

Sim City 2000



One of the few games unquestionably deserving the title 'Classic' was Sim City. Not only did it cause a sensation when it was released but it's still one of the most played games

on any hard drive. Now Sim City is being completely overhauled and revamped as Sim City 2000. Crack squads of programmers, programmers' mates and graphic artists are working around the clock to produce the new version of the game that made Maxis what it is today; the game that launched a thousand poor imitations and the game responsible for more lost sleep and missed buses than any other. We sent **Patrick McCarthy** to have a

sneak preview of the game and, while he was about it, muse on the vast collection of Sim City data disks and other examples of the genre.

NB: The images used in this feature are from the Apple Macintosh version of the game which is at a more advanced stage of development.

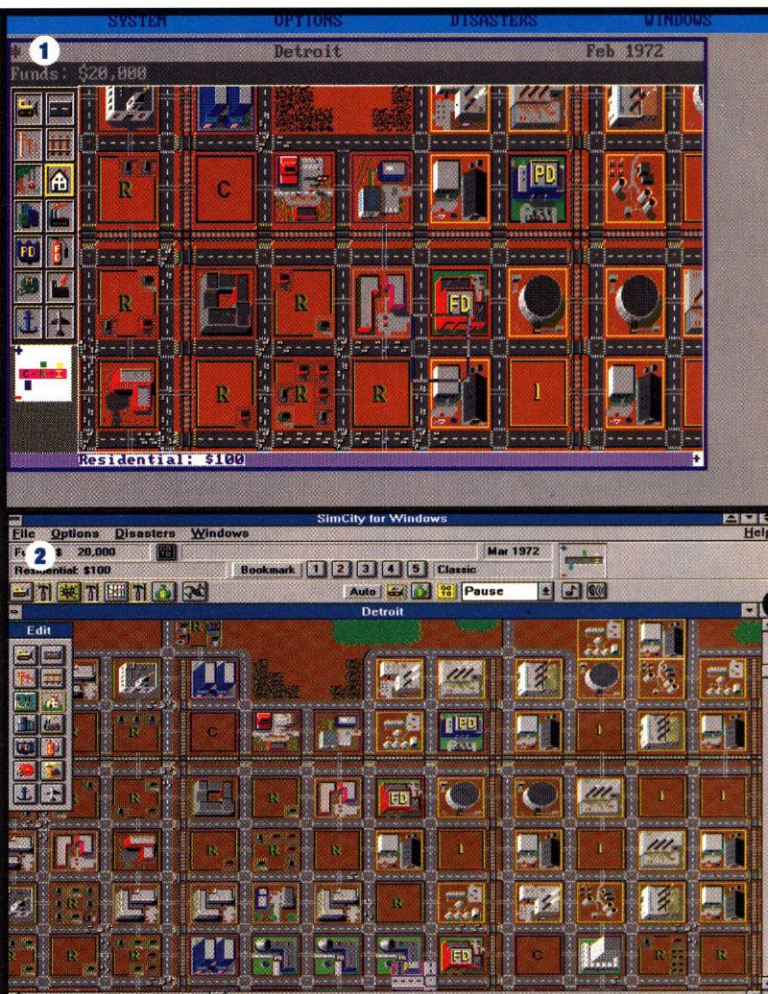
SIM CITY THE FIRST

The original *Sim City* is available on just about every format you could possibly think of, from the SNES, Mac and PC to Arkwright's Spinning Jenny. On the PC it's had more than a few data disks released for it to add to your *Sim City*ing pleasure, although none of them alter the way the game is played in any way.

