

etaTools Inc. Price: \$179 US. Requirements: Macintosh with 68040 CPU or Power Macintosh, 8MB RAM minimum, 8-bit color minimum. MetaTools recommends 16MB RAM and 24-bit color. Contact MetaTools Inc., (805) 566-6200

Superb, realistic landscape and vista creation were but a mere dream only a few years ago. While the hardware and software existed, they were available only to an elite few, Hollywood being among them. Then along came the 68040 processor, followed shortly thereafter by the Power Mac, and highly advanced software packages the average Joe could afford started coming out of the woodwork.

The original Bryce, released in 1994 by HSC Software, is a perfect example of the sophisticated and powerful software that quickly warmed the hearts of artists the world over. With Bryce 2, the newly named MetaTools takes artistic creation into the unplumbed depths of man's imagination.

For starters, Bryce 2 is no minor upgrade to an already successful product. Bryce 2 is completely new; everything from the interface to the way it renders images has been reworked.

The new interface is remarkable. It sports a large variety of tool icons that remain invisible until you drag your cursor over them, keeping the work area free of cumbersome clutter.

Another newcomer to the interface is Nano Preview. This unassuming little window gives you a realtime rendered preview of your image. Also new is the ability to render specified sections of your image without rendering the entire image. These two features are great time savers and enhance the way you work in Bryce. The new memory buttons are yet another welcome feature. You can save up to eight different camera settings and variations per scene, allowing you to compare them .

The interface artistry is superb. Kai Krause really outdid himself this time. The new Bryce interface is easy on the eyes and comfortable to work with. The icons are big enough to use with ease and beautifully crafted. Also impressive is the realism of the graphics. All icons display drop and cast shadows, making them stand out from the background. The same holds true when you select a portion of the image. Once selected, a drop shadow appears behind the selection, seemingly drawing it to the foreground. While these might seem to be small details, they go to show the degree of thought that went into the Bryce 2 redesign. Visually, the Bryce 2 interface may be the most appealing interface ever designed for a Macintosh application.

he interface may cause some to cringe, however, as no element of it (save for the menu bar) is Macintosh standard. Dialog boxes offer anti-aliased Helvetica text with a check mark for OK and an X for Cancel. Floating windows, such as the Object or Materials palettes, don't actually float; though the interface has drawn a beautiful shadow behind the window, this precludes the possibility of dragging it to a convenient location where it may be easily and frequently accessed.

Finally, a request for the Materials Composer will take the user to a completely separate window. (The use of "window" here is actually a misnomer; "view" may be more accurate.) Even with your Macintosh's resolution set to 1152x870, Bryce 2's standard editing view disappears to display the 640x480 standardized interface of the Materials Composer. This is, unfortunately, a slow and cumbersome process, even on a 9500/132.

Bryce 2 features newly designed Create, Edit, and Sky & Fog palettes. The Create Palette boasts a wide range of new primitive objects to select from, including the debut of ready made rocks, a double lattice terrain object, spotlights, radial lights and parallel lights. With these new additions, no longer do artists have to use a variety of different applications to touch up a Bryce image with specialized effects; they can all be created and applied from within Bryce 2.

With the Edit Palette, you can rotate, resize, align, reposition and randomize selected objects in your scene. Best of all, the icons that control these functions are much easier to use and understand than those found in the original Bryce. The Materials Editor found under the Edit Palette is completely new. No longer do you have to use separate dialog boxes to apply specific effects to a material; instead, you apply all manipulations from a central screen. What's more, you have a greater degree of control over material manipulations than you did with the original Bryce.

The Sky & Fog Palette lets you adjust haze, fog, ambient color, cloud cover and color, sun color and a whole host of other useful features. There are eight memory dots to save the different skies you design for future use. You can also adjust shadow intensity and position from within this palette, as well as adjust the sun or moon's position in the sky.

