eview by Pete Burkindine

Title: SimCity 3000
Version: 1.0.0
Developer: Maxis
Price: $49.95 (includes Strategy Guide)
Contact Info: http://www.simcity.com/
Genre: Simulation Game
Requirements: 200 MHz PowerPC or G3, Mac OS 7.5.5 or later (8.1 or later for G3s), 32 MB RAM (64 MB recommended), 4x CD-ROM, 260 MB free hard disk space

ew Version Every 1,000 Years

Sim aficionados, rejoice! It's here, it's here! Hurrah! I quote:

Lo, and the Sims did dance and partake of the sweetmeats, and they were pleased, for their world was somewhat more realistic.
-Book of Sim

Yes, your Sims can finally enjoy the foretold metaphysical awakening , or something, if you plunk them into SimCity 3000, the next convolution of the game that made "sim" a nerdly household word.

Frankly, I'm the most biased person in the world when it comes to reviewing this game. I love simulations, I love Maxis, and I've got a thing for llamas like you wouldn't believe. But, look, I only gave it four stars! I must be objective, right? Well, unfortunately, it's because of some serious

shortcomings and flaws that hurt this game. Although it's a great game overall, I'm obligated by my Reviewer's Oath to mention the things with which I was not happy.

hat's New?

SimCity 3000 has tons of new features. Gameplay will be familiar to any fan of the series, but there are many new tools and problems to be aware of. Let's start with...

The Map
Well, first off, it's huge. You can make maps in SimCity 3000 (SC3K) that are four times larger than the largest maps in SimCity 2000 (SC2K). You can build tiny islands, huge cities, hamlets, or suburbs — it's entirely up to you. No two cities will grow up the same way.

You set up the basics of your new city just as you did in SC2K, but with a few improvements. You select a map size, a difficulty, mayor and city names, and drop yourself into the map editor. The map editor has a cool new feature, seen hyeah:

t lets you pick the features you want — each side of the map can be water or land, and the center can have a river, lake, or mountain on it. You still have the familiar sliders at your disposal to control the quantities of greenery, water, and hills. You can make a volcano island with corresponding huts, or a nearly-pristine flatland upon which you'll build your megalopolis.

The map editor lost a vital feature, too — you can't zoom in or out! No explanation is offered in the manual or on the website. This is what I consider a stunning and annoying omission.

SC3K includes a collection of files to show you how things are done and get you on the right track:
• Complete cities, including a tutorial and a huge, complete megalopolis.
• "Starter Towns," small city fragments based on real city planning principles that you can use to make a city that works from scratch.
• Terrains from real cities around the world, like Sydney, Australia and St. Louis, MO. Can you match the accomplishments of the real mayors?

SC3K can also import SC2K cities, so you can give those Sims a breath of fresh technology and see if there's more growth in your old map.

Landscaping
The landscaping tools are about the same as they were in SC2K — you can raise, lower, or level terrain and add water or trees. A nice new feature prevents you from levelling terrain that would destroy buildings. Otherwise, nothing's new here.

Zoning
Although the basic process is about the same as it always was, you have a few new zoning options. Medium has been added to light and heavy densities when zoning for residential, commercial, and industrial areas. You can still zone for an airport or seaport, with the same polluting, ugly results as in SC2K.

The buildings that develop are different based on land values and population. You will only see small buildings, even in high density zoning , until there are enough people to justify larger ones. You can finally build your industry farther away from your residential zones, boosting land values and decreasing sim-whining. You can even declare buildings historical in SC3K, so Ma's Pie Shop and Flea Market will still be standing in 2075.

New in SC3K is the Landfill zoning option. Sims in SC3K produce trash, and if you don't do something about it, they'll throw it on the ground behind their homes and businesses. This is possible because many SC3K buildings include "spacer tiles" — small areas behind their homes where they can grow a garden, build a swingset for the kids, or make a huge, disgusting trash pile. Landfill zoning shunts the problem — it saves land values in your city by letting your Sims make a bigger, more disgusting trash pile off to the side. Landfills are hard on your city. They take a long time to decompose, and they're ugly — no one will live anywhere near one. There are better, albeit more expensive, ways to get rid of trash, discussed in the Utilities section right down there under the word "Utilities." See it? Right there? Go, grasshopper, go!

tilities
Yeah, here! Good job! You're so smart, you're bound to appreciate the new utilities capabilities of SC3K. First, power lines are all but a thing of the past. You can still build high-tension lines to give power to distant Sims and buildings, but you don't have to worry about getting power to every square. The power lines radiate power to buildings up to two squares away, and any powered building can power buildings up to five squares away. You have no reason to lay lines, unless you decide to plunk

your smelly, polluting oil power plants on the other side of the map from your Sims. There are, as always, an assortment of power plants at your disposal (once they've been invented, of course).

