

SimCity 2000

By Gregg Keizer



The easiest way to find out how the Sims feel is to read the paper.



Fire! When disasters erupt, you'd better react fast. Look what happens when you don't—you may find your fire station up in smoke. Now there's nothing to do but wait for it to burn itself out.



SimCity 2000's disasters come in all shapes and sizes, from earthquakes to riots. This alien space ship is one of the weirdest.

Wanted: tough-as-nails city administrator willing to go out on a limb and provoke the people. Salary commensurate with experience. Ability to move mountains, change the course of rivers, and deliver earthquakes a plus. No deities, please. Call 1-800-SIM-CITY.

Okay, so you've played SimCity long enough to pass the civil service exam. But even if you've shoved the classic back, way back, on the shelf, it's time to sharpen your mayoral skills and pop SimCity 2000 into your PC or Macintosh. It may have more of the old than the new, but SimCity 2000's 3-D perspective and cool terrain editor make it a return trip worth taking.

One Metropolis, Comin' Up

Like its forerunner, SimCity 2000 is an urban simulator: a resource manager. You plan a town, designating areas fit for residential, commercial, and industrial occupation, then create the infrastructure necessary to make it a swell place to live. Along the way, you set taxes, watch public opinion, and provide the people with life's amenities.

Resource management comes into play because everything costs money. To build a power plant, for instance, you must pay for its construction. The same goes for police and fire stations, water plants, and roads. You start with a slush fund at your disposal, but that dribbles away faster than you can say "SimCity 2000." In the end, you must balance what you have against what you want to build and maintain. Therein lies the challenge of both the original SimCity and this updated version.

SimCity 2000's interface improves on its ancestor's. It jazzes up the point-and-click approach. Some buttons summon submenus: Click on the water tool, say, and you get to choose from water lines, pumps, and towers. It's a clever way to hide the clutter. Other menus remain onscreen as long as you hold down the mouse button.



SimCity 2000's new sideways-slanted perspective makes your city look three-dimensional.

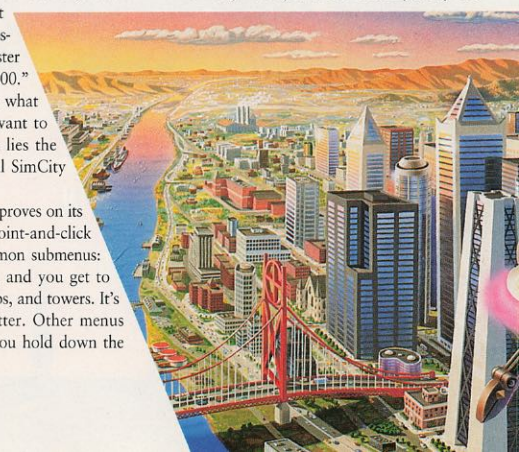
Some game mechanics have changed, too. Rather than force you to set down residential, commercial, or industrial zones in preset sizes, SimCity 2000 lets you click and drag to draw almost any zone shape you want. This comes in handy when you want to expand an existing zone, shape new sections of town for streets, railroads, and rivers, or even alter the terrain.

Most of the other improvements concern the augmented set of city pieces. You can now lay underground water lines, and erect hospitals, prisons, schools, libraries, and museums. The transportation network is more flexible, too. SimCity 2000 introduces subways, on-ramps, tunnels, and even elevated highways. The bottom line: SimCity 2000 is an easier-to-use, more realistic game.

Attain Godlike Powers

Even these changes, though, are puny in the grand scheme of things. The really boffo enhancements in SimCity 2000 are the terrain editor and its perspective.

In SimCity 2000 you create not only a city but



also the ground it stands on. Before you build a town, you can apply a slew of godlike tools to the randomly generated terrain. Make a map, for example, then raise and lower any part (SimCity 2000 has 32 altitude levels), start streams in the highlands (water runs downhill, even in a simulator), create lakes, and plant forests. You can even raise and lower the sea level. Futz with a map as much as you want before clicking on Done. For detailed work, use the magnification tool.

With SimCity 2000's terrain editor, you can even—with some effort—reproduce a scale model of your own city. How realistic the lay of the land is, of course, depends on how much time you spend with the editor.

Rather than look at your town from directly overhead as you do with SimCity, you watch over the metropolis from a somewhat-sideways isometric perspective. A-Train fans will find it familiar, as will enthusiasts of Populous and a bazillion other role-playing games—but it does



When the coffers dry up, you'd better raise property taxes. The limit is 20 percent, though, so you may have to employ other strategies as well, like sales or income taxes, or even Lotto.



GAME-WINNING TIPS

Pick the Easy level to start with as much money as possible. Build a residential, an industrial, and a commercial zone. Make sure that there's room between the first and second zones, and that the first and third zones are nearby. Next, make a power plant and lay out a grid of power lines. Finally, roll out some roads, enough that no zoned tile is more than three from a street.

Watch what you build. You pay not only to construct it but also to maintain it.

SimCity 2000 switches to an underground view when you build water lines or subway tunnels. It's tough to remember where things are above, though, so click on the Show Zones or Show Infrastructure tool.

Once you start making your city, you can't change the terrain without spending money—lots of it. Use the terrain editor first, then colonize.

look sharp. The downtown now has depth. Even better, you can zoom in and out, examining the traffic up close or pulling back for a wider view of the city.

Downtown in 3-D

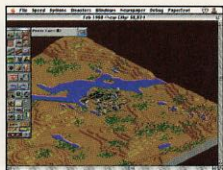
SimCity 2000 has also gotten a face-lift. Its graphics are vastly improved. Both the PC and the Mac versions now display the city in glorious 256-color video, a boon when it comes to the scenery, but a bane when you consider the speed factor. On a Macintosh IIsi, for instance, our preliminary copy of SimCity 2000 ran slow enough to be a distraction, with windows glacially opening and magnification changes taking five to ten seconds.

Like the original, the new version includes natural and unnatural disasters, from fires and nuclear meltdowns to alien invaders and floods. As in the real world, such calamities are random, though if you're hard of heart you can inflict them on the city whenever you want. You can also wimp out and disable disasters.

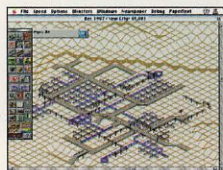
SimCity 2000 is fun. Addictive to some, entertaining to many, this new-and-improved urban simulator deserves a thumbs-up vote on its own merits. (Maxis; 800-336-2947; DOS and Mac, \$69.95)

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SimCity 2000's new isometric viewpoint, terrain editor, and other enhancements make it more flexible, easier to use, and realistic than its ancestor. The only thing that's holding it back from a perfect score is its demand for 256 colors and the resulting slowness on some systems.



You can shrink or magnify the view. Here's a town viewed from high up.



One of the new features is water. You lay water mains in this underground view—it can be tough to match what's on the surface.



The best improvement in SimCity 2000 is its terrain editor, which lets you mess around before you build a city.