One obvious and disappointing omission in Bryce 2 is support for animation. This is one feature Bryce users—including our editor in chief—have been clamoring for. Though early press for Bryce 2 touted a new animation feature, MetaTools has since stated that there

wasn't enough time to incorporate it into the new version. According to the company, animation will find its way into the next release of Bryce. No release date was available by MacSense deadline.

The Bryce 2 Explorer's Guide, while useful, is very skimpy on instruction and detail. MetaTools feels the best way to learn Bryce is through exploration, and makes this point clear in the Explorer's Guide. However, for a product as powerful and robust as Bryce 2, additional instruction and detail should find its way into the documentation. Unfortunately, as a result of the minuscule Explorer's Guide, most casual users will never know the full power of Bryce 2.

Despite the disappointing lack of an animation component, Bryce remains one of the most revolutionary graphics products ever designed for mainstream Mac users. Its new age interface is fascinating, though its lack of standardization is at times quite frustrating. The newly designed Bryce brings many welcome features that make the package all the more useful to both amateur and professional Mac enthusiasts and graphic artists. At a price of under \$200 US, Bryce 2 is a fine bargain—and an excellent way to spend a lazy afternoon.

MacSenseED@aol.com

Now Software Inc. \$89 US. Minimum requirements:  
System 7, 4MB RAM, hard disk. Sales: (503) 274-  
2810. Web site: <http://www.nowsoft.com/>

Now Utilities is a collection of 12 system enhancements that facilitate everyday Macintosh tasks such as opening, saving, finding files, launching applications and managing extensions. I have been using Now Utilities for years and find it difficult and frustrating to work on a Macintosh without these indispensable tools.

In Now terms, you fall into one of two categories: those who don't use Now Utilities and those who do and need to upgrade.

I have three questions to those who don't use Now Utilities: Do you ever use the Open command from an application? Do you have more than one folder on your hard disk? Do you know how to turn on your Macintosh? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you

will benefit from using Now Utilities.

Our favorite components of Now Utilities—those I can't live without—are Now Startup Manager, Now Menu, and Now Super Boomerang, each of which has received minor, but worthwhile improvements in version 6. Now Startup Manager replaces Apple's Extensions Manager, allowing you to micromanage your myriad system extensions, control panels, Chooser devices and startup items. You can create different sets for your various operating environment requirements (for example, a minimal set for optimized QuickTime capturing, or a full set for everyday work), and these sets can be activated at startup by holding down a key that you define. Now Startup Manager also helps isolate conflicting extensions, but only if they cause your Macintosh to crash when booting up. New to version 6 is integration with Now Save, allowing your Macintosh to return to its exact state before a crash with no work lost.

Now Menu allows you to define additions to your menu bar, and can contain documents, applications or folders found on any mounted drive. I use one menu to access our most commonly used applications and another to gain quick access to my complete folder hierarchy. Any folder displayed in a menu can have its contents listed as well, through a hierarchical submenu. New to version 6 is the ability to navigate 10 levels of nested folders.

Now Super Boomerang allows you to navigate, rename, and delete folders and files from within Open and Save dialog boxes. While Now Super Boomerang let you choose from its static Folder and File menus only, version 6 allows you to navigate folders just as you can from Now Menu—a welcome and useful addition.

Two more components are updated in version 6. Now QuickFiler provides an alternative to native Finder windows called Inspector windows. With an Inspector window open, files can be copied, compressed/uncompressed, moved, renamed, and deleted by clicking on the toolbar icons. You cannot, however, drag and drop the files displayed in Inspector windows, nor can you display files hierarchically, as you can in the Finder. The real advantage to Inspector windows is the added information about each file's archive status (whether it is compressed) —but this is helpful only if you are using Now's compression on your files.

Now FolderMenus adds a popup hierarchical menu to every folder and disk on your desktop. This further increases the accessibility granted by Now Menu and Now Super Boomerang.