The water utility in SC3K is almost identical to SC2K. The only important difference is that the subway and water pipes are now displayed in different views, so it's easier to keep track of what's been set up and what hasn't.

The garbage utilities are structures you can build to deal with your trash instead of dumping it in a landfill. You can build recycling centers to decrease the amount of trash in the first place, and incinerators to convert your garbage directly into air pollution. Hey, at least it doesn't take up tiles!

The "Man" and the Public Good
Police and fire stations are pretty much the same as they ever were, but now you can also build jails to keep the criminals off the streets and crime in the gutter. If you fund your police stations well enough, the cops will even become oppressive overlords and beat your city's children!

Schools, colleges and hospitals are also about the same. Build a lot and watch your Sims get smarter, healthier and more expensive — nearly everything has a maintenance cost in SC3K. You can also add a massive university, turning your city into a college town and raising education levels a lots.

ewards and Landmarks
Ever since the original SimCity, the Sims have honored the mayor with goodies. First it was just the Mayor's House, then SC2K featured six rewards, including a statue and City Hall. SC3K has seventeen — I'll tell you there's a courthouse. The rest, you'll have to find on your own.

Beyond the rewards are the opportunities — buildings you can put up to make some cash for the city. Usually, that cash comes at a cost, as in the toxic waste recycling center. Who would want to be anywhere near it?   Not me, and not your Sims — but cash is tight in this game, and the sleazeball who wants to build it will pay a pretty penny each month to keep the building in your city.

Another new feature is the landmark. Landmarks are real-world buildings you can add to your city for visual spice. The only effect a landmark will have on your Sims is mild initial shock at seeing the Parthenon appear in their town overnight. The Space Needle, the Arch, the Empire State Building and a whole lot more are there to pick through, and you can have up to ten in every city.

Petitioners, Neighbors and Dealing
The life of a mayor is much more harried in SC3K — constant haranguing from your cartoony citizens alerts you to every misdeed. They'll petition at the drop of a hat to get lower taxes, shuttle service for the elderly, or even absurdities, like eliminating parking tickets. It's your call to listen or not, but the Sims will notice. This is also the medium by which the opportunistic businessmen will hit you up for a site for their toxic waste plants, megamalls, etc.

Your neighbors are much more interesting in SC3K than they were in SC2K. You can connect your roads, highways, rails and subways to them to boost tourism, and you can connect your water pipes and power lines to them to arrange deals. If you produce too much water, electricity or trash, you can sell it to your neighbors (and vice versa). It's a great source of income, but the deals are expensive to get out of.

Advising and Budgeting
SC3K has a set of cartoony advisors who instruct you in the mayoral arts and tell you what you need to change to get back on track. They have their own personalities, and some will selfishly give you advice that benefits their department at the expense of the treasury. It's your call to listen, but they're usually right.

Budgeting in SC3K is a little smarter than SC2K, but it's roughly the same. The currency in SC3K is the Simolean, a clever way of explaining why it only costs 130 "Simoleans" to run a police station for a year. Your deals with your neighbors and the businessmen change your income and expenses, and city ordinances can bring in money or waste it for the public good. You can set separate tax levels for residential, commercial and industrial residents, and use tax incentives to encourage high-tech industry or farm development.

Disasters
SC3K actually has less disasters than SC2K. Trashing a city is still fun, but I miss the variety.   Flood and Air Crash have disappeared entirely, and the Monster has been replaced by an Alien attack. You can still turn disasters on and off in the preferences. There is an interesting new feature, the Warning Siren, that you can use to warn your Sims to get off the streets when you know a disaster is coming. If you hit it enough times, they'll stop paying attention — then, you can really nuke 'em!