The *Terrain Editor* allows you, perhaps not surprisingly, to edit terrain, creating your own bizarre chunk of land which you will later ruin by overdeveloping. The other data disks come in the form of additional *Sim City Graphics* sets. There are packs containing Ancient Cities (Ancient Asia, Medieval Times and Wild West) and Future Cities (Future Europe, Future USA and Moon Base). It has to be said that these aren't exactly 'must-buys.' They don't add anything to the gameplay whatsoever (power cables being replaced by water pipes, etc.) and even as an attempt to introduce a different atmosphere they're rather lacking, as the graphics aren't at all evocative of the time they're supposed to represent: multi storey sheriff's offices and Ancient Asian Police Departments are typical (and they're still all priced in dollars).

The only (rather pathetic) difference is the way in-game messages are phrased: In Ancient Asia and Medieval times 'More industrial areas needed' becomes 'Master (or Sire) we need more industrial areas'. In the Wild West 'More residential areas needed' becomes 'More homesteads needed' etcetera.

The original PC version has been given a smart and jazzy 256 colour upgrade and is now available as *Sim City for Windows*. These data disks aren't available directly for the Windows version, although the installation routine does have a built-in facility to convert the DOS packs for use with the Windows version. There's something of a dispute going on at the moment as to who owns the rights to *Sim City*, so it's not the easiest game to get hold of in its original form. Informed opinion seems to think that this will all be sorted out in the near future, and that a bumper budget package will be released next year, containing at least some, and possibly all, of the above 'extras' at a low, low price.



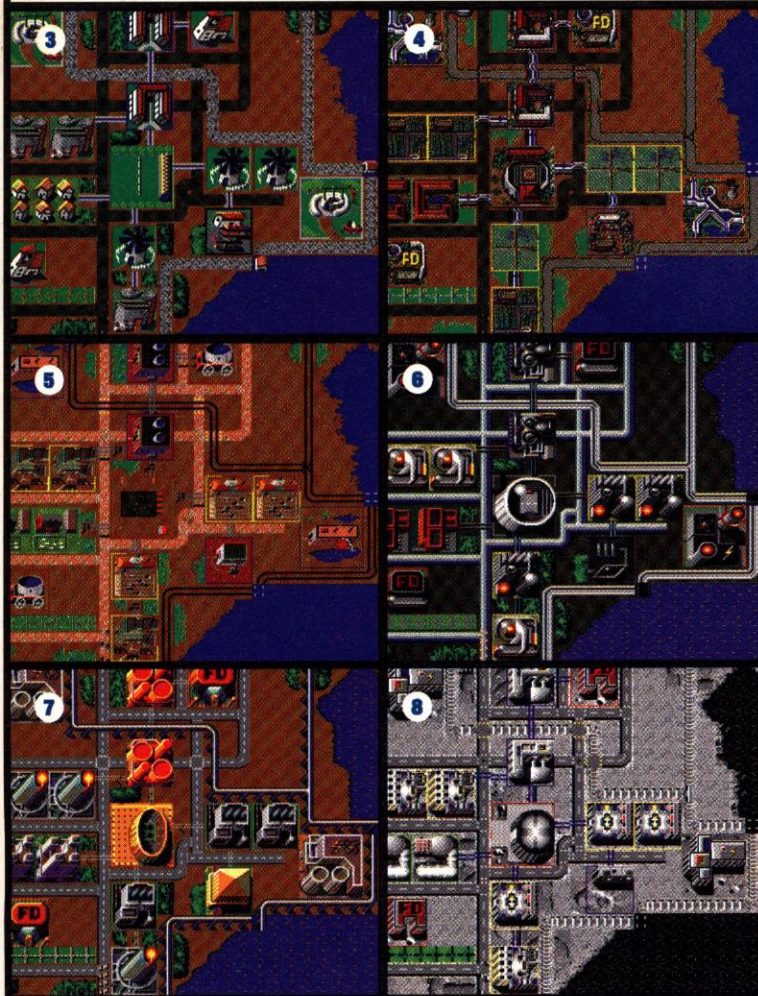
THE GOD GAME

God games are so-called because the first time you see the number of icons splattered all over the screen you say: 'God.' There have been any number of games released in which you get to lord it over the scumbags on-screen, controlling and toying with their destinies for your own amusement.

