

Heads up, space fans! Angry Birds roosting at NASA

March 25 2013, by Marcia Dunn



This March 22, 2013 photo released by Delaware North shows the main entrance to Angry Birds Space Encounter at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex in Cape Canaveral, Fla. The online game Angry Birds is the inspiration for the

new attraction at the space center, where most of the exhibits focus on space exploration and NASA history. (AP Photo/Delaware North, Joe Cascio)

(AP)—Angry Birds have a new space coop. At NASA's invitation, the online game birds are roosting at Kennedy Space Center for the next 1½ years in an effort to lure youngsters to the cosmic wonders of math and science.

The huge interactive exhibit opened March 22 and immediately packed in the kids, including this reporter's 7-year-old son who couldn't get enough of the mirrored maze and the design-your-own Angry Bird and play-the-game stations.

It's called Angry Birds Space Encounter and is the first of its kind.

Astronaut Donald Pettit, a chemical engineer and father of 12-year-old twin boys, announced the collaboration between NASA and Angry Birds creator Rovio Entertainment a year ago while living aboard the International Space Station. He squeezed in as much physics as he could in the YouTube announcement.

"Wow, this could be a great venue for getting some physics and getting some math and getting some science into something that has the connotation as just an empty brain-draining video game that sucks out the creativity from the minds of young people," Pettit told The Associated Press at the grand opening.

"And so I thought, well, maybe I could help make a difference on this and bring the idea of a game up to a different level, where unbeknownst to the kids playing it, they're learning a little bit of math and physics at the same time."

Enter the concepts of parabolic trajectories, hyperbolic trajectories, elliptical trajectories and even Holman transfer orbits, "which is what we do with spacecraft going from Planet A to Planet B."



This March 22, 2013 photo shows guests taking their best shot in a competition with fellow players using mini-Angry Birds launched in a slingshot to zap space pigs at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex in Cape Canaveral, Fla. The online game Angry Birds is the inspiration for the new attraction at the space center, where most of the exhibits focus on space exploration and NASA history. (AP Photo/Delaware North, Joe Cascio)

"There's all this stuff latent in this game, particularly if you tend to be a geek, or an uber-geek or what I'm actually calling now a super-uber-geek," Pettit said. "All of this stuff can be mined out of this game and it can be used as an excuse to learn more. If you're not in any of those categories as a kid, you can still play the game and be entertained."

Parent Alert: If a Ph.D. astronaut like Pettit endorses Angry Birds Space, it must be worthwhile.

Toss in space shuttle Atlantis, making its museum debut in another few months, and the educational value goes sky-high.

The \$100 million Atlantis display, just a few minutes' stroll from Angry Birds Space Encounter, opens June 29.

Angry Birds is "a nice prelude to Atlantis and it will be a nice complement as well," especially for children, said John Stine, Delaware North Co.'s director of sales and events at Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex.

"They're going to learn something about Angry Birds and they're going to really be inspired when they go to Atlantis."



This March 22, 2013 image shows part of the new Angry Birds attraction at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla. This part of the attraction is a sliding puzzle with three levels of difficulty. The online game Angry Birds is the inspiration for the new attraction at the space center, where most of the exhibits focus on space exploration and NASA history. (AP Photo/Delaware North, Joe Cascio)

The Finnish-based Rovio Entertainment has another Angry Birds Space exhibit up its sleeve at another locale in the near future, said Dan Mitchell, the company's director of location-based entertainment.

"But you can't get a much more true-to-life space theme than being here at Kennedy Space Center," Mitchell said as his 6-year-old daughter waited none too patiently at the exhibit entrance.

The 4,485-square-foot (417-square-meter) exhibit features six interactive stations, including 4-foot-high (1.2-meter-high) Eggsteroids Slingshots that children can use to launch mini Angry Birds at enemy pigs, and a laser-beam obstacle course set on the Red Planet.

This reporter's son had to be dragged away after more than an hour inside the noisy, darkened chamber—noisy and dark for grown-ups, that is. The Florida sunlight beckoned, with the outdoor play area, rocket garden and shuttle launch-simulator ride.

"Want to go back to the Angry Birds?" he pleaded a few days later.
"Pleeeeeease."

More information: If You Go...

KENNEDY SPACE CENTER VISITOR COMPLEX: Located about an

hour's drive east of Orlando, Fla.; www.kennedyspacecenter.com/ . Open daily 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Adults, \$50; children 3-11, \$40 (plus tax). Angry Birds Space Encounter is included with regular admission. Unmanned rockets still soar from nearby Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, so check to see if a launch is coming up for double the fun.

NASA YOUTUBE ANGRY BIRDS ANNOUNCEMENT:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxI1L1RiSJQ

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