

DOES PAC-MAN GET PILLS FOR HIS BIRTHDAY?

By Will Guyatt

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Happy 45th Birthday Pac-Man. If he was a human - Pac would be battling stiff knees, heart disease from all those power-pills and type-2 diabetes from munching all those ghosts. Thankfully - our games heroes don't need to age, while we do.

As games matures, we're heading into an age and stage where we'll be inundated with milestone birthdays and anniversaries for milestone franchises and iconic characters.

I know we'll be all in on Mario's 50th in 2031, but who other than me has Mega Man's 40th pencilled in on their 2027 calendar?



Pac-Man was games' first superstar - the characterless, voiceless disc was shifting serious amounts of merch before Mario had stopped abusing the large gorilla. Games merch feels like a fairly recent phenomenon, but the early 80s toy shop was full of Pac-Man puzzles, mugs, pens and even finger puppets.

My first experience of Pac-Man was the 1980s MB boardgame which I got for Christmas in 1983 - which was essentially Hungry Hippos without the Hippos...

Forty odd years later and various bits of Pac-Man merch still appear - I recently got my hands on a very bizarre and rare Red Bull themed Pac-Man arcade machine Fridge, but how do you make a character like Pac who lacked pizzazz four and a half decades ago, cut it against a whole universe of games personalities?

It sounds like Bandai Namco have been trying to bring Pac back for a whole new generation, and I have to confess I totally missed it. I only heard about the recent Shadow Labyrinth game in a fantastic BBC Online feature about the impact of Pac-Man on society.

The throwaway line talks about the spirit of Pac-Man living on through a character called Puck who (and I quote) “is this a goth-meets-cyborg-spin on Pac-Man’s original design.” This description alone was enough for me to Google Emo-Pac, who definitely won’t be powering the character through the second-half of his first century.

And that leads up back into an interesting place - while the BBC says Pac-Man has generated an estimated \$14bn in revenue to date, and that even macaque monkeys have got tasty at playing it over the last few years - just how do you successfully keep a franchise like this relevant?

Is it ok for Pac-Man to exist like an Oasis tour - playing the hits - or should he still be in front of new audiences, with a funky Emo haircut? I can’t even comprehend what happens when Sonic the Hedgehog gets his bus pass...



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