Months to Days
Months are now days. Maxis moved from measuring Sim time in months to measuring in days, and this makes the years pass slowly — torture when you're short on dough. Typically, three or four days pass each second at full speed, whereas SC2K can get through an entire year in a few seconds. It's

more realistic, but it can wear you down when you just want time to pass quickly.

nterface/Gameplay

Now that we're through with the "What's the big deal?" section, we need to talk about some of the dirty details of SC3K. The most important (and problematic) is the all-new interface. I'll include one sample screenshot of it — don't say I never did you any favors.

on't worry, the game looks a lot better than that. We had to compress the image. Next month when we move to an online format, I'll have space to let you see full-screen, full-color pictures. But this month, you still had to download the issue…

The interface? Well, it's a Windows port, and it really shows. From the white cursor to the file dialogue you see above, it's obvious there was no effort to make this a Mac game. Every filename even has an extension (e.g. mycity.sc3).

I like to think of it as the SimOS, though, because, for the most part, it's very attractive and usable (unlike Windows). I'll talk you around it real quick, starting   in the bottom left corner of this picture.

• The News Ticker — The News Ticker replaces the newspaper in SC3K. You get constant updates about your Sims' desires, quick reports on problems in the city and bad jokes from the guy who had to write the ticker.

• Stats — Just below the ticker is a selection of information you can use. The city name, population, treasury and date are always visible and convenient.

• Speed Controls — You can pause or start the simulator and set it to four different speeds with this doohickey.

• Layers Views — You can use the Layers View button to bring up a dialogue that lets you quickly remove trees, transportation, buildings and more from your view of the city. You can also switch to the underground views of the subway or water pipes, and various views showing crime, pollution and the like on the main map (instead of the smaller map available elsewhere).

• RCI Indicator — It's exactly the same as it used to be. The RCI indicator tells you what kind of zoning to do (residential, commercial or industrial) to satisfy demand.

• Views Controls — You can zoom in or out, rotate the map, and turn gridlines off and on here. You can also get rid of the entire interface temporarily, to give you an unobstructed view of your city, with the button in the lower right.

• The Building Commands — This isn't a manual, so I won't go into detail. The buttons along the right bring up submenus of buttons that build various structures, zones, etc. It's an attractive and common-sense way to organize the vast number of different things you have to build to make a working city.

The mouse pointer in SC3K is usually a cartoony representation of whatever you're trying to build. When nothing's selected, it's a small target that you can use to re-center the view. You have to hold control and click the mouse button to scroll around the view — there are no scroll arrows (though arrow keys work). Since I have a Kensington Orbit (the Quasi-Official Mouse Substitute of the Apple Wizards Staff™), it's no problem for me — I just right-click and drag to scroll around. It's kind of annoying, but not unbearable, to have to hold Control every time you want to move the view around. Or do what Erik does — use the arrow keys.

The overall interface is a peculiar mix of bubbly, cute functionality and frightening Windows artifacts. I like using it pretty well, until I see an open/save dialog.

raphics

The graphics are beautiful. Every element of the game has been pre-rendered in 3D, with enormous attention to detail. There are different trees for different terrains. Cars, construction vehicles, and cop cars roam the streets, merge into highway traffic and stop for pedestrians. Zoom all the way out to see clouds floating over your city. Zoom in to see Sims walk to work or use the subway, where trains whiz through the tunnels in full view. The interface is well-designed and blends in beautifully with the atmosphere Maxis is trying to create — industrious and silly at the same time. Landmarks are great replicas of the real buildings they're supposed to represent, and they really spruce up a city. Visually, this game is a knockout.

The only problem is, with everything rendered (from trees to water pipes), it can take a while to draw a city. If you scroll quickly around your map, most of your screen will fill with hundreds of light blue cubes that slowly redraw into the correct structures. It allows you to scroll quickly, and that's why it's there, but it can detract from the realism somewhat. Unless you live in Boise — that place is weird.

ound

The music in SC3K is great. You have a choice of one of a dozen CD-quality audio tracks to listen to, or you can let SC3K play them randomly. Each track is very different from the others, but most are a sort of fast-paced city jazz   that mixes perfectly with the interface and gameplay to suck you into the game — SC3K rates high on the "Oh my gosh, it's dawn" meter. The sound effects are great, if a little annoying — I can't listen to the sounds of traffic for more than a minute without getting a serious headache. Incidentally, Maxis is selling a soundtrack CD. If you like the music as much as I do, it's a good buy.

erformance

This game sucks cycles. It requires a pretty new computer to run at all, and even then it works best with minimal extensions. I'm using a beige G3/300, and I find gameplay very snappy when running with minimal extensions and

really quite playable with everything on. As far as multitasking goes, you might as well quit everything — there's no way to get back to the Finder without quitting (another example of this game's Windows heritage).

