

Sim City 2000

by Sandy Kettenhofen and Don Henson

REVIEW

As computer games for the Mac become more and more sophisticated it was a treat to see the release of **SimCity 2000 (SC2K)**. This is a massive rebuild and expansion of the overall concept first presented on the Mac in **SimCity**.

In 1989 the release of the original **SimCity** by Will Wright, *Maxis* and associates marked the birth of a classic in personal computer simulation. **SimCity** had a bird's eye view of a flat terrain in 1989 with various water and forest elements that were generated randomly to start planning your city. If the Sims (computer people) liked your management they would come and build a city in the areas that one assigned industrial, commercial or residential zoning status and associated infrastructure. This is where the simulation left what could be done in other ways and made a giant stride into the real potential of computer gaming and simulation. If one as mayor started to get lax in areas of traffic management, pollution or sundry other "details," the Sims would dismantle and move elsewhere or just let an area slide into slum like real estate. This was of course not good for the tax base, the cities source of operating capital. Computer generated artificial intelligence took a quantum leap forward from the random generated greater and lesser possibilities that never quite make it. So many computer games go little beyond simulating the concept of a previously existing board, card, or mechanical game

if not a direct copy. It is very refreshing to experience the results of concepts only possible on a computer and through creative thoughtful programming.

The Revolution, Part Two

SC2K comes with several pre-built cities and those who played the older version of **Sim City** can dive right in and play with little or no need to consult the manual. An experienced player does not need to go through the "set-up" if they want to get right into the "nuts and bolts" of city management.

Maxis has made **SC2K** very easy for the novice to learn. The manual comes with 3 "tutorials" which show the basic "how-to's" that will quickly enable the new player to establish and expand their new city. The first tutorial explains that as soon as the barren terrain is equipped with power, streets and designated zoning the Sims will move in and start building.

This is where the true fascination with **SC2K** comes to light. It is positively intriguing to watch the program as it shows the barren plots of land become inhabited. The buildings do not simply "appear," the program shows the process of construction as the building is erected. It is difficult to imagine that the programmers were not only able to show identifiable structures but to also show them under construction.

The building and city details don't stop there. In **SC2K** one can rotate the city to four 90 degree views.

The buildings and terrain all have another isometric view. Since the landscape is in 3-D, everything is quickly redrawn and what was in front is now in back or to the side. It seems a remarkable programming feat to put all this on one high-density disk in an age where entertainment programs can occupy 10 megabytes of hard drive space without a second thought.

All of the commands for building, equipping, and repairing the city are in a "toolbar" which can be located anywhere within the screen that the player chooses. The icons in the toolbox provide pictures that represent the different functions necessary for city management. Some of the icons have built in pull-down menus that list the variety of choices within each category. One can hold down the shift key and click on any icon button in the toolbar and get a complete description of what it will do.

Toolkit Supreme

Many of the tools will be familiar to those who have used the earlier version of **SimCity**.

The terrain is marked off into grids and each section of land can be zoned as either Residential, Commercial or Industrial. One can use the selected tool by clicking and dragging diagonally to make a rectangle that is to be zoned or other selected effect. This can be as big as you want and covers any non-level terrain, roads, or whatever else may be in the way of a pre-

Published by

Maxis

Designed by

Will Wright

Systems

Mac (IBM PC version due out soon)

