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Watching television is a national pastime and so it's no surprise to find so many spin-off products fighting for space on shop shelves over the festive season. You can buy everything from videos and cuddly toys to sound-tracks, Teletubbies duvets and, of course, computer software.

As most of us know what our nearest and dearest's favourite TV shows are, a spin-off CD-ROM could be the ideal Christmas present. But what can you get? The simple answer is plenty. Take a stroll through your local software store and you'll find everything from tepid sports quizzes, hosted by the likes of Des Lynham, to exciting shooting games featuring your favourite cartoon characters. But games are not the only type of program. Educational programs are big business, and there are dozens of other titles that defy categorisation other than being called 'multimedia'.



Over the next few pages we've rounded up the best of the bunch, along with one or two that should definitely be left to gather dust.

From the Simpsons to Star Trek, you can now bring your favourite TV programmes to the PC with a range of spin-off software titles. We tune in to see what you can buy this Christmas

The Simpsons Cartoon Studio

Without doubt, *The Simpsons* is one of the finest cartoon creations of all time.

With its well-rounded characters (literally so in Homer's case) and great storylines, it's little wonder that the cartoon series has enjoyed massive worldwide success for many years.

Now, with a little help from Fox Interactive's Cartoon Studio and your PC, you can create your own animated Simpson adventures. To aid the process you can choose from thousands of hand-drawn

animation 'cels' and a good collection of 'sets'. There's also a huge selection of Simpsons' voice clips and sounds taken from classic episodes.

Putting all these elements together to make a 'full-length' (meaning a few minutes) cartoon is laborious, and it can be frustrating at times, but the results are well worth the effort. This is a highly polished program that any Simpsons fan would be glad to have.

● £19.99 (inc VAT)

● Electronic Arts (distributor for Fox Interactive): 01753 549442

The Simpsons Cartoon Studio

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Virtual Springfield

Virtual Springfield is not

quite in the same category as its stablemate The

Simpsons Cartoon Studio.

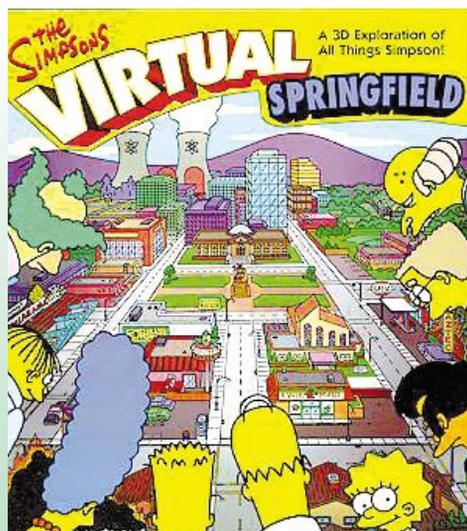
Though it looks wonderful (in a Simpsony sort of way) and runs smoothly, sadly the idea behind it is flawed.

As a tourist in the Simpsons' hometown of Springfield, you find yourself wandering the streets, sightseeing. You can enter all the local establishments, including Moe's bar, Apu's Kwik-E-Mart and the Simpsons' own house, and interact with any characters you happen to come across.

The trouble is that Springfield is a small town and it's not long before you've seen almost everything there is to see. After that, you'll probably never want to 'play' it again. So, while it's briefly entertaining, you certainly wouldn't want to spend your hard-earned cash on it. Buy Cartoon Studio instead.

● £19.99 (inc VAT)

● Electronic Arts (distributor for Fox Interactive): 01753 549442



Virtual Springfield

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Telly addicts

Sightings Ufopedia

Subscribers to cable or satellite television will probably have seen the *Sightings* programme, which exposes (supposedly) extra-terrestrial encounters. Well, this is the official spin-off CD-ROM, a multimedia collection of material gathered from the numerous screened episodes.

Undoubtedly, its content will go some way to convincing sceptics that there really is 'something out there'. Sadly, though, we doubt few will ever bother to find out exactly what's 'in there' because the presentation is both dull and confusing.

