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arly in the 21st century, astronomers have discovered an asteroid hurtling toward the planet Earth. The asteroid, nicknamed Vulcan's Hammer, has thrown the entire population of Earth into a panic. Nuclear weapons are fired at the asteroid in an attempt to destroy it or steer it off course, but they fail to force the asteroid off its course. In a last-ditch effort to save humanity, a colony starship is built, supplied, and launched. Heading out toward the stars, the 200-man colony ship will be burdened with the task of finding a new planet to call home. You are the commander of the starship and the leader of the outpost upon whose success lies the future of the human race.

["Tranquillity Base here..."](#)

Outpost provides a truly immersive experience. It attempts to account for all the factors with which an outer-space colony would have to contend. Factories, miners, waste processing plants, satellites, and robots are all at your command. You must outfit your starship, taking into account your needs on your new planet and the limitations of the starship's space and money. Using your assistant AI (Artificial Intelligence) and probes brought with you, you must select a star system and a planet suitable for colonization. Once you have selected a planet, the seed lander, a vehicle designed to begin construction of your colony before humans arrive, descends to the planet at the location of your choice. A smelter, a factory, a power generator, and a command facility are immediately deployed along with several robots, including a RoboDigger, a RoboDozer, and a RoboMiner. From this point, you must

prepare the planet for the colonist landing by clearing terrain around the landing site and by digging underground tunnels for residential space. Once the colonists arrive, it is up to you to meet their demands, keep their morale high, and most importantly, keep the colony alive and running. From this point on, what you do with your colony is up to you. You can try to advance your colony through underground laboratories and research to the point where you can start another colony. You can also establish trade relations with a Rebel colony that is formed by dissenters among the original crew. Or you can continue to build your original colony, attempting to raise morale to new heights. Like many such simulation games, there is no distinct win condition; you can lead your colony to whatever future you desire.

#### CHAPs, SPEWs, and DIRTs... Oh, My!

Those who have played Maxis' simulator games will find many striking similarities in Outpost. Construction of your colony is based on "tiles" of the planet surface where you can build the facilities that will allow your colony to survive. Like SimCity, you must connect all of your buildings with tunnels to supply power (and air, in this case) to your colonists. You can even descend to underground levels (up to four, depending on the planet) in order to build your colonists' homes and universities. There are, however, several departures from Maxis' city simulator. In Outpost, you are not constrained by financial limitations. As long as you have the manpower, the supplies, and the technology, any structure can be built at any time. Also, game time does not proceed continuously; you are allowed to do as much as you possibly can in each game turn before advancing the game clock to the next turn.

In many ways, the Outpost simulation is less detailed than Maxis products. For instance, building a police station on the planet does not seem to have any effect on the crime rate in a certain location. Rather, it simply increases the numerical morale rating on the colony.

Finally, Outpost has a very steep learning curve. With buildings called SPEWs, CHAPs, and DIRTs, the beginning player is likely to be extremely confused. Outpost throws the player into a situation where the player must load satellites, Tokamak reactors, and cargo landers on to the starship after being informed that a mistake will result in the death of the colony and the human race. The game could easily be tossed in a closet, never to be seen again, if the player does not take the time to read through the manual's tutorial carefully. Those who have trouble reading the "Read Me" file on game disks won't appreciate this aspect of Outpost.

### [ultimedia Gone Bad](#)

Outpost's graphics are truly beautiful. With literally dozens of high resolution animations to accompany the game, Outpost provides more than enough eye candy to please the viewer. It even includes voice messages from your AI to accompany the AI's messages to the player. However, many of these animations and voice messages tend to interfere with gameplay. When you run a turn, you will occasionally be interrupted by an enigmatic animation correlated with some unknown event in the game. Fortunately, command-period or a quick click will end these animation or voice sequences. After playing for fifteen minutes, I quickly disabled as many of these superfluous features as I could using the preferences dialog. The graphics and sounds are good looking and well-done, but they're out of place in the middle of a simulation game.

### [SoftWindows?](#)

The interface is ugly. REALLY ugly. Outpost suffers from the all-too-common PC port syndrome; the game makes your Mac look and feel like a Windows machine. Although the graphics are brilliant in all their high resolution glory, the programmers obviously put little effort into making Outpost a Macintosh game instead of a PC port. The game's windows, for instance, are hardly recognizable as Macintosh windows. Dragging a window over another window does not necessarily move it to the front of a window. Don't even think about trying to find a close box. If you want to hide a window, you'll have to option-click (the right-click equivalent as described by the leaflet accompanying the Windows manual) in the window and then select "Close" from the resultant pop-up menu. The game's save feature is even more disturbed. Your game can only be saved immediately after running a turn; otherwise, the save option in the menubar (which, by the way, covers up the top of some of the windows when it is not hidden) is disabled. As far as I can tell, opening, closing, or starting a new game are permanently disabled features, although the grayed-out menu options remain. If you want to start a new game, you'll have to quit. Oh, and did I mention that command-Q has a nasty habit of malfunctioning? Worst of all, Outpost is not PowerMac native. It crawls on my PowerMac 7500. Even though the animation sequences run smoothly, there is a noticeable pause between each mouse click and the game's response. I wouldn't call it unplayable, but the game definitely approaches that status on my PowerMac. Users of 68040-based machines will most likely be more satisfied, while 68030 users will enjoy the same sluggish performance I do on my PowerMac.

### [The Bottom Line](#)

Outpost itself is a wonderful, entertaining game. The concept is relatively original, and the simulation holds the player's attention well. Unfortunately, Outpost comes across as a PC port rather than a Macintosh game. It suffers from downright awful use of the Mac OS and the lack of PowerMac native code. If you're a true fan of this genre of space exploration simulation game, Outpost may be for you. If you're not a Mac enthusiast who chokes every time you see a Windows machine, you may not mind the more negative aspects of Outpost's interface. If you're using a 68040 Macintosh, the game will perform well on your machine. If you match the descriptions above, Outpost is for you. Otherwise, you will probably find better uses for your money elsewhere.

### Pros

- Beautiful graphics and animations
- Interesting scenario
- Detailed and immersive experience

### Cons

- Not PowerMac native
- Windows-like interface
- Badly implemented save and open functions
- Windows manual with Macintosh addendum
- Steep learning curve
- Mid-game animations and voice messages are annoying and superfluous

### Publisher Info

<http://www.sierra.com>