

framed

a mobile (pun intended) spy game!

Parsons
The New School for Design
COMMUNICATIONS
DESIGN+TECHNOLOGY

MiLK The
Mobile Informal
Learning Kit.

acid
australian crc for interaction design

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mobile technology: miLk (a text messaging platform)

course: PlayLab, a collaboration between

Parsons School of Design and ACID (australian crc for interaction design)

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concept

The brief of this project was to create a narrative based experience/game that revolved around the subject of the ‘Manhattan Project’ and utilized the physical sites associated with the project, which were located in Manhattan, New York. For technology, we had to utilize the ‘miLK’ text messaging application, developed by the Australian CRC for Interaction Design.

Background

Funded by the US government, the Manhattan Project was geared to produce an atom bomb during the IInd world war. Many high profile scientists, administrators, businessmen were called upon to ensure successful results. Even though US and USSR (now, Russia), were allies during the second world war, they differed in political ideology. Possible threat to prevalent ideology/ruling state, by means of atomic attack led to a defensive race for weapons, which was later recognized as the ‘Cold War’. And as a consequence, military-scientific espionage was rampant during the times. Infact, hunting “Commies” or communists, would soon become national agenda in the US, verging on panic during the period of the Cold War.

‘Framed’

This game tries to simulate the essence of the times. Its a historical walkthrough with roleplaying and puzzle solving elements. The players are a character from the 1950s, who is working on the Manhattan Project. The narrative will simulate ‘a day in the life of’ the character by taking him to the various sites that are part of his routine. Yet there is always this looming fear of being accused or framed as a communist spy. To save one-self from such a fate, the player must frame a competing player as a spy. The rules section elaborates on how this is done. The story is a work of fiction and doesn’t follow a strict narrative or time-line.

The game is more like a historical walk-through, envisaged as a tool that organizations like the UN or travel companies can hand out to tourists or school group who wish to sight-see. It’s in a portable format requiring no need for on-location props or technology other than simple text-messaging.



Players texting responses at former NY Times building.

rules

Description

You will roleplay an employee for the Manhattan Project. Follow the instructions on the cards to simulate a ‘day in the life of your character’. For fear of being marked a communist spy, a player must frame other players as spies (whether or not your character actually was a spy during that time).

The simulation will take you through Manhattan Project sites. You can access the address of the next site by messaging the correct name of your present location to a number through your mobile phone.

Required Equipment

1. Mobile phone
2. Game Cards
3. Metro Card



Required Set-up

1. Game for 3 to 4 players.
2. Each player gets a packet of cards.
3. Check alphabet on front of card. That's your player ID.

Rules and Play

1. Let the cards lead you through the walkthrough. Do as they say. But feel free to explore a site while you are there, take photos. Indulge in shopping or eating. That is part of the experience!
2. Start game by pressing your ‘player ID’ and ‘start’. For example, message - **A start**. This will give you the address of your first site.
3. On reaching location, message ‘player ID’ and ‘name of building’ to get the address for the next location. For example, text - **A Madison**. Ask the receptionist or people around for building name.
4. While travelling, solve the puzzle on card5. A bunch of picture cards are provided with it which you stick on the puzzle grid. If placed correctly, they will form the **image** of a character - a spy!. The story will help you get answers to the puzzle.
5. Use the **image** to “frame a spy” or blame another player character as a communist spy. This requires some guesswork and judgement by information gained while helping each other solve the puzzle. For example, a scientist will not need help with finding out the image for ‘cyclotron’. But a businessman may need to do some digging to guess that one.
7. Each player has a **photo-ID** on card2. On framing a another player, the other player needs to show you his photo ID. If the photographs match, you win. If not, you’re not dead, but out of the game. So say in a game of three, the person who frames first and correctly is the winner (first position), the one who gets framed and is revealed loses the game (third position), and the one who finishes the puzzle first and frames (but gets it wrong) is at the second position.

first prototype

CARD2:



Its your permit to visit the headquarters.
You look at your face. Thin and weary with work.

Name: Klaus Fuchs
Divison: Theoretical physics
Office: Kellex Corporation.
Task: (1)Inform engineers the discovery of new radioactive ores by the geologists at Union Carbide.(2)Explain the intensity of radioactivity such that safety regulations for mining can be determined.

At the meeting you show images of ores found at Coldorado Plateau site. Uranite or Pitchblende, is black The other one is Carnotite. Its very yellow.

You check out after the meeting. Goto run and clear out your desk from the old Headquarters at 270 broadway. Subway: Take R-W train from 28th Street to City Hall. On reaching location:

message 709.646.4755>>reached broadway
reply>>You reach the 18th Floor, the old HQ for the project. Now engineers were at Madison and scientists at the Kellex Corp. Amongst your papers you find CARD3.

The first prototype focused on writing the story for player characters:

The Scientist: Klaus Fuchs, was a theoretical physicist working on the development of the bomb.

The businessman: Edgar Sengier's Uranium stockpile at Staten Island became the projects fuel resource.

A Manager-General: Leslie Groves was the army officer reponsible for administration and overseeing of project.

The journalist: William Lawrence, a science reporter at the New York Times was the official journalist of the project.

The sites were chosen on the basis of ease of access. Narrative themes revolved around the buildings. For example, if a player was at the former NY Times building, the story told you what you were doing there. The story also unfolds the hints the player needs to crack the puzzle grid. Four sites were zeroed in for the game:

Former NY Times Office building

Madison Sq Area Engineer's Office took over 270 broadway as HQ.

270 Broadway (first HeadQuarters) responsible for administration, logistics, engineering, construction, fuel procurement.

Woolworth Hall (housed Kellex Corp.) home of scientists, the corporation cnsucted nuclear research along with Columbia University.