- £29.99 (inc VAT)
- Anglia Multimedia: 0500 600191

Sightings Ufopedia

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Live & Kicking – Show Maker

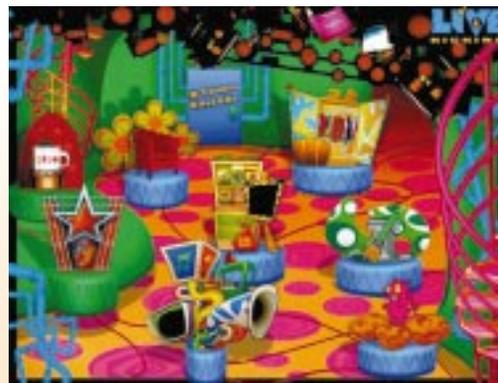
Though she might have a tough battle keeping the Radio One Breakfast Show on top of the pile in the face of competition from Chris Evans' rival Virgin slot, Zoe Ball reigns supreme with *Live & Kicking*, the Saturday morning kids' television programme.

Along with sidekick Jamie Theakston, Zoe fronts this wacky CD-ROM where kids of mouse-holding age and beyond can have a go at creating their own *Live & Kicking* show. The program is awash with gaudy colours and loud music, and the awful jokes flow like running tap water. However, it's obvious that the developers have put lots of effort into making this a fun product because the presentation is slick and the pace is fast and furious. Kids will absolutely love it.

- £29.99 (inc VAT)
- BBC Multimedia Sales: 01483 268888
- Enquiries: 0181 576 2112

Live & Kicking – Show Maker

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



TV on the Web

The Internet isn't yet as popular as television but it's certainly proving a hit with wired TV fans around the world. Web sites devoted to television programmes are popping up almost daily so you'll doubtless find something of interest online.

Our first pointer is to **Andrew Wiseman's Television Room** (www.users.dircon.co.uk/~bandc/a.wiseman/625), which is quite simply one of the finest TV-related Web sites. It's a barrage of well-researched texts giving behind-the-scenes information on the five terrestrial channels and many of the popular shows.

Though not quite as pretty as Andrew's effort, **UKTV** (www.uktv.com) is also worth a visit. The site doesn't have much content itself but it plays host to a list of Web links to hundreds of popular television programmes.

Finally, soap fans might want to take a trip down **The Street** (www.coronationstreet.co.uk) or make a quick sortie into **Brookside Close** (www.connect.org.uk/brookside), but **EastEnders** junkies visiting either of the BBC's two sites (www.bbc.co.uk or www.beeb.co.uk) will find nothing to fuel their habit. However, rather than going cold turkey, surf on over to **EastEnderNet** (www.vrtx.co.uk/users/andy/een).



Wallace & Gromit – Fun Pack

Who in this country hasn't got a soft spot for Wallace and Gromit? The clay pair's animated antics have made us 'ooh' and 'ahh' for a number of years now. Shrewdly, the BBC is cashing in on their popularity this yuletide by releasing this tie-in CD-ROM.

To be honest, the disc is a bit of a mishmash – a couple of games, a few screen savers and some video clips – but it's all well presented and, at just a penny under £20, it's cracking value.

- £19.99 (inc VAT)
- BBC Multimedia Sales: 01483 268888
- Enquiries: 0181 576 2112

Wallace & Gromit – Fun Pack

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Pingu

Pingu might not be the most coherent character on children's television, but the cutesy penguin's warbling certainly makes more sense than any one of the Teletubbies.

This fine CD-ROM boasts 10 activities for tiny-tots and five screen savers aimed ostensibly at youngsters, although we're quite sure that kids will tire of Pingu's tube-preserving antics long before their parents do. The activities range from simple action games to challenging alphanumerical puzzles, and all benefit from bright colours, jolly tunes and Pingulese (and, thankfully, English) instructions.

- £24.99 (inc VAT)
- BBC Multimedia Sales: 01483 268888
- Enquiries: 0181 576 2112

Pingu

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

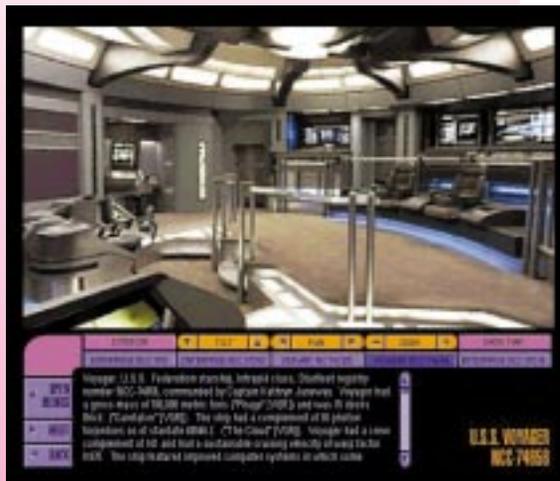
Star Trek Captain's Chair

This disc boldly goes where no other disc has gone before – and alienates all but the most devoted Trekkers on the way.

