cage and position her and your mate at the top you may want to ask her permission.
3. 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.

ASTEROIDS

Equipment: Some mates, 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 yourself getting hit using your racket.
Hint: Try getting your mates to vary their throwing speed 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 hard shoulder and, when 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 frog paste. **Hint:** Avoid rush hour, the traffic will be moving too slowly - that is for beginners.

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Hitting the streets to hunt down geeks

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Hot fuzz: Runner Paul Dungworth yesterday



Twin town: Megan Kennedy demonstrates the GPS system

Pictures: Haydn West

BY ROSS McDONAGH

BACK in the day, all you needed to play chasing was a pair of legs and he hope that your mam 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



Gamers: On George's Dock

appear online next to the player, and use hand-held computers showing the positions of online players to guide them in the chase across the 1km sq boundary.

Chasing dots on a computer screen

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 1.5metres 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 nevergetme, and US dancer Jessica Kennedy, who was caught by her twin sister and runner for the day, Megan, after just 7min 58secs.

'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.