Now Utilities version 6 includes three new components of varying usefulness. Now Auto Type lurks in the background, analyzes your typing habits, and suggests macros based on the phrases you repeat most often. For example, if you commonly type, Sincerely, Jon Smith, you can instruct Now Auto Type to automatically insert that phrase every time you type JS. This utility, if used efficiently, can really streamline a writers' repetitive tasks.

Now Shortcuts allows you to perform Macintosh file operations such as Duplicate, Make Alias, and Put Away by accessing a popup menu, instead of using the Finder's menu bar. This isn't much of an improvement over native Finder operation, but some may enjoy the convenience of having the various file commands available on a single menu.

Now Tabs aims to reduce screen clutter by adding a gray bar to the bottom of your screen where you can temporarily store open windows by dragging them to the bar. Your windows are reduced to small tabs which can be restored with a click. This utility is perfect for keeping commonly used, deeply nested folders close at hand.

Four of Now's components remain unchanged since version 5: Now Save records your

actions in order to recreate lost data due to a crash, Now Scrapbook provides an enhanced alternative to Apple's Scrapbook, Now Profile compiles a detailed report on your system's hardware and software, and Now WYSIWYG Menus displays font menus using their own typefaces.

ully loaded, Now Utilities will consume over a megabyte of system RAM, but it is memory well used. You'll have to decide whether some of Now's more esoteric utilities are more than novelties, but the core components—Now Startup Manager, Now Menus, and Now Super Boomerang—are worth every dollar, and are stronger than ever in version 6.

aaron@pinsight.com

<http://www.pinsight.com/~aaron/>

ymantec Corp. \$69 US. Minimum requirements:  
System 7.1 or higher, 4MB RAM. Sales: (800) 441-  
234. Web site: <http://www.symantec.com/>

Ah, too many fonts. The price you pay is decreased performance. You get to sit and twiddle your thumbs every time your program has to assemble a font menu. The only answer is to have fewer fonts loaded. It used to be quite a chore to load and unload fonts from the System suitcase. Of course, it got easier when System 7 introduced the Fonts folder, but not as easy as Suitcase made it. Suitcase streamlines the task by allowing you to keep your fonts in any folder on your hard disk, open and close fonts while other applications are running, create sets of commonly used fonts, and even specify fonts to load with specific applications.

Suitcase 3.0 boasts a redesigned user interface, and proves easier to use than its predecessor. If you already have your fonts organized in folders on your hard disk (for example, one folder contains sans serif fonts and another contains masthead fonts), simply drag the folders into Suitcase and new sets are instantly created. This is an improvement over earlier versions of Suitcase which required that you open each font suitcase individually. You can open or close all fonts in a set with a single click, and you can open or close fonts individually within a set.

A set of fonts can be linked to an application, causing the specified fonts to be opened when

you start the application. Just drag the application's icon into Suitcase, and a new, empty set is created. Next, drag fonts or font folders into the application's set. Now when you start Eudora, for example, its special Mishawaka font will automatically open. Suitcase causes only a brief delay while it opens the application's fonts. Fonts remain open until you close them in Suitcase, or reboot the Macintosh.

Suitcase provides an option to display fonts using their own typefaces in font menus, though it does not gather font families into single menu entries, which is a much more useful function (the ability to unify families is integral to other font utilities, such as Adobe's Type Reunion and Impossible Software's TypeTamer).

Several other Suitcase features merit mention: QuickDraw GX, AppleScript, and AppleGuide support; font compression and on-the-fly decompression; and automatic font ID conflict resolution.

I was disappointed with Suitcase's user guide. It does a fair job of explaining the program's operation, but its index contains only 80 entries, and lacks an entry for temporary set, an important feature which is explained on pages 4-9.

