



MIND GAMES

Do not pass Go until Uncle Roy says so

I pause at the intersection of George Street and Nicholas Street in Manchester's Chinatown and plot my position on a palm PC. Once the information has been transmitted, I am sent a message. "Nod at the man in the doorway, who knows more than you think." Sure enough, there is an Oriental man in the doorway of the Chinese supermarket, but he's talking to the driver of a van that's just dropped off a ton of beansprouts. Surely he - or they - can't be part of the game? I half-nod as I pass by, and naturally they ignore me, assuming I have a twitch. At the next crossroads I send my position again and am advised by return of message to stand at the foot of the concrete tower. Which concrete tower?

I'm playing *Uncle Roy All Around You*, the latest cross between game, theatre, art installation and paranoia-inducing mind-splat from Blast Theory. Having surrendered my personal possessions to staff at the Cornerhouse Gallery on Oxford Road, I was set loose on the streets with only a hand-held computer capable of sending and receiving messages, and the vaguest of vague ideas about a mission to find Uncle Roy's office somewhere in the centre of Manchester. You wander around - or run, as the game is limited to 40 minutes - sending your position as you go and receiving clues in return. You don't know to what extent you are being watched, though you have an idea that your increasingly erratic and random movements are being monitored by a growing army of online players (who are permitted to send you messages of either a helpful or deliberately misleading nature).

Uncle Roy drops hints about a back alley and a massage parlour. I find both. I'll learn more about Uncle Roy in their vicinity, he

promises. I don't. Instead I find myself running around in circles, determined that I, a keen crossword solver, will not be defeated by this cryptic nightmare. Finally, taking pity on me, Uncle Roy sends me an address, but can I find it on my palm-sized screen? Can I heck! I ask a parking attendant, who, I realise, has been keeping pace with me for two blocks. He's the strangest-looking parking attendant I've ever seen. Four and a half foot, dwarfed by his red council-issue cap, long curled

fingernails. He must be an actor. "I can picture it," he agonises, turning this way then that. "It's around here somewhere." The seconds are ticking by. He's a decoy. I run away. No one I ask knows where the street is.

Just as I'm beginning to think Uncle Roy's made it up, I see the name ahead of me. I push open the door. The man in the lobby - is he part of it? I ask him. He claims to be waiting for a cab. Yeah right, and I'm Jack Nicholson. In fact, I'm Michael Douglas in David Fincher's mind-altering 1997 thriller *The Game*. I want it to stop, but the fun is only beginning.

Nicholas Royle

Games being played Tuesday to Saturday.
See www.uncleroyallaroundyou.co.uk

GONGS AND SARONGS

Writers' paradise found

Literary award ceremonies are not known for their opulence. An evening of drafty backslapping in a venerable institution is the usual enticement but in the case of Le Prince Maurice Award, the setting is the prize.

Thus a motley group of us were treated to a week basking in five-star splendour at the Prince Maurice hotel, a celebrity-encrusted hide-out situated on a turquoise lagoon beside the Indian Ocean. Judges, journalists, a suitably starry chef and the