Two or three can justifiably be called 'classics': one is *Populous*, in which you really are a god, and, as such, responsible for a warlike people at odds with their neighbours who worship a different god. Raising and lowering land to enable your people to settle and breed, you gain power from your people's worship. As you gain strength, an arsenal of special effects become available to you – earthquakes, floods, and so on – which you can unleash on the enemy's people to help your own to victory.

In *Civilization* you attempt to lead one small, unarmed tribe from the dawn of civilisation all the way into the space age, hopefully becoming the first to colonise a new planet. You start by establishing a new city and, with a combination of exploration, scientific research and development, and plain old war, you discover new lands, establish new cities and make new inventions to help you in your task.

Many cheap imitations of these games are around, amongst them are *Caesar* which is essentially a poor *Civilization*, and *Moonbase* which is a very poor *Sim City*. Other not-quite classics are two other 'Sim' games, *Sim Life* and *Sim Earth*, which are based on scientific theories of evolution and planetary development. They suffer from the lack of any real target for you to achieve: however much you tinker around with things, the planet and life continues to evolve. They don't really have any kind of edge that makes them addictive. Yet another is *Sim Ant*, in which you control an ant colony in a garden, fighting off rival colonies before launching a raid on the house. Strange indeed, but not without interest.





KEY

The original Sim City and its panoply of add-on scenarios.

- 1 Sim City (DOS version)
- 2 Sim City (Windows version)
- 3 Medieval Europe
- 4 Ancient Asia
- 5 Wild West
- 6 Future USA
- 7 Future Europe
- 8 Moonbase
- 9 Terrain Editor



The three ages of a planet, the age of innocence, the age of commuter belt and the age of Milton Keynes.



THE IDEA BEHIND *Sim City* is simple but captivating: you take over and develop an expanse of land, hoping, in your role as Mayor, to transform it from an inconsequential village into the nation's capital. Starting with a budget (fixed at a sum dependant on the difficulty level you select), you try to build and lay out a good balance of residential, commercial and industrial areas, linking them with roads and railways, and ensuring a good supply of electricity. Raising funds by taxation, you try to battle with the likes of pollution, crime and traffic congestion, while ensuring your town becomes an attractive place to live, thus attracting more people, increasing the revenue from your taxes... you get the idea. Get it wrong and the population will start by being annoyed, and end up simply moving elsewhere.

As well as the economical and logistical problems there are the disasters to contend

with: fires, floods, plane crashes, whirlwinds and even rampaging monsters will do their utmost to destroy your good work, making you spend on repairs the money you were saving up for a sports stadium or a park. All very dull sounding, but it's extremely addictive. It's one of those games where you suddenly look up at 2am with a cold cup of tea next to you that you made four hours ago. And so to the new version...

What's the same?

You're still the Mayor of a patch of mud that you would like to do an Eliza Doolittle to. You still build things, demolish things, battle against all the same misfortunes and delight at the same triumphs, in the hope of finally making it big.

And what's different?

Absolutely everything, from the gameplay and the options to the level of complexity (it's about five million times more complicated). But by far the most obvious enhancement is the view of the land you're developing. All that top-down

ICON SEE CLEARLY

One of the easiest ways to show the kind of depth the new game goes to is to run you through that vast bank of icons staring balefully at you from the left of all those screenshots.

1 BULLDOZER Although this icon is still used to demolish (one click) and clear (two clicks) a square of land, it now has many more uses besides. It also represents your Capability Brown talents as well: you can use it to raise and lower land, and to flatten an area to a level selected by you. (Click on the level you want, then the squares you want changed to that level). It's also used to 'de-zone' land.

2 TREE Believe it or not, this adds trees to the landscape. The more times you click on the square of land, the more trees are added, from one tree per square to whole forests.

3 WATER This is used to turn areas of land into areas of water. It's a way of fine-tuning the rivers that are already present, or adding the odd spot of decorative wetness.