Suitcase's new user interface is better organized and easier to use than that of earlier versions. The ability to drag folders full of fonts into Suitcase to create new sets is a great time-saver, and application specific sets are a worthwhile addition. Although I feel Suitcase is overpriced (Suitcase's competitor, MasterJuggler, is priced \$30 US less), it is still the font utility of choice.

aaron@pinsight.com

<http://www.pinsight.com/~aaron/>

asady & Greene. Price: \$60 US. Requirements: Any Macintosh with 1MB RAM (2MB preferred), System 6.04 or greater, System 7 compatible, Power Mac native, an AppleTalk or Ethernet network. Contact: Judith Frey at (408) 484-9228.

SnapMail 2 is the effortless email utility from Casady & Greene, the folks who gave us Conflict Catcher, one of the best-ever system enhancers for the Macintosh. I had hoped SnapMail 2 would be to email what Conflict Catcher is to system management. It is not, although it is a good program for those who work on a network.

For the workgroup environment, SnapMail is a model of simplicity and efficiency. File enclosures let you send files, folders or even clipboard items over the network. Its Talk window provides real-time mail conferencing. Mail features include easy mail searching, return receipts, mail forwarding and password security. An online help guide can tutor you through most problems, though you are unlikely to have trouble.

Besides the expected basic mail features, SnapMail also has interesting extras. It not only comes with several icons to simplify point-and-click mail handling, but even allows you to create your own icons. Does your sweetheart work two cubicles down? Create a special icon for those messages sent to your heart's desire.

A User List maintains an alphabetized list of all people to whom you can send mail on your network; SnapMail updates the list automatically. There is also a convenient "All" group feature so you can send a memo to everyone at once (just be careful not to send that love message for your sweetie to "All" instead.).

The "To" pop-up menu not only lets you choose whether recipients are primary receivers of your messages or get carbon copies, it also lets you send blind carbon copies. A blind carbon copy leaves no record that might appear on mail delivered to others.

Besides your common email messages, SnapMail also lets you send alerts for matters that require immediate attention. Send an alert that "our client wants her ad revised immediately," and an alert box will pop up on the recipient's monitor. Alerts can be set for removal immediately after posting or for removal after a specified time.

Another very convenient aspect of SnapMail is that it does not require a system administrator or designated server. It can run without servers or in a distributed-server mode. In the latter, when one Mac on a network shuts down, undelivered outgoing mail will be forwarded to any other Mac designated as a server. The mail is held and delivered later.

Installation and setup are a breeze. SnapMail auto-configures itself and monitors a network for any other Macs. It also runs in the background, snatching office memos as they are received and notifying you when you have new mail.

Unlike much new software, SnapMail does not require your Mac to be revved to the max. It will run on any machine from a Mac Plus on up as long as the Mac is using some type of AppleTalk network software. Incredibly, Casady & Greene says SnapMail will even run under System 6.04, a feature you do not see every day.

SnapMail will also send and receive messages over the Internet from a variety of mail systems. Unfortunately, this is SnapMail's weak link. You have to buy and implement services from third party vendors to have Internet access. Services are software additions that let SnapMail talk with a variety of mail systems. The process of setting up a service somewhat negates SnapMail's claim to provide all the essentials of electronic mail software in an easy-to-use and low-priced package.

A \$135 service called HoloGate is available from Information Access Technologies. HoloGate is fully compatible with SnapMail and can be set up to call certain mail systems at regular intervals. HoloGate connects with Microsoft Mail, Quick Mail, NovaLink, First Class, UUCP and SMTP, but does not work with BBSs. You will need a program like Z-Term to do this. SnapMail also will not check your email. You will need an application like Eudora to do this.

The SnapMail manual says services will also let the program communicate with fax

machines and pagers, but a call to Casady & Green reveals such services are not yet available.

asady & Green calls SnapMail a "workgroup solution that is always up and running but will not cost you an arm and a leg." That is more than just advertising hype; it is a fair description of SnapMail. A more simple method for implementing Internet and online messaging would be very nice. Still, the remainder of SnapMail's features are well designed and useful. Its low price with a wide range of Macs make SnapMail a fine tool worth the price for office communication.

daseller@earthlink.net