

Tablet apps let cats catch critters in cyberspace

January 7 2015, by Sue Manning



This August 2011, video frame grab provided by T.J. Fuller shows a cat named Maxine playing "Game for Cats" on an iPad in Valencia, Calif. Fuller, Nate Murray and their company, Hiccup, created "Game for Cats", "Paint for Cats" and "Catzilla." (AP Photo/T.J. Fuller)

When Laura Fritz's felines play with her iPad, her fat cat loses the urge to eat, her scaredy-cat loses his fear and her youngest just loses interest.

If you've had enough time to play with the tablet you got for the holidays, try turning the device over to your tech-savvy cat. Every cat app, no matter the maker, has something for felines to electronically track, stalk or hunt, such as mice, bugs or laser dots.

"Cats are attracted to things that move, and that is the 'magic' for most of the apps," said Dr. Bonnie Beaver, a professor at Texas A&M University's College of Veterinary Medicine and executive director of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists.

"The motion in most apps is jerky and quick, much like an insect," she said, adding that any sound component would quickly be eclipsed by the draw of movement.

Every cat is different, but if they are like two of Fritz's, they will love pawing the screen to catch critters, which breaks anxious Maxie out of his shell and gives hefty Mr. Brutus a way to exercise, said Fritz of Waltham, Massachusetts. But they may be like her youngest, Pansy Rose, who couldn't care less.

Maxie and Brutus work together on the app "Paint for Cats," chasing a mouse and leaving a trail of splattered paint where they have pawed, rubbed, jumped or made other marks with their movements. Many cat owners see the results as art worthy of sharing on social media, so the app allows people to email the creations.



This June 2013, video frame grab provided by T.J. Fuller shows a cat named Beans playing a game called Catzilla on an iPad in Los Angeles. Fuller, Nate Murray and their company, Hiccup, created "Game for Cats", "Paint for Cats" and "Catzilla". (AP Photo/T.J. Fuller)

It is among three popular apps created by T.J. Fuller and Nate Murray's Los Angeles company Hiccup. The company also features a mouse chasing game called "Game for Cats" and monster crushing game dubbed "Catzilla."

There are several cat apps on the market. "Pocket Pond" for Android tablets allows cats to follow fish or dragonflies with their paws. Friskies' "Cat Fishing" also taps into the fish theme for Android and Apple devices.

Some people worry about damage to the devices, but claws won't hurt the screen, said Fuller, who ran many tests. But nobody has tested for

teeth, and Karen Rittmuller of Salem, Massachusetts, found a problem with a bite.

Rittmuller tried to get her calico cat Pixel to live up to her high-tech name, so she downloaded "Game for Cats," but her pet will only stalk, pounce and bite the iPad, so she took it away.

"I did not want the device ruined or her hurt from biting too hard," Rittmuller said.

Even cats at shelters are joining the tech trend.

When the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Los Angeles received a couple of used tablets two years ago, the shelter decided to see if any of their homeless cats were hiding inner artists.

Two of them, dubbed Pawblo Picasso and Frida Catlo, created abstract art that looked like fuzzy circles, and the organization turned it into sellable notecards.

Those trading up to a newer model tablet should consider donating used devices to shelters, said Ana Bustilloz, spokeswoman for the organization. People give food, kitty litter and blankets, but many don't think of animal shelters when it comes to tech equipment, she said.

Back at the Fritz house, the cats work out their problems with the tablet. The 21-pound Brutus is only motivated by food and refuses to exercise, so "Paint for Cats" gets him to move, Fritz said.

"Maxie is scared of everything that moves. But when he's painting, he becomes a different cat ... and really gets into it," she said.

More information: www.spcala.com

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