4 POWER BOLT This used to just signify the power lines. Now, holding it down will bring up a mini-menu with which you choose between power lines and power plants. There are now potentially nine power plants available to you (they become available to you as they did historically, and the newspaper keeps you in touch with developments). Instead of being restricted to coal or nuclear power, you now have the options of gas, oil, hydro-electric, solar, wind, microwave and fusion power.

5 TAP Water distribution is now just as important to the success of your city as power was in *Sim City*. The tap allows you to lay water pipes (see underground, overground...), and site water pumps, storage towers, sewage treatment and desalination plants.

6 PARTHENON This option is ghosted out until options become available to you. For example, when your village first becomes a town, Founders Day is announced and you're invited to build a mansion for yourself to live in. As you become more successful, you will be able to reward yourself by erecting a splendid statue of yourself, building a City Hall, and erecting vast Arcologies, huge frightening things whose exact use escapes me.

7 ROAD This is still used to build roads, but there are now more types of road available. Normal, single lane roads can be run together to create plazas (which look very nice when they get little lights alongside them). You can also build raised multi-lane highways complete with ramps to join them to more lowly roads; you can bore tunnels through hillsides and even build little bus depots so the poorer members of the public have transport.

8 RAILWAY TRACK The railway track builds good old fashioned rails, but can also now build underground railways (see underground, overground...), railway stations and underground stations.

9 SEAPORT/AIRPORT Builds seaports and airports – the difference being they're not of a set size, and so can be built a square at a time. They don't cost as much this way, and you can expand them as your city needs it.

10 HOUSE Housing (or residential space, to give it its correct title) now can be designated Light Residential or Heavy Residential areas, depending on whether you want poor ghettos or plush suburbs.

11 OFFICE Again, the commercial areas can be Light or Heavy...

12 FACTORY ...as can industrial areas.

13 MORTAR BOARD One of the big new developments in this version is that you'll be judged on how well-educated the people in your town are. To enable you to hold your head up and not be seen as 'a bit of a Clarke,' you'll have to build schools, universities, libraries and museums. This is where you select them.

14 LIGHT The emergency services and the correctional institutions. Build police stations, fire stations, hospitals and prisons with this. (Slap a prison down in the middle of your most exclusive development and watch the rich move out.)

15 BALLOONS Build the fun things in life – parks, zoos, sports stadiums, and brothels. What, no cinemas? No theatres?

16 SIGN Click on this and then on an area of land, and you can use it to remind yourself what the hell you were planning on doing when you put that small roundabout in the middle of nowhere.

17 QUESTION MARK AND ARROW Click on this and then on a square and you'll be shown a pop-up status window which will provide you with all sorts of information about the square, including its precise grid location, whether it's powered or not, whether pipes run beneath it and other stuff vital to the diligent town planner.

18 DIRECTIONAL ARROWS Since buildings are now three-dimensional, and could have all sorts of problems hidden behind them, you can now use these to rotate the map 90 degrees at a time.

19 TWO CROSSES AND A SIGHT The first two zoom the map in and out, and the third can be used to centre the picture on a particular square (very useful for precision revolving).

20 SIX INFORMATION ICONS Provide a wealth of facts and stats (see right for full breakdown).

21 RCI An at-a-glance view of the balance of residential, commercial and industrial zones in your city, and the demand for each. (The higher into the plus area the bar, the less you need of that type of zone.)

22 BUILDINGS Switches the buildings on and off, but leaves foundations visible.

23 SIGNS Toggles the display of the signs you've written for yourself on and off.

24 DETAILS Toggles on and off the display of the smaller items in the city, including roads, trees, power lines and railway track.

25 ZONES Show or hide designated 'zones' in the city.

26 UNDERGROUND This switches to underground planning, and displays underground railways, water supply pipes and any underground road tunnels you've built.