CARD4:



The headlines read: "Meredith Gardner (linguist and codebreaker) and team of the Venona Project, have been successful in breaking the Soviet Crypto-systems". You read further to discover that the hunt for communist led spies has begun.

It seems as if a chill has passed through the room. You look around at your colleagues. Could one of them be a spy?

message 709.646.4755>>finsh A
bold>>This is the government. You have been framed as a communist spy. If you disagree, you must produce a photo of a person who you think is a spy. Over.

second prototype



Each player gets a pack of five cards.

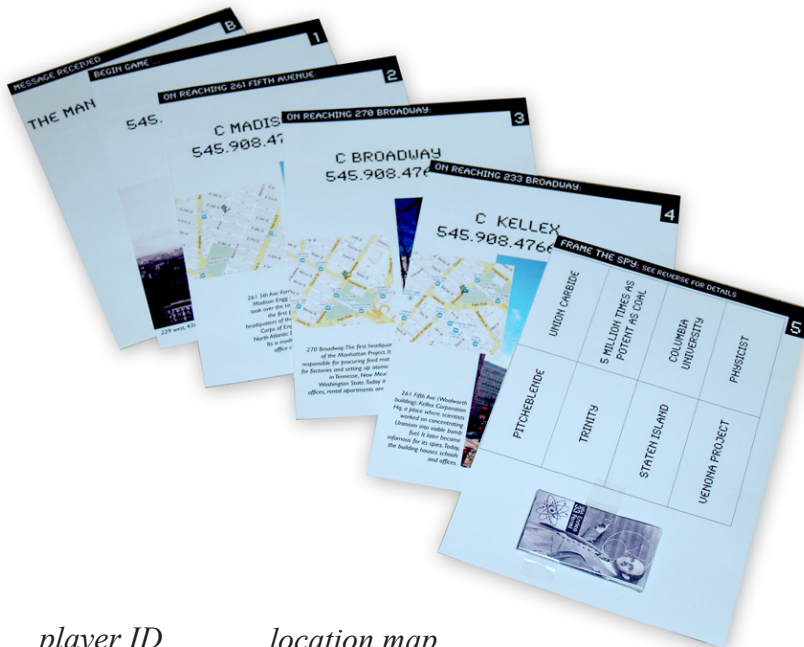


Card-front:

1. Player ID (alphabet)
2. Image of location
3. Map of location
4. Phone number for text messaging miLK

Card-back:

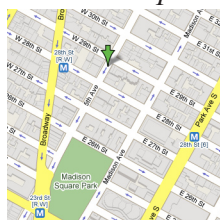
1. Narrative
2. Images related to the narrative



player ID



location map



playtest



Doris messaged : 'C Start', she is the businessman
Fuki messaged: 'B Start', she is the general
Shipra messaged 'D Start'; she is the journalist

On way to first location.
The former NY Times office.
Players checking map shown on card.



On reaching
location, Fuki texts
'B NYTimes' to a
remote mobile
server. It sends her
the address for
the next location.

Yes! we found the new location.



Indulging in photography along the way!



Figuring out the puzzle while in transit



From cards to complete image... Fuki has cracked it first!!
(checks for information: see corner left photo)





You are a commie spy!!! Fuki slaps the complete photograph at Shipra and frames her.



Shipra must show her ID (on card 2), and yes, Fuki is correct!! She wins the game! While Shipra is executed :(

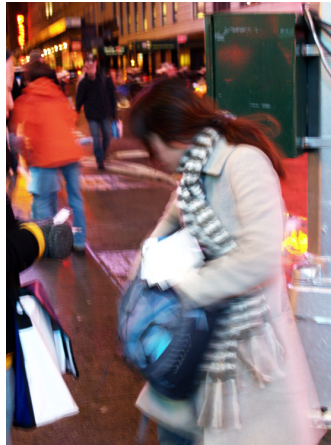


So what if the puzzle got over early? we've still got a site to see!! So off we go with our trusty travel/narrative/game cards!

(And if there were more people, we could've caught some more spies!. You see, Doris got lucky and wasn't framed at all. Had there been a fourth person, the game wouldn't be over till either one of them framed the other.)

Bon Voyage!

results and recommendations



First: Players enjoying the narrative. Left: A card slips out of Fuki's hand.

Positives

1. Look and feel of cards appreciated.
2. Story was interesting.
3. Puzzle solving in transit was fun.

Negatives

1. Cards were loose, difficult to hold.
2. Puzzle card was last, so players tackled it in the end.
3. Text Heavy.
4. Instructions should've been more clear and made BOLD.

Recommendations

In the next iteration, the following points can be taken care of:

1. Enclose cards in a portable folder jacket (made specifically for the cards in appropriate size).
2. The puzzle card be the inside jacket flap and constantly accessible.
3. Add clarity to, and edit length of instructions.

Other Comments

1. It was felt that cards were providing all the information and there was no need for text messaging. To remedy this, I have removed address on image of buildings (they will recover those by text messaging). I would also like to add, that the cards have been made due to the limitations of a 160 character limit on a text message. In the future, when phones will accommodate greater information transfer, including images, at low cost to the consumer, then there will be no need for cards. Then all information will be retrieved from the phone itself. The walkthrough has been designed with such a future in mind.

2. Another comment questioned that solving the puzzle did not require the player to visit the sites at all, since the cards provide all information. The cards have been made informative to tell players more about the site's history. It also provides reading material when traveling across Manhattan via subway. Inclusion of physical space was a tricky call as (a) One cannot install a permanent props (b) Even people living on the site are not aware of its past, so where will the player get this information from? (c) A possible solution is to create the puzzle with snippets of architectural forms that the player needs to recognize to complete the spy photo (instead of snippets taken from story).

THANK YOU

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