Put simply, it's a techie Trekker's dream. You can take the helm of any one of five starships from the various series, ranging from the original USS Enterprise NCC-1701 to the state-of-the-science-fiction-art Voyager. Once in the hot seat of your chosen craft, you have a 360-degree panoramic view of the bridge and can push buttons and twiddle knobs to your heart's content. Each twiddle and push results in a response, which is often nothing more than a positive 'zap' or 'ping' or a scolding 'buzz'. You can also examine in detail the schematics of the five ships and explore the bridges from different viewpoints.

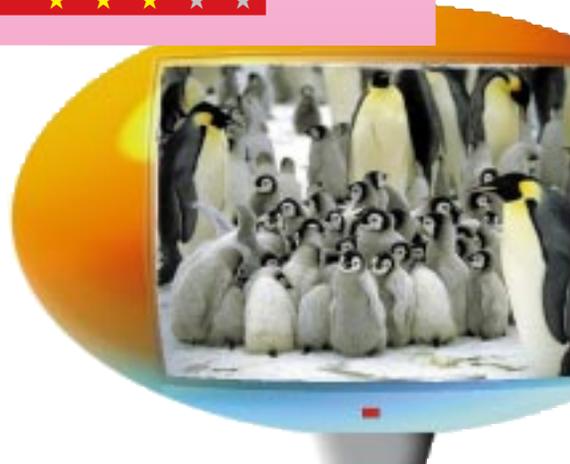
Although it's certainly not a product that has mass appeal, we're sure hardened Trek-types will enjoy it.

- £34.99 (inc VAT)
- ZABLAC
- Entertainment: 01626 332233



Star Trek Captain's Chair

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



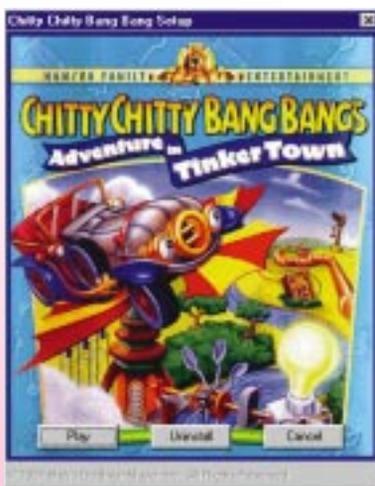
Chitty Chitty Bang Bang's Adventure in Tinker Town

Poor old Chitty. Nearly 30 years after Dick Van Dyke and chums first turned their fine four-fendered friend into a spick and span super-car, the rust has returned and he's lost a wheel. Fortunately, he's been befriended by that most essential of Nineties automotive accessories: an airbag. But this is no ordinary airbag. Just like a German politician, this airbag walks and talks and thinks that he's in full control. And he's called Otto.

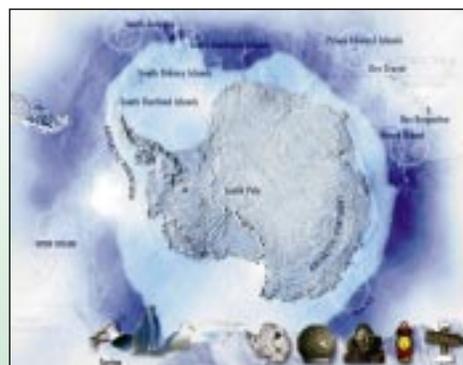
The problem is that Otto makes mistakes and this is where your children come in. They must take Otto by the hand and help him get Chitty up and running again. With that done, they can take a trip around the beautifully drawn Tinker Town, solving puzzles and watching the story unfold as they go.

Adventure in Tinker Town is an educational game aimed at children aged four to eight and the difficulty level of the puzzles reflects that age group. However, the humour level, colourful graphics and non-linear nature of the journey can be enjoyed by all.

