

Sim-ply Irresistible: *SimCity 2000*



Maxis' Master Plan For Software Renewal

by Johnny L. Wilson

Johnny L. Wilson is the author of The SimCity Planning Commission Handbook and co-author of The SimCity 2000 Planning Commission Handbook, both published by Osborne-McGraw Hill.

A city, according to Lewis Mumford's *The City In History*, serves as a structure for the storage and transmission of valued goods (an economic purpose), a repository of information and artifacts from its cumulative social heritage (a socializing purpose); and a stable human environment through police and fire protection, the modern equivalent of the walls and armies of the ancient world (a protective purpose). In short, the urban or suburban environment touches nearly every aspect of our lives.

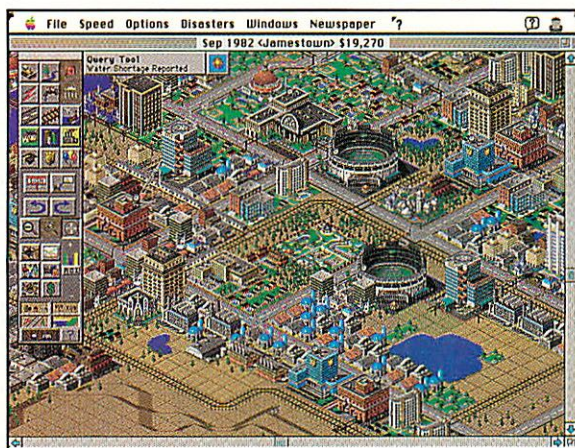
This may well explain why the original *SimCity* touched a nerve and had such wide-range appeal. Nearly everyone could identify with it, because even those who do not live in cities have had to visit them for one reason or another, and nearly everyone thinks that they could do a better job of planning a city than their own local government officials.

Urban Renewal

SimCity 2000 (*SC2000*) offers the same fascination and potential satisfaction as the original *SimCity*, but it offers considerably more tools with which to create an urban utopia. Now, *SimCity 2000* contains built-in terrain editing functions to tweak the landscape without having to leave the City Window; subway and freeway options to help alleviate traffic congestion; and alternative power plants to help alleviate pollution. There are now schools to help shape the future of the city and help determine the types of industry that will dominate in that future city. There are hospitals to increase the life expectancy of your citizenry and proactive government spending options to help

you hone in on specific problems, like attracting new businesses or reducing crime through anti-drug education.

The new game also features the ability to send police and fire-fighting forces directly to trouble spots, and allows you to designate light and heavy industrial, commercial, and residential zones without having to use the



bulldozing trick many of us used in the original. Roads in *SC2000* can be built diagonally, so you no longer have to zig-zag your way across the map in order to recreate Washington, D.C. or Paris. You can even connect your cities to neighboring cities by building roads to the edges of the map.

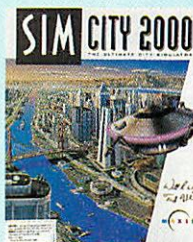
Stadiums (for baseball, football, soccer, or cricket), recreational areas, and tourist attractions can both customize a city's look and improve its population and economy. Also, the addition of a utility to allow mayors to create customized signposts for their cities is a very nice touch. The Oakland Hills Fire scenario makes excellent use of this tool by indicating Lake Temescal, as well as the former home of designer Will Wright that burned during the fire.

SimCity 2000 can also be more difficult than was the original *SimCity*. To be sure, the Easy mode (where the initial bankroll is \$20,000) is still basically a software toy—accessible enough that almost anyone can feel successful from the beginning. At the Medium level (starting with the coffers at \$10,000) and Hard level (where the city begins \$10,000 in debt because of floating a municipal bond), things are tougher. Not only do you have to handle the specific budgetary issues, but you have to be able to handle NIMBY (Not In My BackYard) issues, as well. Putting that prison near certain high-priced housing can cause a backlash among your citizenry. Not only do you have to plan for the road, freeway, and subway grid, you also have to deal with the Mayor Koch Syndrome (the former NYC mayor says he used to have nightmares about the city's waterlines disintegrating) and deal with the underground water system.

The easier a difficulty level is set, the easier it is for cities to sell their industrial products to neighboring cities and expand the economic base. Further, the harder difficulty levels increase the probability of a city facing a disaster. Finally, some of the new scenarios, like the Oakland Hills Fire, are extremely difficult. There are feelings of déjà vu when playing *SC2000*, but this is not the same game. There are plenty of new challenges.

Finally, the new game also lets you decide on the start date for the game. In turn, the time period in which you begin has an effect on what power plants are

SimCity 2000

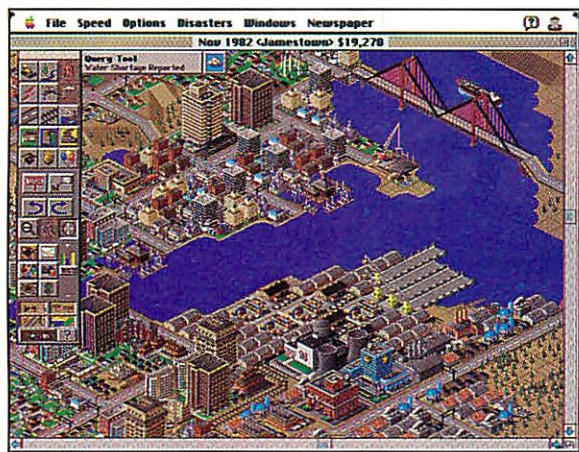


TITLE: *SimCity 2000*
PRICE: \$69.95
SYSTEM: Macintosh, IBM (early '94)
REQUIREMENTS: LC, Performa, II, Centris, Quadra, Color Classic, and Powerbook; 4MB RAM (2.5MB free), 8-bit color monitor, 4MB hard drive space, System 7.0 or higher
DESIGNERS: Fred Haslam and Will Wright
PUBLISHER: Maxis
Orinda, CA
(510) 254-9700

