y James and Sara Malgieri

urk's Rainforest Lab is the sequel to Zurk's Jungle Safari. Instead of being in the Serenghetti Plains of Africa, our location is the Costa Rican rain forest of Central America. Like Zurk's Jungle Safari, Zurk's Rainforest Lab encourages exploratory learning where children can explore the rain forest, classify animals, insects, flora and fauna, take pictures of the animals and insects, write a story about their experiences and then print everything out. This is all done at the child's own pace, unaware that they are actually learning a great deal of information. Unlike Zurk's Learning Safari, Zurk's Rainforest Lab is fully trilingual with speech and text in English, Spanish and French. Throughout, Zurk offers encouragement in the chosen language. Soleil believes in the Immersion Method of teaching foreign languages where kids hear and absorb spoken sounds and inflections and soon will be able to speak a few words and phrases in Spanish or French. It seems to me that Soleil really wants to teach our children a different language as opposed to merely including other languages on their software to increase market share. Zurk's Rainforest Lab is also available in German, French and Japanese for overseas markets, and I am sure if a parent or relative wanted, these could be acquired by calling Soleil directly.

Zurk's Rainforest Lab opens in a Costa Rican marketplace know as a Mercado. This is where you choose one of five activities and the language you initially want to hear. On the right of the screen is a table with hats on top of it: a Cowboy Hat representing English, a Beret - French, and a Sombrero for Spanish. At the start of each activity is a randomly selected

question about the Rainforest animals. The question is answered at the end of the activity.

Clicking on the rain forest at the left of the Mercado screen takes you to the Jungle Discovery activity. Children can explore three levels of the rain forest: the floor, under-story, and upper canopy. In its entirety, the graphic area is three screens high and assessable by scrolling the screen up or down with the mouse. Each level includes the appropriate animals you would normally find in the rain forest. Clicking on any of the forty-six insects and animals brings up an information box which tells facts about that particular item. By selecting the camera icon, the child can take a picture of any animal or insect, which moves an image of what they are photographing to the Photo album.

To move to the Photo album, click the two children in the Mercado. The photo album is represented by an open book with the item the child took a picture of on the left page. The right page can be used as travel journal or a story book where the child can write a story about their experience or enter anything they want. When finished, everything can be printed out. The Photo Album helps a child develop creative writing and observation skills while reinforcing life science knowledge.

Returning to the Mercado, clicking on the woman carrying a canister on her head takes you to Seek and Sort. Here you scroll through the different parts of the rain forest to search for animals hidden among the vegetation and then classify them into the following categories: amphibian, bird, insect, mammal or reptile. At the bottom of the screen, Zurk sits in a machine that rotates at one of three different speeds to accommodate children having different levels of mental and motor skills. On the top of Zurk's machine are the different categories that the child can choose from. To classify an item, the child selects an item and drops it into the appropriate slot on Zurk's machine. If the child misses his or her sort, or chooses incorrectly, they will get another chance when the category comes around again. Our boy, Aran, who is three years old, likes this activity and was able to sort using the slowest speed. When you are done you can create and print a graph of how many items you have found and correctly classified. If you want, you can also camouflage the animals in the plants and terrain for a friend to find. Seek and Sort teaches animal classification, encourages mathematical thinking and increases life science skills.

Puzzling
Pattern Puzzles can be accessed by clicking the table draped with the colorful, geometric patterned cloth. The object of this activity is to complete the pattern puzzles using multicolored polygon puzzle pieces. If the pieces are not facing the proper way, they can be rotated to fit the design by using the four buttons at the bottom of the screen to rotate the pieces in 15, 45, 90 and 180 degree increments in a clockwise or counterclockwise direction. Children can also create their own designs using the geometric shapes. If you are not sure what to make, clicking on a light bulb at the bottom of the screen will give you suggestions. When you are done the pieces that were used in the puzzle can be graphed to show how many pieces of each geometric pattern where used. You can also add up your pieces and add that to the graph. If your addition is correct, Zurk will nod "Yes", otherwise he will nod "No" and you may try again. Below the graph you can write whatever you want about your work. Also, the puzzle designs and graph can both be printed. In Pattern Puzzles, children learn about angle degrees, number grouping and geometry.