Architectural Exam. Question 1.
Does the picture show a subtle
blending of modern and neo gothic
principles or a bit of a bodge job?



INFORMATION ICONS

These six small icons, if clicked on and dragged to the right, can all be used to provide information on an absolute wealth of subjects. They can all be kept on-screen as separate windows (if you have the room).



1 MAP Hold the mouse down on this to show a small overhead map of the city. It can also be used to move quickly around the city, and it rotates as the city is rotated by the directional arrows. This mini-map has, in turn, its own range of icons which give information on a number of subjects tied in with areas of the city (it also alters the large display to reflect the info supplied):

A MAP shows the structures and zones of your city.

B ROAD SYMBOL shows roads, rail and traffic layouts and density.

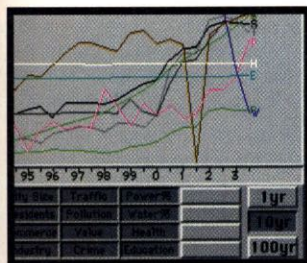
C POWER shows power distribution.

D TAP shows the water distribution.

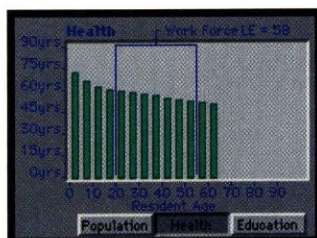
E PEOPLE shows population density and rate of growth by area.

F PERSON behind bars shows you the crime rate, the police power and the police stations.

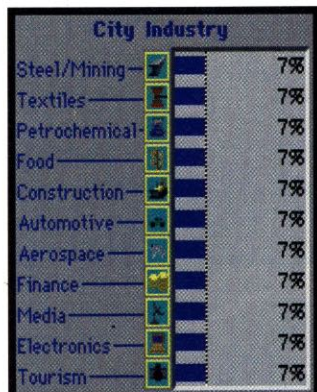
G FACTORY shows pollution levels.



2 GRAPH This shows the evolution and development (over a span of one, ten or 100 years) of city size, population, commerce, industry, traffic, pollution, land value, crime, availability of power and water, education and health.



3 PEOPLE Displays the education, population and health of each age group in your city.



4 FACTORIES Gives you information about the ten different industries now capable of running in your city; showing national demand, local tax rate and amount of each currently in your city. Industries available include steel, textiles, petrochemical, aerospace and automotive.

5 PLAYING BOARD Shows the names and sizes of your immediate neighbouring towns and cities, from where, hopefully, you will entice people to come and live in your own fair town.

6 MAN WITH TOP HAT This icon displays the current city ordinances which have been put into effect by the city council, and which will cost you a large wedge. For example, you might be running an advertising campaign to promote tourism and a public no-smoking policy. (See Budgets.)



plan-view stuff has gone right out the window. It's all rendered in sumptuous three dimensional 256 colour VGA graphics. You have proper hills and valleys and you can raise and lower it yourself, *Populous*-style. To allow for the fact that things will be hidden from your view behind the lush graphics, it's rotatable through 360 degrees in 90 degree steps. The graphical detail has improved tenfold: there are lights on airport runways, little street lamps and mini stop-signs at road junctions. The planes and helicopters even have shadows. There's a far wider range of buildings and facilities, including prisons, schools, universities, marinas and libraries. You can allocate high and low density residential, commercial and industrial zones, with irregularly shaped boundaries.

There are new and different objectives and more 'vital statistics'. The latter are key areas in which you must be successful: no longer is it sufficient merely to keep down crime, traffic jams, taxes and pollution. Education is now high on the list of priorities. No longer is it enough to merely make sure each home has power: water must now be provided to all, via pumping stations, desalinisation plants, water treatment works, storage areas and a whole network of pipes. Larger buildings are erected complete with their own pipes already laid beneath the ground; you have to link everything up and provide the pumps to get it all circulating. Yes, there is an underground view.