Graphics

SVGA

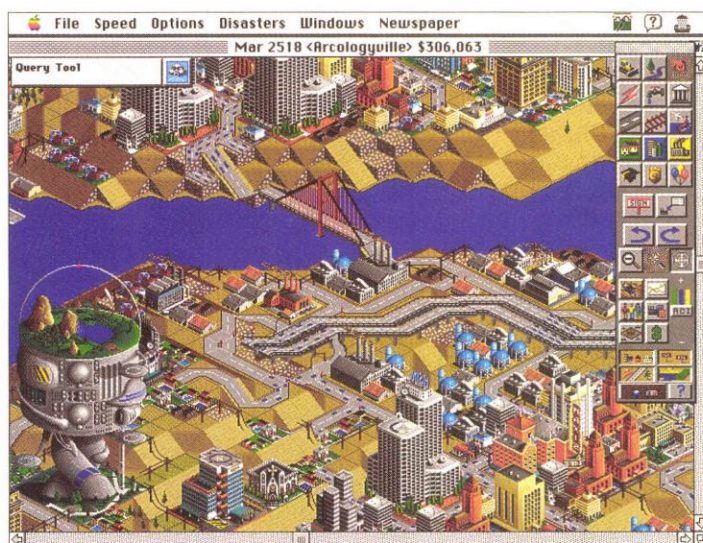
System Requirements

4MB RAM (2.5MB RAM free), mouse or trackball, hard disk, color monitor with 8-bit (256) color graphics

Mac: system 7.0 or higher.

Supports

LC, Performa, II, Centris and Quadra Series: Color Classic; Powerbook (160*, 165c, 180*, 180c, Duo e 210*, 230*)



set size. There are subcategories within these choices. The player can choose between dense or lightly populated zoning in each of these three types.

The bulldozer icon in **SC2K** has all the terrain editing features built in rather than as a separate program. One can raise or lower the countryside as one sees fit with its menu choices. One can of course still have the fun of using the bulldozer for urban renewal in direct clearing mode. The buttons for linear items like roads, rail, and pipelines can be placed much more easily in that they now highlight the area of squares where the road will be built when you drag the mouse and release the mouse button. This makes putting in straight roads and the various types of mass transit much easier.

As the city grows the citizens will begin to demand things from the government. They need the government to provide emergency services. They want schools for their children. They want recreational facilities such as stadiums and parks. As Mayor of the city, the player needs to keep informed as to what is going on within the city. The manner in which the player can keep abreast of what is happening is provided by several sources, one of which is the local newspaper. As new developments occur the newspaper will announce what is happening in the city as well as how the people are feeling.

Squeeze of the Hand

Another method of information gathering is by obtaining it directly from the city officials. In the budget window where it shows how much of the budget is allotted to each of the city services there is a window that can be selected to listen to what each of the city officials has to say about their department. The Fire Chief, the Chief of Police, the tax collector, the city planner, and various other officials all have their input as to what is needed in

their respective areas.

As in the original **SimCity**, there is a map window for input in **SC2K** as well. It gives one information about where the traffic is too heavy or an area that has pollution problems by clicking on the appropriate icon button and its sub-menu. This is a valuable tool in analyzing where things are going wrong when the newspapers become filled with stories about traffic, crime and so forth.

Obviously, all of the needs of the city cost money.

When a new city is started, there is money in the treasury, the amount dependent on the level of difficulty you choose as the starting point. Each segment of road, each line of electrical wire, each square of zoning costs a certain amount. As the city grows the increased population pays taxes and this provides income for the city. If the growth maintains a positive trend then the income from taxes is sufficient to support the city's needs. However, if a good balance is not maintained between residential, industrial and commercial occupants, then the community will not be able to support itself.

Since taxes provide income it would seem to be a good idea to zone huge areas for residential use. People will move into the houses, pay taxes and the city will grow. However, this model community is based upon the real world and as such these people have to be able to work to bring home money to pay the taxes.

Thus we have the need for industry to provide jobs. A good balance between industrial employers and residential is good in more than one way since industrial properties pay taxes also. However, the industries are producing "goods" and there needs to be a demand for what they produce. If there is no demand for these goods then the industrial companies will fail, not be able to stay in business, and thus the residents will be unemployed.

Herein lies the need for the commercial businesses to demand the goods from the industrial sector.