y selecting the table with a basket full of painted eggs on top we come full circle with Egg Hunt where we are presented with more activities in the Jungle Discovery graphic world. In Zurk's Learning Safari, we had Maya the lion cub which was an animated cursor. Maya was somewhat hard to control, especially for younger children. Here we have Nita the margay, a wild jungle cat, which is an improvement over Maya as far as control of movement is concerned. When we start, Mico the spider monkey is on the screen asking Nita to help him find twelve colorful eggs that are randomly hidden on the three levels of the rain forest. I personally found the spoken words of Mico to be bland and lacking inflection. His arms were right angles at the elbows and their movement was static and rigid, lacking the fluid motion that a real monkey has. Nita comes out, stands at the center bottom of the screen, looks at the child and says, "Will you help me?" Aran responded by nodding, "Yes." Egg Hunt is a step above "Hide and Seek" in Zurk's Learning Safari in terms of complexity. In addition to being partially exposed, many of the eggs are hidden under rain forest animals and insects. I had to explain this difference to Aran and he understood what was going on and really enjoyed looking for the eggs. To the left of the screen is a tree trunk that extends from the jungle floor to the upper canopy. On the trunk at every level is a door where help is available for the particular level of the rain forest you are currently on. By clicking on it Zurk will appear and give you a hint as to where an egg is located. In all, there are two million combinations of plants and animals available to this activity, with different animals and insects randomly generated for each hunt. Children practice multi-step problem solving skills and observe the animal behavior, habitats and sounds.

An excellent Rhyming Book and parent's guide is included with Zurk's Rainforest Lab. As with the better manuals I have seen, this one includes various activities to enhance using Zurk's Rainforest Lab at, and away from, the computer: a supplemental book list which includes books about patterns and shapes, and rain forests. There are also suggestions for audio recordings and additional software related to rain forests. Addresses of conservation groups are also included. A glossary at the back of the book contains definitions of many earth science and biology terms such as Amphibian, Pollinate and Scavenger.

Final Word

I was pleasantly surprised to find Soleil was a small company devoted entirely to the Whole World Learning series which includes Zurk's Learning Safari, Zurk's Rainforest Lab and Zurk's Alaskan Trek. When I called, Ragni Pasturel, the president of Soleil answered the phone, not some unknown receptionist who would then transfer my call to a marketing department. Ragni Pasturel along with Barbara Christiani, the principal designer, and Marc Pasturel, the CEO, make up the core of the company. The Whole World Learning series takes field trips around the world and shows us "the whole world" is a classroom. Math, science, reading, language skills (including the foreign languages: English, French and Spanish) and critical thinking are all brought to the forefront as children explore various ecosystems and cultures.

Zurk's Rainforest Lab has garnered numerous awards:
• 4 out of 4 stars - PC Magazine
• "Most developmentally appropriate" Excellence Award - by a team of educators at the 1994 National Association for the Education for Young Children meeting
• Seal of Approval - National Parenting Center
• Top 20 CD-ROMs for children 3 to 6 - Parents Choice
• National Parenting Publications Award Honors

We highly recommend Zurk's Rainforest Lab. You will not get all wet with this particular experiment.

Pros
• Three Languages: Spanish, French and English
• Easy to use mouse driven point-and-click interface.
• The graphics, sound and music are all excellent.
• An excellent Rhyming Book and parent's guide
• Children learn at their own pace in an unhurried, visually pleasing and auditory enhancing atmosphere
• The child experiences cultures other than his or her own, learning about the central American rain forest and its ecosystems

Cons
• I wish they would have added more information on Rainforest sounds (i.e., the sounds the animals and insects of the rain forest make.)

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