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**GAMES
BLOG**

Getting Blasted at Sundance

The famed film festival is opening its doors to interactive entertainment...



Blast Theory – the UK art collective is bringing its latest alternative reality game to Robert Redford's festival. Photo credit: A MACHINE TO SEE WITH by Blast Theory (UK) at New Frontier, Sundance Film Festival, January 21-29, 2011

There are plenty of odd things film goers are prepared to see at Sundance. But amid the shoe-gazing neo-neorealist indie flicks and dolefully sincere documentaries about out-of-work rodeo riders, few would expect an area dedicated to interactive storytelling. Or games, as we like to call them.

For the second year running, however, the festival will include New Frontiers, "a large-scale exhibition highlighting work that pushes the boundaries of storytelling and the moving image, and celebrating the convergence of film, art, and new media technologies as a hotbed for cinematic innovation."

Okay, so we're not talking about Sonic the Hedgehog here, it's more an attempt to include emerging areas such as alternative reality, interactive art and urban gaming into the festival's remit. Among the featured works are Pandemic 1.0, a transmedia experience that, in the words of the Sundance website, "unites film, mobile and online technologies, props, social gaming, and data visualization, enabling audiences to step into the shoes of the pandemic protagonists anytime during the day." There's also the rather beautiful Moony from Japanese artists Takehisa Mashimo, Akio Kamisato and Satoshi Shibata which projects digital images of butterflies into a vat of steam – plunge your hands in, and the butterflies flutter away.

And from the UK, art collective Blast Theory will be showing off its latest genre-bending work, A Machine to See With, a sort of interactive ARG thriller. As the press release explains:

"Sign up in advance online and enter your mobile phone number. When you arrive at your designated street corner your phone rings. A man's voice leads you through the city and into a 45 minute heist movie; you are the protagonist, you must deal with a bank robbery and it's aftermath. The work mixes thriller clichés with the reality of the urban environment and explores the tyranny of choice and the financial crisis."

Of course, this sort of location-based urban gaming experience has been around for a while now, but Blast Theory, alongside the more ludic [Hide&Seek](#), is one of the agenda setters in the area. Also, the collective's ideas on what constitutes art and interactivity are slowly gaining mainstream traction as smartphone apps introduce more and more of us to notions of location-based entertainment. The Nintendo 3DS, with its StreetPass feature, which allows the consoles to communicate with each other automatically as they pass in the street, is the perfect commercial platform for the sorts of concepts Blast Theory explores.

Right now they're confined to a leftfield movie festival. Tomorrow, the world.

And if you're interested in offbeat game design and new concepts in interactivity, make sure you check out the [World of Love](#) conference, taking place in London on January 28. We'll be there!

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