The only thing that's really slow in SC3K is laying long lengths of road (or pipe, high-tension wires, etc). If you run two full-map tracts of pipe right next to each other on the largest map, you can expect to go microwave a TV dinner and make it back in time to see the mouse come back to life.

heating

Let's face it: it's fun to cheat at SimCity. I'm not condoning it, of course — you'll only be proud of the city you make honestly. Still, it's fun to see what you might make with unlimited funds or access to every building. The folks at Maxis have a page set up with most of the cheat codes, and I stumbled over a few more at Happy Puppy Games. You can make everything free, get a $100,000 one time "donation" from Cousin Vinnie or force a swarm of aliens to trash your city (if you're into that sort of thing). If there is a code that gives you money every time, Maxis isn't telling — most of the old codes just send you insults via the News Ticker.

AT?

BAT is the Building Architect Tool, the new generation of the SimCity Urban Renewal Kit, which let you create your own buildings in SC2K. And guess what? They aren't going to make a Mac version! Does that push your buttons? Do you believe, as I do, that Mac users ought to be able to express their (much greater) creativity in building form? Tell Maxis! If they hear from enough loyal Mac users (who buy the game, of course), they might change their minds! It certainly affected my view of this game.

Click the hand to the right to e-mail maxis and tell them you want BAT!

imCity Online

imCity's website has a host of features to make the game more interesting and fun. If we can convince Maxis to develop BAT for Mac, we'll have access to thousands of user-designed buildings. There are also thousands of user cities and terrains, and an assortment of extra landmarks you can add to your game. There's also a BBS and chat section where you can trade ideas for cities with other users and gripe about features you want in SC4K. The site also features an online version of SimCity Classic, but it only runs under Windows. What's the deal, Maxis? Mac users, it's our responsibility to remind Maxis that they have a following among Mac gamers. Buy SC3K, then e-mail Maxis to remind them where their roots are!

hat I'd Like to See

Well, it's not the next big thing in sim, but SC3K is a huge leap from SC2K. I think the new interface (with some pro-Mac tweaking) is worth the price of the game, and the host of new buildings and fun things should delight any fan of the series. Still, there are things I'd like to see added.

First, I'd like to see a way to get feedback from individual Sims — a talk tool, kind of like the one in Afterlife, that would let you get a peek at the problems and personalities of your residents.

Second, I have fantasized for a long time about a combination of all the games in the sim genre. I'd like to see SC4K featuring the ability to zoom in until you're controlling individual Sims (a la The Sims) or building individual office buildings in 3D (the next logical step in the SimTower/YootTower progression). More ambitious than that, I'd like to see zooming out until you're looking at the whole SimEarth. You could control hundreds of cities at the same time, and manage the ecosystem of the planet as well. Whatever you're not working on could be managed by your advisors, who could come to you with their questions. Sure, it would take a supercomputer to run, but wouldn't that be cool? Okay, fine, it's a pipe dream, but you already read it, suckah!

Editor's Note: I've always wanted SimCopter and SimGolf to be integrated. When the pressures of Simming get too demanding, wouldn't it be great to fly around your city or play a relaxing 18 holes?

Third, how about more disasters? A terrorist goes after City Hall, a ten-car pileup on the interstate, poison in the water supply — the possibilities are endless. You'd think programmers strange enough to include hundreds of llama references in every game would be coming up with hundreds of great ways to whack Sims.

his Best of All Possible Worlds

What a great time to be alive! Computing is fast and cheap, and simulation games are plentiful and well-made. Sure, I guess the economy's good, too... and crime's down... but I'm a nerd! What do I care for your "real world?" I can now create a fake city realistic enough to be built in the real world! Every man, woman, and child in the world can be a city planner, an architect, a composer and so much more if they'll just learn to eschew "social contact" and huddle in front of their monitor fidgeting their mousing hand nervously. Who's with me? Good! Seek out your HMO's favorite shrink, and then get out of the house for once!

Should you buy SC3K? Heck yes! It's one of the best (and most reusable) games you'll ever buy (maybe not the most original, but the evolution of a great idea is usually an even better buy). It's not expensive, and you get a strategy guide to help you build better cities for free. Most importantly, you're sending the message to Maxis that Mac gaming is a valid and successful area to develop their software for — valid enough to get them to make their next interface Mac-inspired, instead of an unfortunate Windows derivative. And BAT, I want BAT!

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