- £24.99 (inc VAT)
- Eidos: 0181 636 3000



Chitty Chitty Bang Bang's Adventure
Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Attenborough's Antarctic

Leaving the land of make-believe we head across to the continent of harsh reality with Attenborough's Antarctic, the semi-educational CD-ROM focusing on the BBC's recent *Life in the Freezer* television series.

In essence it is an interactive guided tour of the Antarctic with most of the content coming from the television programme. However, many of 2,000-plus featured photographs are exclusive to the disc. David Attenborough has been drafted in to do the voiceovers and links, which means the disc retains some of the drily-humorous character that made the series so absorbing.

- £29.99 (inc VAT)
- BBC Multimedia Sales: 01483 268888
- Enquiries: 0181 576 2112

Attenborough's Antarctic
Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Des Lynham's Result

BBC Multimedia has tried, but failed, to bring Des 'The Guv'nor' Lynham to life in this tedious offering. It's a sports quiz, pure and simple, which is in itself not a bad thing because there are plenty of sports fans out there.

All the major sports are covered, from relaxing golf to adrenaline-pumping Formula One racing, and there are 3,000 questions in total. Some feature audio and video clips, and the game can be played in single- or two-player mode, or in teams.

The trouble is that although Des does his laid-back best to articulate the questions, poor presentation and a lack of variety overshadow his efforts. Our low score includes a point simply for Mr Lynham's fine performance.

- £29.99 (inc VAT)
- BBC Multimedia Sales: 01483 268888
- Enquiries: 0181 576 2112



Des Lynham's Result
Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Mastermind – The Ultimate Challenge

And we move from the tedium-inducing to the tension-filled with Mastermind. Yes, you too can now seat your behind where over a thousand bottoms have been before: the black leather chair!

Feel the shiver crawl down your spine as the screen dims, the theme tune (*Approaching Menace*) resonates and Iceland's most famous product since frozen burgers, Magnus Magnusson, appears on your monitor. 'You have two minutes on your chosen specialised subject.'

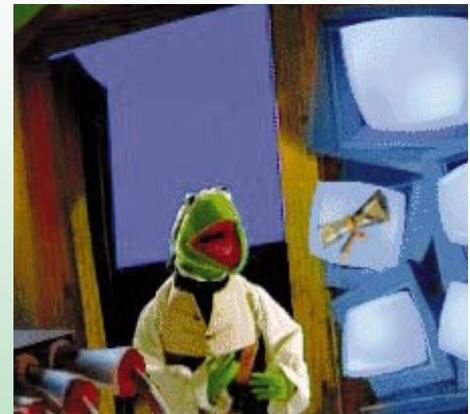
It's all here – with more than 5,000 highbrow posers for you to plough through in your quest for the 'ultimate' prize: the Caithness Bowl.

Once you've started, you'll want to finish.

- £29.99 (inc VAT)
- BBC Multimedia Sales: 01483 268888
- Enquiries: 0181 576 2112

Mastermind – The Ultimate Challenge

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Muppet Treasure Island

Those furry stars of the small screen, the Muppets, have appeared on PC screens before but Treasure Island is their biggest and best outing yet.

A three-disc epic, Treasure Island is a graphical adventure starring all the loved – and loathed – Muppet characters, including the irrepressible Kermit/Miss Piggy double-act. Oh, and that risible Scot Billy Connolly makes a cameo appearance too.

The game is both imaginative and fun, with gloriously bright and detailed graphics, and several weeks, if not months, worth of gameplay.

- £29.99 (inc VAT)
- Activision: 01895 456700

Muppet Treasure Island

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Beavis and Butthead in Wiener Takes All

'Uh, huh huh huh.' It pained us, but we felt compelled to start this review with those four 'words' because they will be instantly familiar to any fan of the animated stars of MTV's late-night music show, *Beavis and Butthead*.

The two uncouth youths bicker and banter in the background while you work your way through 750 inane show-related questions ('In what part of your body did you put a pair of dice once?').

If you like Beavis and Butthead – and some members of the *What PC?* team do – then like our colleagues you'll undoubtedly find Wiener Take All funny for a while.

However, those not enamoured of their particular brand of scatological and sexual innuendo-laden ramblings should steer well clear.

- £19.99 (inc VAT)
- Virgin Interactive: 0171 368 2266

Beavis and Butthead in Wiener Takes All

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

