y James and Sara Malgieri

ou know, it seems to me that sometimes, as parents, we should choose software on the premise of what our children would like or enjoy and not necessarily on what we think would be "best for them." The Fisher-Price® Great Adventures™ Pirate Ship is good solid fun first and an educational aide second, and our sons, Aran, 3.5 years old, and Brian, 16 months old, love it. I have spent all week smiling and watching our boys laugh, sing, dance and play with the game. They seem to be saying, "Who cares what we're learning, we're having so much fun!"

The software is based on the Fisher-Price toy, the Great Adventures Pirate Ship. Davidson, through its subsidiary, FUNNYBONE Interactive, transferred it to computer. The design of the Great Adventures Pirate Ship is elegant in its simplicity. It seems primarily designed to help and encourage young ones build early computer skills through an uncomplicated mouse driven interface. Children are also encouraged to "look around" and explore the Pirate Ship world. The premise of the game is that Captain Stubbs tore up his treasure map into nine pieces and hid them on the ship. He forgot where he hid everything and needs your child to

help him find the lost map pieces. When all the pieces have been found, a "X" will appear on the map showing the location of buried treasure on Pirate Island. There are ten treasure maps, two sets of pirates, and hundreds of hidden items that change every time a game is played, making every game unique. When we watched our boys play, we saw their imaginations working so hard that they eventually believed they were one of the pirate crew. Playing the game seemed to be more fun than getting the treasure.

The game starts out with Captain Stubbs having to tune the piano for the sing along and put the first mate, Pongolo Pete, the parrot, in charge of guiding us through the ship. In the lower right hand corner of every screen is the top of a barrel with Pongolo Pete's picture on it. Clicking on the barrel accesses the option screen where you can choose any one of six options. The Treasure Map option shows you all the map pieces that you found. The Cards option brings you to the Collector Card Scrapbook where you can see and print the pirate cards that you have collected by clicking on each pirate you meet. The Credits, Volume and Quit buttons are self-explanatory. The Activities option brings up the activity menu where you can immediately go to any one of eight locations: Pirate Island, Salty Sing-Alongs, Shark Raft Shootout, Ship in a Bottle, the Crows Nest, Fire Away!, Feed the Parrot or the Fabulous Flag Fest. Three of the activities occur in the Captains Quarters: the Fabulous Flag Fest, Ship in a Bottle, and Feed the Parrot.

n Fabulous Flag Fest, you click on the Jolly Roger and you can design your own pirate flag. You are able to change the mascot in the center of the flag, the crossbones behind the mascot, and the background color or design. Aran's favorite mascot is a moose. You can add pirates and decals anywhere on the flag that you want, as well as letters to spell your name or a favorite phrase. Pushing the Print button prints out your flag. When you are done, the

flag will be on display on wall of the Captain's Quarters.

Clicking on the ship in a bottle in Ship in a Bottle lets you design your own ship in a bottle. You can change the front and back sails, the hull, and the mast. As in the Fabulous Flag Fest, you can also add pirates and decals anywhere you want on the ship. Pushing the Print button also prints out the ship. The new ship in the bottle will appear in the Captain's Quarters on the Captain's side table.

Feed the Parrot
Pongolo Pete asks the kids to feed him. It seems that Captain Stubs thinks he has already eaten enough, and anyway, he is too busy writing his mother a letter, "As every good pirate is sworn to do at least once every two weeks." All through the room are items you can try to feed the parrot although he might not eat every item you give him. To give children a little extra practice using the mouse, occasionally a bug will run (not too fast) across the floor and the child can try to catch it and feed it to Pongolo Pete. Aran really likes this activity. He laughs heartily as Pongolo Pete readily devours a varied menu from frosted cupcakes to a bag of TNT, but don't try to feed him the picture of Mother Stubbs!

If you click on the piano in Salty Sing-Alongs' the Mess Hall, a page of sheet music will appear. Clicking on the "Play" button starts the song and each word will be highlighted as the song plays. Children can sing any one of five pirate songs along with the crew of the Pirate. There is also a "Help" and a "Pause" button, as well as a slide to adjust the volume. Aran turns up the volume to as loud as it will go as he sings along and rocks back and forth in time with the music.

Aran's favorite is Fire Away!. Children can help Gunner John, who is quite a pleasant fellow, load and shoot the battle cannon with any item they find in the scene: sleeping pigs, chickens, Pongolo Pete, and even Gunner John. There is a variety of entertaining outcomes every time the cannon is fired.

You can look though Crow's Nest telescope to get a closer look at items in the distance. The telescope points in the direction the mouse moves.

The only activity where Aran has a bit of trouble is in Shark Raft Shootout. Children click and drag a barrel onto the catapult of the Shark Raft. Moving the mouse right and left also turns the catapult in that direction. The more you pull the mouse towards you the further back the catapult is pulled and the farther the barrel will fly. As items float by the Shark Raft, the children are to take aim and fire, hopefully hitting their target. Aran has not hit the target yet. Mr. Pym, who is also on the raft, gives words of encouragement and praise to the children. If ten items are hit, Mr. Pym sets off a fireworks display for the child.

Set a course for the nearest computer store and pick up the Fisher-Price® Great Adventures™ Pirate Ship. You won't be walking the plank over this pick. We think you, and your kids, will love it.

Pros
• Helps build early computer skills through a very good, simple, mouse driven, point-and-click interface.
• Promotes creative exploration.
• The graphics, sound, and animation are very well done.
• The game saves automatically.
• Included on the CD are the songs featured in the program that can also be played on a regular CD player or the audio CD player on the computer.
• There is an actual Fisher-Price Pirate Ship that can be purchased at toy stores to enhance play and imagination away from the computer.
• Suggested Age Range: 4 to 8 years

Cons
• Cannot disable the print buttons.

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