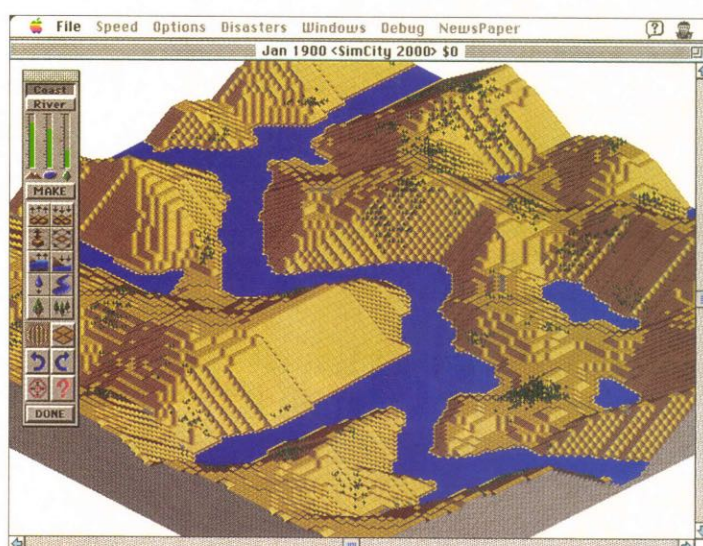
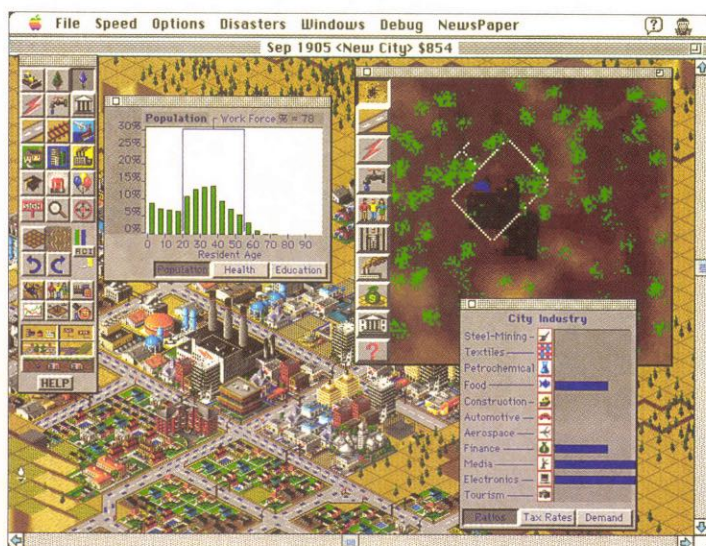
As you can see, it is the law of "supply and demand" which makes **SC2K** the challenge that it is.

A new twist in **SC2K** is that we aren't alone in our "little" town, we now have neighbors on all sides. This is interesting in many ways as a control to see how you are developing in comparison to your neighbors. Furthermore it provides other markets for the products of the factories and businesses in your city that makes the simulation even more realistic.

The concept is simple but the execution can become taxing (no pun intended) especially when all of the variables are added to the formula. Yet **SC2K** lets those familiar with the interface of **SimCity** start out in an intuitive manner. **SC2K** gives the player an abundance of measuring devices to gauge how well, or how poorly they're doing. Getting familiar with these measuring tools can take some time but it is entirely possible to build a successful city without fully understanding all the functions of all the tools. It can be a very rewarding "learn as you go" process.

The infrastructure of **SCK2** is much deeper, in that we now have the options and demands of such matters as water supply pipes, subways, and other interesting things lurking under our city in need of our innovative design and maintenance concepts. The city window is available in three levels of magnification, as well as the underground layer of pipes and subways. The tools are still functional at these various levels.

As the growth of the city reaches certain "milestones" the player is rewarded with certain achievements. After the population of a city reaches 2,000 the game rewards the player with a new house. As the Mayor of the city the player can then



place his house wherever desired. After the population reaches 10,000, 30,000, 90,000 and 120,000 there rewards as well.

