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CD-ROM Reviews

with Greg Schick



"Star Trek: The Next Generation Interactive Technical Manual"
Simon & Schuster Interactive
Grade: B-

For you trekkies out there who long for computer interaction with everyone's favorite starship, Simon & Schuster presents the Star Trek Interactive Technical Manual on CD-ROM.

Now this is just what it says, a technical manual. You will not find any of the characters from the popular television show here, although the voice of Jonathan Frakes (Cmdr. William Riker) leads you through the guided tour.

But the program earned its first minus because it's hard to load. Unless you have a machine with eight megabytes of RAM, be prepared to beat up your computer or re-write the boot-up program.

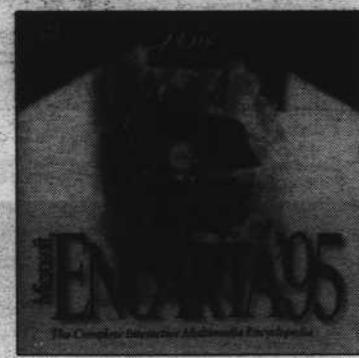
When you finally get it running, the computer talks to you, with the voice of Majel Barrett Roddenberry, the late "Star Trek" creator Gene Roddenberry's wife. She lets you choose between a guided tour and a self tour.

The typical room is something like this: You start at the room you were previously in, and you wait for the computer to load up the new one. The second minus is for the amount of time you wait between screens. Even with a fairly fast machine, it takes a while. If you want multiple views, you wait again.

You can only visit four of the crew's quarters, those of Capt. Jean-Luc Picard, Riker, Counselor Deanna Troi and Lt. Cmdr. Worf. And the only simulation on the holodeck is of a shuttlecraft!

That may be appropriate because the only main rooms in the manual that you can not access, but are frequently shown on the television show, are the cargo bays.

You might not mind the lack of people if you are a very technical person, but some might lack the patience to read screen after screen.



"Microsoft Encarta '95"
Microsoft Home
Grade: A

For a top of the line computer reference tool, look no further than "Encarta '95."

From the software giants at Microsoft comes this complete, well-produced and easy to use encyclopedia reference on CD-ROM. If you need information on something, it is probably in here.

The 1995 version will appeal even to those familiar with the older versions of Encarta. Not only does '95 have updated information, but it also has a new look.

For '95, Microsoft has completely redesigned the layout of Encarta.

The simple windows format previously used is replaced by a stylish system, which goes beyond user-friendly to user-fun.

Instead of a simple click of the mouse leading to the next area, each part of the toolbar has a list under it, so when you touch it with your arrow, the list slides out. There is even a "shhh" sliding sound.

The information is organized in the same nine areas and 93 categories as before, but each area is now color-coded.

The special tools are also upgraded. The globe screen for the atlas spins better now, and the maps are more complete.

There is a timeline that traces the history of man from 15,000 B.C. to present. The color and graphics have drastically improved.

A new addition is the media gallery, a place where you can look through every sound or video clip, photo or map, with an easy organization and pinpointer, a quick searching list.

A word processor is even included, and so are instructions on copying and printing articles for easy use in reports. The word processor, unfortunately, is much more basic than what you might expect from Microsoft.



Monty Python's Complete Waste of Time
7th Level, Inc.
Grade: B+

Computer users are always searching for the latest technology in games. Perhaps it has arrived in a new disk inspired by the humor of "Monty Python."

It doesn't have the scrolling screens of "DOOM!" or the innovative graphics of "Myst," but what "Complete Waste of Time" does have is versatility and hot spots.

Hot spots are areas on the screen where there may not seem to be anything, but if you go there and click the mouse button, something strange pops out.

Of course with the collective humor of "Monty Python's Flying Circus" as material, the writers have plenty of material for hot spots — probably more than any other computer game yet.

This is the first basic part called the "Interactive Monty Python Show." It includes six screens with daffy names like "the loonitarium" and "the exploding TV room" that have dozens of hot spots, sparking everything from the entire video of "Nudge, Nudge" to a piece of "The Lumberjack Song" or "Spam."

If that is not enough, there are games to entertain including a pinball-like game in a cathedral, shooting flying pigs, maneuvering a chicken through an obstacle screen and bopping gopher hole people on the head with a hammer.

The big game is actually a contest built into the software, if you can find the hidden door and solve a series of tough puzzles.

If that is not enough for you, there is the "Desktop Pythonizer." Whether you want silly icons, goofy screensavers, wacky wallpaper or just a few audio bytes so that when you turn on your computer it says, "You know I... still wet my bed," it's all here.

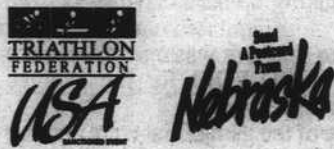
If you still want more, too bad. This should be about enough for any Python enthusiast.

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Paintings and shadowboxes capture magic of realism

By John Fulwider
Staff Reporter

A collection of paintings and shadowboxes by former Lincoln resident Charles Rain has been improved and is now on display at Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery.

"Charles Rain: A Personal Realism" is the first exhibition of Rain's works to reveal his important early ties to Lincoln and the many influences on the artist's life.

Rain's works have been displayed annually at Sheldon since 1985.

Rain was born in Lincoln in 1911 and attended Lincoln High School. At one time, he lived in "The Castle," now an apartment building, at 1845 D St.

After leaving Lincoln and studying at the Art Institute of Chicago, Rain studied throughout Europe. It was there he developed his distinct style, called "magic realism" by critics.

In magic realism, individual elements are depicted with extraordinary attention to detail. They are then placed in incongruous settings — often juxtaposed with strange, dis-

proportionate figures, such as architecture.

An example of this is found in Rain's "Architectural Still Life." Various vegetables, painted in extreme detail, are placed on the stone steps of a ruins, reminiscent of Greek architecture.

Nine shadowboxes by Rain also are on display.

A shadowbox is a miniature model that depicts a scene in three dimensions.

Rain's shadowboxes depict Italian commedia dell'Arte, a type of raucous stage play popular in 17th century Italy.

The miniaturized sets include architectural details, clouds and landscapes, as well as diminutive actors in full authentic costumes.

Rain was somewhat eccentric in his use of materials to make the shadowboxes. In "Venetia," the two central columns at the front of the scene are made of cigarettes. Other materials he used were the cardboard from shirt boxes, string and florist's moss.

The exhibit ends June 25. Sheldon is open to the public, and admission is free.