

# SimTown

The sacred cow that is SimCity 2000 is being milked, but will the result turn sour? Kids get the chance to play social planner with this new 'software toy'.

Today is a good day in Sarajevo. The inhabitants are walking around saying things like, 'I'm feelin' good all over,' and, 'Things couldn't be better.' Life is peaceful, life is fun. Everyone's having a great time eating burgers and pizzas, and frolicking with their pet penguins.

Unfortunately, the Sarajevo we're talking about is not the one that has been held under siege by a man called Ratko for the past few years. No, this Sarajevo exists only on a Mac and was created using SimTown, the kiddie version of SimCity 2000.

Aimed at the 8 to 12 year old age group, SimTown is part of a range from Maxis called Software Toys For Kids, but don't let this marketing hyperbole fool you – SimTown is, in fact, a game.

Terrain tools. Clicking this gives you access to roads, paths, parks, ponds, sandpits, trees, bushes and statues.

The whole idea of SimTown is... you guessed it, to build a town. Start playing and the program sets you up with an empty grid map (which you see from an isometric 3D viewing angle) and a range of point-and-click tools with which to create your own settlement. You can plonk houses down wherever you like, lay roads faster than John Gummer, and erect bowling alleys on every corner. If you fancy some petty revenge

against the educational establishment, you can make schools and bulldoze them over. Or, to be even more cruel to fetishistic headmasters, you can surround all schools with games arcades, pizza parlours and icecream stalls.

ouble-click on buildings at the highest level of magnification and you can see what's going on inside them. A neat diversion, but it doesn't add much to the game overall.

The great thing SimTown adopts from SimCity 2000 is its freeform approach. Your Sarajevo can be however you want it to be – apartment blocks everywhere, ranch houses in rows or grass huts scattered in parkland. The big departure from SimCity, and what brings SimTown down to a more manageable level for kids, is the fact that you don't have to worry about the macroscopic aspect of the infrastructure. You handle your town on a household-by-household, business-by-business basis. Forget the electricity supply, the underground pipes and the tax policy – this one's a little less serious than all that.

onetheless, it has its challenges. As Sarajevo grows, you have to keep an eye on the natural resources. The amount of building you are able to do is limited by the number of trees and volume of water available. Skies get polluted, recycling is needed to deplete the garbage dumps and crops must be grown. Furthermore, the number of homes must be balanced with the availability of employment in local businesses and so on.

After a few hours' play it all gets very dull. To extend the challenge, situations have been included where you have to manage problem towns out of extreme situations (no trees, no water, no crops, that sort of thing). Despite nice big graphics, cute little characters inhabiting the towns and a choice of three quirky tunes, the game gets to be a straightforward and dull affair. It may have a longer life with younger kids, but it doesn't really have anything to hook you in. There's none of the addictiveness of SimCity 2000 and the excitement will dwindle quickly for older young people. Still, it was nice to think there could be peace in Sarajevo...

Garrick Webster

A cute but useless touch is the ability to name some of the people living in your SimTown and design their characteristics.

Price: £39.99. Out: now.

Age range: 8 to 12

Requires: LCII running at 25MHz or better, 4Mb of RAM (8Mb recommended), System 6.0.7 or later, 13-inch colour monitor, CD-ROM drive.

Contact: Maxis on 0171 490 2333.

Graphics 82%

Colourful and cute, lots of variety. Sometimes a bit too simple.

Sound 61%

One of the three tunes is good. Few effects and poor atmosphere.

Gameplay 73%

Starts well but gets slow and tedious. Easy, even for our reviewer.

MACFORMAT rating 74%

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