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# A Pox Upon their Children!

By James Flint

James Flint reports back from the playgrounds of Chicago

While grown-ups fret about setting up bluetooth office environments and alternative local area networks their kids are forging forward with wireless initiatives of their own. Pox, a new handheld game by Hasbro aimed at 'boys of 8 and up (though girls like it too!)' is fast becoming the biggest kids' craze in the United States. Looking like a hypertrophic GameBoy Advance, the Pox console just runs one game... Pox. But Pox rules, because the Pox console has a built-in radio transmitter that can detect and make contact with any other Pox consoles that happen to be within 30 feet of it. And when this happens the result, this being a children's game, is war.

This is how it works. You play Pox on your own, creating a monster who you guide through various levels, collecting bits of armour and weaponry with which it can be equipped. There are three main species of monster, and each monster can wear three bits of kit (head, torso, tail). There are around 7,500 possible bits of kit, so that means there's a staggeringly large number of combinations. Your monster lives on your machine; when another machine comes in range, your monster scraps with its monster. Whoever wins gets to swipe the kit belonging to the loser, and add it to his/her own range of options, so enabling them to move on to bigger, better things. It's electronic conkers, in other words.

In launching Pox, Hasbro went for totally viral marketing, seeding 1,600 handsets to kids in Chicago in advance of the full product roll-out. The effect was extreme – by the time the handsets were in the shops, half the children in the city were threatening their parents with Columbine-style retributions if they didn't find one in their Christmas sock, and this was with zero spend on ads or TV tie-ins. Pox: coming soon to a child near you.

James Flint <jim AT metamute.com> is contributing editor to *Mute* magazine. His second book, *52 Ways to Magic America*, will be out in the spring

[<http://www.p-o-x.com>]