

Adventuring in Education

Mark Sealey reviews two educational adventures, from 4Mation and Sherston

INTRODUCTION

Simulations - where the computer allows exploration of a situation or environment that would otherwise be impossible - were amongst the first, and remain some of the most effective, types of educational software.



Figure 1.
Darryl the
Dragon

Darryl the Dragon

This new problem solving adventure from 4Mation has several things in common with ArcVenture (see opposite). In the first place, it builds on the successful format used, for example, in Noot (reviewed in RISC User 6:4). It is intended for roughly the same age range (Key Stages 1 and

PRODUCT INFO

Product Darryl the Dragon
Supplier 4Mation
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2, though if anything is more suited to slightly younger users).

Its graphics and animation styles are similar, and it employs a similar graphical (point and click) method of moving through the scenario to other 4Mation products and to ArcVenture III. It should be seriously considered as an addition to your software library if you make heavy use of this type of software, and looked at carefully as an exciting and original departure if, as yet, you do not.

THE GAME

Reading the short story at the front of the well produced teacher's book sets the scene: Darryl is a good dragon, living in the traditional fantasy landscape of forests, castles and chasms. But he has lost his fire, handkerchief and matches and has a cold. What could be worse for a dragon? The children's job is to help him regain the objects and thus offset the effects of his cold. To do this they are sent on a series of errands to complete tasks of differing complexity (whose level of difficulty can be simply controlled by the teacher) until - in standard adventure style - all is well again.

There are five main locations (figure 1), and the activities to be carried out at each depend on having successfully found something (typically a coin or can of smoke etc.) at one site before another can be completed. The puzzles are of different types and require a variety of strategies and skills... verbal, mathematical, logical and so on. Some are much easier than others thus ensuring a valid blend of positive feedback and challenge.

CONTROL

The state of the game can be saved at any point, the volume of the sound effects changed to suit circumstances, and the whole program can be run either taking over the whole screen or in a separate window. All of this is accomplished effortlessly and adds to the flexibility of use which can be made from the package.

USE

4Mation has - as usual - provided ample guidance for ways in which Darryl the Dragon can be used in most areas of the primary curriculum. There is a set of extra photocopyable activity sheets available to extend this work (price £11.75 inc. VAT). For those floored by this type of adventure there is a partial crib at the back of the teacher s book. Classes engaged on most topics should find a place for Darryl since the aspect of learning which it was designed to stimulate - measured and careful problem-solving - comes into so much good work nowadays.

ArcVenture III -The Vikings

Sherston Software has developed particular expertise in this field, and previously released two titles in the ArcVenture series centred around archaeological digs on Roman and Egyptian sites. These correspond to National Curriculum Core Study Units and are aimed chiefly at pupils at Key Stage 2 (upper primary) but could successfully be used up to the end of Key Stage 3 (lower secondary).

The format of the third in the series - The Vikings - is broadly similar to that of the other ArcVentures. The pupils take part in a contemporary excavation: this time the site is tenth century Jorvik (York).

The main educational purpose - and a sound one, too - is to discover as much as possible about the daily life of these Vikings through objects which the pupils discover in the course of their explorations.

There are various options governing the way this happens. You have two weeks to complete your excavation, time being allotted and subsequently used according to the activity... one hour to uncover a level with a spade, two hours with a trowel etc.

SCORING

A record is kept of objects that are found and points are awarded for using tools correctly, solving puzzles about the objects and for answering various questions relating to them.

This system is implemented consistently, and provides a useful extra motivation, although the scenario is sufficiently well constructed and illustrated (figure 2) for this not really to be necessary.

ArcVenture III consists of two main phases. During the excavation a total of twenty objects scattered throughout the site are to be found. The computer (situated in the information hut)



Figure 2. Viking ArcVenture III - exploring Jorvik has details on twelve of these. The other objects are placed in different positions each time the simulation is run and are unknown to the computer.

THE EXPEDITION

On finding one of these objects, the expedition phase begins as the pupils are sent back in time - along a time line to Viking Coppergate in Jorvik - to discover what they can about the artefact for themselves.

In some ways this is the more satisfying - and challenging - portion of the package. Pupils are encouraged to make scrupulous notes of what they uncover at this point although the journal is not accessible during this phase; they can talk to people living there, ask

PRODUCT INFO	
Product	ArcVenture III - The Vikings
Supplier	Sherston Software Swan Barton, Sherston, Malmesbury, Wiltshire SN16 0LH. Tel. 0666-840433,