immediately available and what inventions are already in existence. A 1900 start date allows you to choose between three types of power plants (Coal, Hydroelectric and Oil); allows no subways until 1910, buses until 1920 or highways until 1930; and allows no water treatment plants until 1935 or arcologies (self-sustaining cities in a single enveloping structure) until 2000. A 1950 start date adds gas-powered electric plants with nuclear power plants only five years away, and also allows all forms of transportation and water treatment plants. The year 2000 adds wind- and solar-powered plants, as well as desalinization plants and arcologies to the mix. The year 2050 adds microwave and fusion power plants to the energy pool.

Report From The City Manager

With so much going for it, many might think that *SC2000* is perfect. It isn't quite there, yet. You would think that someone in



my position would be able to proclaim the new game to be everything *SimCity* fans could have desired, since virtually every criticism I leveled at the game in *The SimCity Planning Commission Handbook* was addressed in the design of *SC2000*. Yet, there are still awkward features.

For instance, I complained about the meager terrain features in *SimCity*. Now, there are multiple levels of terrain, complete with "reticulating splines." This means that the formula which generates maps for *SC2000* builds a series of curves and angles within the hillside terrain so that the map presents credible geological structures. It also means that there are lots of little triangular terrain tiles that cannot be improved by zoning or road, rail and/or on-ramp construction.

I also noted that the original game locked the player into a grid plan for city design. The large square commercial, industrial and residential zones virtually assured symmetrical grids where possible. *SC2000* made the basic zones smaller and, as a result, more realistic in

terms of the way property is zoned in real life. This provides for additional flexibility in using terrain features effectively and creating realistic neighborhoods. Unfortunately, it has also meant that some *SimCity* fans do not feel like they can see what's happening in *SC2000* as readily as they could in the original game.

Again, I lamented the inability to build freeways. Now, you can build them, but you must be able to cross an ordinary road at a 90 degree angle in order to do so. Then, you can build on-ramps to the raised highway that will serve as your expressway or freeway. If you do not place the freeway sections at such a stern angle, you will not get viable on- and off-ramps. Also, many novice mayors find themselves frustrated because they cannot build on-ramps on triangular spline sections or at the end of one of the sections of freeways.

Another problem introduced by the additional terrain possibilities has to do with crossing water. Many mayors are frustrated with their inability to change directions with raised wires. You must be certain that you can get *straight* to where you're going *before* you start crossing water. The same holds true when building bridges. You cannot build circular, S-curve or T-intersection bridges.

Another awkward design feature has to do with the customized signposts. Many novice mayors want to customize as much of their city as possible, but end up unhappy with the results. They forget that the sign is about three tiles in height and a minimum of five tiles wide.

In the more dense areas of the city, placing signs will obscure the topographical view of the city and actually reduce, rather than enhance, the enjoyment of the city's growth. Fortunately, the game allows you to toggle off these signposts when they are obtrusive and unsightly (unlike certain stretches of highway in real life).

Of course, once you have gotten used to the conventions used in *SC2000*, none of these are problems that should significantly diminish your enjoyment of the game. They are simply factors that should be considered by fans of the original game.

Tales of the City

The new scenarios are very similar to those in the original game. Charleston is essentially equivalent to Rio, since flooding is the problem whether caused by recurring high tides or recurring hurricanes; Hollywood is essentially equivalent to Tokyo, since a movie prop monster that rampages out of control

through a metropolis is not much different than a Godzilla-type monster; and a depressed economy in Flint, MI is the same as a depressed economy in Detroit.

The main scenarios of distinction, with regard to play, are the Dullsville scenario where you must build a tourist attraction to build business and population, and the Oakland Hills Fire scenario where you must end the conflagration as swiftly as possible. The latter is not so different than the San Francisco Earthquake scenario in the original *SimCity*, but it plays differently because of the necessity of dispatching fire-fighters to the specific terrain squares where they must put out the fire.

Public Opinion Poll

Is *SimCity 2000* a better program than the original *SimCity*? It is without question a superior program. Will Wright and Fred Haslam have addressed the wish lists of nearly every *SimCity* player that has contacted them.

Is it more fun than the original *SimCity*? It is for me. With the additional depth in play and the proliferation of new options, *SC2000* feels more realistic and offers more challenges. It's Sim-ply irresistible. **CGW**

Backdraft

How to stop the Oakland Hills Fire seems to be the most commonly asked question from those who know me and my love for both *SimCity* and *SC2000*. The sneakiest way to get the fire out in a hurry is to use the "Raise Terrain" tool to build up the terrain around the affected fire tiles and, as a result, isolate the fire. To those who insist that this is cheating, I insist that real fire-fighters use bulldozers to create fire breaks. I'm just exaggerating that effort.



I also tried to isolate the fire by ringing it with water. The flames jumped the ring of water. Further, I tried to emulate those airplanes and helicopters bombing the fire with water drops by clicking the "Place Water" tool over the flames. This does not work, even though each click costs your city budget as much as if it did.