



Children's SOFTWARE & new media Revue™

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MOVE OVER, GAME BOY!

Why kids love Leapster (page 8)

Six Ways Technology is Changing Play
(page 4)

Plus first looks at Zoo Tycoon 2,
Kidspiration 2, The Muppets Party
Cruise, Trainz, iLife, Home on the
Range, and over 100 more reviews!

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Macromedia Director MX 2004, Macromedia, Inc., \$500, ages 12-up, Windows, Macintosh. New features to this upgrade include the ability to incorporate media formats, including DVD-Video, Windows Media, RealMedia, QuickTime, and Flash; plus the ability to integrate Macromedia Flash MX 2004 content into Director projects. Supports JavaScript syntax or the familiar Lingo. For more information, visit www.macromedia.com/go/dirmx2004. The software works on Mac OS X v10.2.6 or higher, and for Windows 2000 or Windows XP. French, German, and Japanese versions will be available at a later date.

My Med Log, Professional Management Solutions, Inc., \$19.95, Windows. This is a computerized home medical journal that has specialized charts for diabetic care, personal care and pediatric care. Other features include an office visit log, health history log, height and weight charts and more. Every detail of someone's health can be recorded with reports and printouts.

Secret Weapons Over Normandy, LucasArts Entertainment Company, \$49.95, 13-up, PlayStation 2, Xbox, Windows. This is a World War II flying game that uses the same flight controls as other Lucas StarWars flying games (just imagine the White Cliffs of Dover instead of the Death Star). There are mission games, where you unlock as many as 16 additional historically detailed airplanes and weapons, and also quick flights. This is not an easy game to play—you get dizzy trying to find the enemy. We reviewed both the PlayStation and the PC version, and liked the console rendition more. The detailed graphics did not perform well on our standard graphics card. The game has some historic value, most notably the facts about the airplanes, their attributes, and the different weapon systems of the period. Violence is no more than you'd expect: shooting and crashing; nothing more than that to worry about. For PC, bag it; for console, borrow it. ☺

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Following the FETC show in Orlando, many new educational products were announced. Here's a listing, from highest rating to lowest rating.

Kidspiration Version 2, 4.8 or ★★★★★, Inspiration Software, Inc., \$69.00, 5-12, Windows, Macintosh. With a new emphasis on writing, this concept-mapping tool is better than ever. Like its big brother Inspiration, Kidspiration provides a set of tools so that both teachers and students can create graphic concept maps for any subject. This edition is easier to use, with clip art to complement the text

options. It is possible to toggle back and forth from the graphic organizer view to the written outline view at any time, and there are twice as many activity templates. It is also possible to quickly sketch out a symbol, for use in diagrams or Venn diagrams. Also new is the ability to pair words with picture symbols, which is great scaffolding for young readers and writers. The bottom line? This is a wonderful creative writing tool, with endless creative possibilities.

Health for Kids Series, 4.6 or ★★★★★ stars, Core Learning, \$20, ages 7-10, Windows, Macintosh. The two volume Health for Kids Series (\$20 each) provides a fun tour of the human body, covering how it functions and how it works to stay healthy. The two titles are Explore Your Health (with nine animated tutorials such as 'Alluring Alveoli')



and Explore Your Body (nine tutorials such as 'The Tongue of Terror'). The interface is well designed and very responsive. There is no record keeping. This is a good reinforcement activity for home or school use. Note that a series for older children is also available, called Health Beats. Recommended.

Health Beats Series, 4.5 or ★★★★★, Core Learning, \$20/title, 9-15, Windows, Macintosh. Designed to accompany the Health Kids Series, this is a well designed,

responsive set of five programs. Each provides guided tours of content typical of physical, emotional and social health courses. There are quizzes, games and colorful resources that can be incorporated into projects. Just put in the disk, and you have a set of simple activities, with a quiz for each key concept. There is no record keeping and not much chance to apply the knowledge, but the design is very engaging.

Kurzweil 3000 Version 7, 4.5 or ★★★★★ stars, Kurzweil Educational Systems, \$395 and up, 6-up, Windows, Macintosh. Designed for students with learning disabilities or other reading difficulties, this is a well designed text-to-speech word processor and document reader lets students hear each word they type read aloud. The software can be set to read word by word, whole sentences or continuously. Text is highlighted as it is read, and there are many ways in which the font can be manipulated and enlarged to facilitate easier reading. The document reader works in much the same manner. Students scan (scanner required) or open up an existing document, and the software will read it out loud. The program is easy to use. A multi lingual dictionary and thesaurus are always available. Additional features include a note-