

# after hours: *family*

We take a look at the Toy Story Animated Storybook, play the Train Game with Wallace and Gromit, and get immersed in Arthur Miller's classic play *The Crucible*

## TOY STORY

### Toy Story

If you've seen the film, you'll be familiar with the plot.

Toy Story Animated Storybook is told through the pages of an on-screen book that comes to life with characters animating when you click on them. A talking piggy-bank (voice by Cliff from *Cheers*) provides the introduction and



running commentary. You also get simple games to play and puzzles to solve, like dragging toys to their correct positions on the toy shelf.

Or you can sit back and watch the story unfold.



## family/multimedia news

Just in time for Christmas, Microsoft and Hutchinson have announced new versions of their multimedia encyclopaedias. Both **Encarta 97** and the **Hutchinson Multimedia Encyclopaedia 97** feature improved interfaces and thousands of new articles. They both also have their own Internet sites. Monthly updates will keep you current, and links in the encyclopaedias will take you straight to related Web



sites to help your research. Watch for our reviews next month.

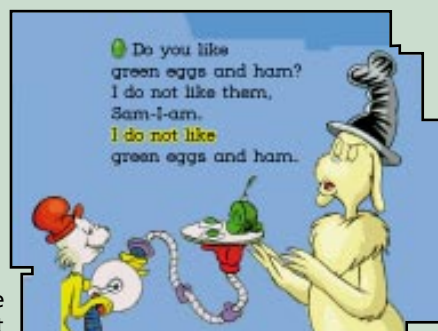
Microsoft: 0345 002000

Attica: 01908 570113

If you've ever wondered who actually invented the parking meter then **Eureka!**, an encyclopaedia of inventions and discoveries, could be just the ticket. It's the first title in the new **Family Reference** series from Anglia Multimedia, and supports Key Stages in the National Curriculum. In Anglia's existing series, new titles include an interactive role-playing educational adventure, **Romans**, for 7-12 year-olds, and **Naughty Stories**, fun tales for younger children. Anglia Multimedia: 01603 615151

The atmosphere of Gotham City may permeate your PC if you buy the **Batman and Robin Activity Centre**, an educational adventure from Warner Brothers aimed at five year-olds and over. Warner Interactive: 0171 391 4300

Sam-I-Am is available for PCs in Living Books' **Green Eggs and Ham**. This is based on the Dr Seuss book and is for children aged between three and seven. The book also comes with two games and links to the Silly Rhyming Sentence Machine. Living Books: 01429 520250





## After hours family

The graphics created by Pixar are pretty impressive, and there are quite a few amusing one-liners. But, whereas the film appeals to all ages, the Animated Storybook lacks depth and subtlety, and is unlikely to hold the interest of older children for long. The games and puzzles just aren't very challenging, or visually interesting.

Disney Interactive has already launched Toy Story the Game for Sega consoles, and a PC version shouldn't be far off, where you get to play out the story of the film, platform-style. The graphics may not be quite so good, but it's bound to provide more-lasting fun. **MA This has impressive graphics, but so has the film. The rest is rather disappointing.**

○ £39.99

○ Disney Interactive: 0171 605 1413

### Toy Story

Presentation	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
<b>Overall</b>	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: 486, 8Mb of Ram, 2x-speed CD-ROM drive.

### Wallace and Gromit Fun Pack

At last, you can put the stars of Nick Park's Oscar-winning animations on your PC. BBC Multimedia has just released the Wallace and Gromit Fun Pack on CD-ROM.

The disc is in two parts. Customise-O-Matic allows you to have Wallace and Gromit on your machine while you work. Crackin' Compendium gives you two games, a quiz machine and a collection of video clips, which you choose between by firing Wallace's porridge gun.

Unfortunately, despite being based on scenes from the films, the games lack any real depth. In the Train Game, derived from 'The Wrong Trousers', you lay track in front of Gromit as he rides a train around the kitchen. It's simplistic and has a poorly designed play mechanism. The games should pose little challenge to anyone over 11.

Quiz-O-Matic is disappointing. As a trivia quiz about the Wallace and Gromit films, it demands a very detailed knowledge. None but the most

dedicated fan will be able to do more than guess at most of the questions, and, again, it's let down by the interface.

Only the video browser lives up to its promises. A copy of the *Daily Lamp-Post* acts as an index, and you click on an introductory picture to play each clip. Sound and picture quality are excellent – The Customise-O-Matic screen savers aren't as good as we'd hoped, but the wallpaper images – stills from the films – are very nice.

**The Fun Pack is pretty well put together. Apart from the games, it has some excellent bits, and if you're a die-hard fan of Wallace and Gromit, you'll want to buy it. If not, you'll probably find it a bit unsatisfying.**

○ £19.99

○ BBC Multimedia: 0181 576 2000

### Wallace and Gromit Fun Pack

Presentation	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
<b>Overall</b>	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: 486-50MHz, 8Mb of RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, 16-bit colour, Windows 3.1 or later.

### The Crucible

If all you want to do is read Arthur Miller's play, then Penguin's multimedia boxed set of *The Crucible* is not for you. Text is much easier to read on the page than on the screen, and although Penguin sensibly recognises this by giving you a paper copy of the play, this box is



a very expensive way of getting it.

However, this disc contains far more than the play's text. It has introductions to each act and excellent hypertext access to definitions of words and historical information. There is also video footage of the Youth Theatre at the Young Vic rehearsing part of Act Three, the climax of the trial scene. It plays in a tiny window, but is still gripping.

Miller used the Salem witch trials, which took place in Massachusetts in 1693, as an allegory for McCarthyism and anti-communism in 1950s America. The disc provides a lot of historical and cultural background. It is impressively detailed, easy to access, and well indexed.

The disc's showpiece is an interview with Arthur Miller. The video's jerky, and the sound is a bit crackly, but the content is fascinating and revealing about his motives for writing the play. We had mixed feelings about the way this was presented. It is broken into small chunks, each with an on-screen title which also serves to index it. This does break up the flow of the video, but on the other hand you can find the bit you're looking for quite easily – no mean feat when the CD contains over an hour of video of this interview alone.

**The Crucible is expensive. However, it's so intelligently presented, and contains so much extra material, that it's excellent value for anyone learning, or teaching, the play. Our only quibble is the dodgy sound and colour on some of the video sections.**

○ £49.99

○ Penguin: 0171 416 3000

### The Crucible

Presentation	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
<b>Overall</b>	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: 486 with 8Mb RAM and 5Mb hard disk space, 256-col SVGA, Windows 3.1 or later, Sound Blaster-compatible sound card, 2x CD-ROM drive.