Visual Jamming

The program is jam packed with visual rewards. As the Sims continue to build their city they include many structures and businesses that would be found in almost any real city. As the game progresses the discovery of these incredibly detailed representations can be quite intriguing. There is a drive-in movie theater, complete with cars and the latest from "SimAnt studios" on the screen. When a high-rise building is being constructed the construction crew brings in an enormous crane with which to build the upper stories. The "squares" that represent sloping areas even have rubble and such things that are affected by Mr. Gravity, slumped to the bottom, rather than covering the entire area as on one of the level tiles. There are convenience stores, luxury homes, shabby tenements and warehouse districts all depending on what the Sims perceive is appropriate for the area as you are arranging the rest of the infrastructure and zoning. When the airport is constructed a traffic helicopter flies over the city and reports on the traffic situation. If the player wants an "extra" they should use the "centering tool" over the middle



of the traffic helicopter and click the mouse button. If the tool is placed correctly both the player and the pilot of the helicopter will receive a surprise.

As with most of the "Sim" games from *Maxis*, there seems to be a penchant for extras hidden within the program. These are often referred to as "easter eggs" in the world of computer software. Most of these "easter eggs" in the previous *Maxis*

games have consisted of four letters. Just to get you started type "joke" (without the quotes) during the game, now see what all else you can discover.

The audio in the program is high quality and interesting as well. This ranges from "busy city" background music to all the sound effects that accompany a community. Sirens for the police and fire departments, school bells for the schools,

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ambulance sirens for the hospital and playground noises when a park is built. There are airplane noises for planes flying nearby, not to mention the squeal of the airplane's rubber tires when the plane touches down, or the explosion when there is an airplane crash.

Mac Details

On the whole SC2K is very stable

operating under System 7.0.1 and 7.1. There are some cosmetic difficulties such as trouble getting the roads to conform to the terrain and still lead somewhere. There are also some glitches in other areas of graphics and sound that show up periodically. In rotating the city, sometimes the buildings (especially the large ones) are just dark brown squares on the ground in the rotated view. The sports teams have

their stories "written up" in the newspapers using a singular verb, while I can't think of many stadium type sports teams that have a singular name to go along with this. Maybe the proof readers and testers were fans of the Florida pro basketball team names? There are also some "features" that I am not sure are intentional. If the player inadvertently puts a power line down the center of a road, the power lines do not appear but the city budget is charged as if it had been done. Conversely, this also occurs on some squares that are occupied by power lines and the player attempts to put down a road. There are times when the road does not get built but again, the city budget is charged. Maybe this simulation is too realistic in this aspect.

SimCity 2000 is entirely addicting. Once the game begins, the movements of the city and the challenge of well managed expansion captivates the player. SC2K will be responsible for many "all nighters" in which the player will suddenly realize that it is no longer night, but early in the morning. I can think of very few sequels that surpass the original, but this one definitely does. **SimCity 2000** is a great addition to anyone's software library, and it will be a special treat for those not previously familiar with the concept of Sims. □

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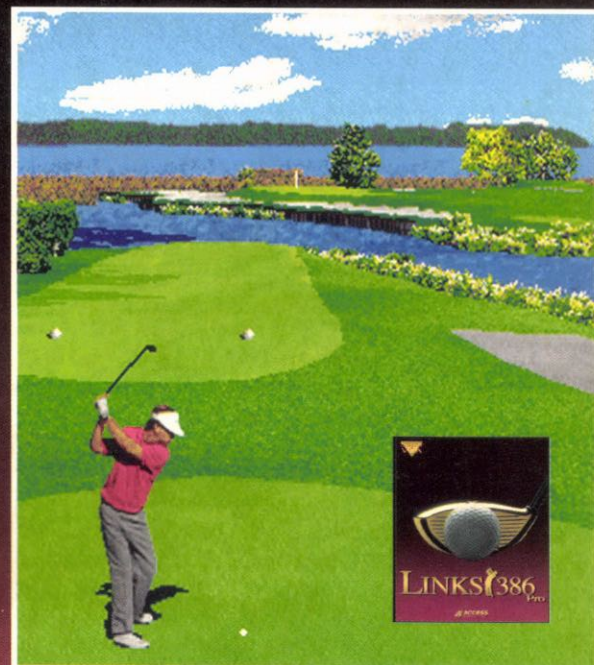
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