

- Yesterday's ideas are being applied in new ways. For instance, applying sophisticated simulation techniques to a zoo concept (in ZooTycoon) brings new life to classic genres.

- With the exception of a clever breed of videogames, 2001 was not a good year for innovation in the United States. More interesting products came from Asia (www.littlefoxxkids.com) and Europe (Findus and Bioscopia).

- Children's eBooks (books available in eBook Reader format) are in the beginning stages of evolution, especially when compared to other children's interactive media products. Most of the nearly 100 entries made little effort to use interactive media features.

There is always room for a well-crafted adventure, especially when it adds learning to the mix. That's why HEUREKA-Klett's Bioscopia won the prize.

Children's Internet sites still can't compare with CD-delivered content. That's not to say there aren't some excellent activities available. Sites mentioned by the jurors include

www.mobilekids.net by DamarChrysler -- designed to teach safety skills.

www.lego.com/build/jUnkb at -- an innovative exercise in logical thinking.

www.highlights.com -- try the hidden pictures puzzle.

www.ipicturebooks.com -- where a child can customize a story with his or her name.

www.littlefoxxkids.com -- a Korean site with some of the best Shockwave programming you can find.

Playing with children's software, smart toys and video games all day may not make us rich, but the quality of life can't be beat. Over the years, we've become adept at spotting the amazing products, but let's face it, a review is only one person's opinion. The real fun comes in bickering with colleagues-Ebert and Roper style-over which products are the all-time best. For our industry, the penultimate debate comes once a year in an unlikely place-- Bologna, Italy, home of the international Bologna New Media Prize and some of the best eating in the world. Each February, a group of reviewers from all over the globe gather there to judge the previous year's interactive media.

Jurors for this year's contest included nine representatives from the US, Germany, Italy, France, Korea, and Japan. The task was daunting-- choose just four winners from 2001's batch of more than 987 products, entered from 13 different countries. Software, games and toys filled one conference room of the Bolognafiore, host of the culminating event, the Bologna Children's Book Fair, where the winners are announced each April. This forward-thinking organization decided to explore new media back in 1997, as a natural extension of the world of print. This year marks the first that e-books were also up for an award, and nearly 100 were considered for the prize. Despite language barriers and a bit of national patriotism, the jurors made their selections following three days of intense debate and demonstration. This year, there were four winners, along with five citation winners.



The telescope in Bioscopia (above); and one of the puzzles (below).

Bioscopia (Germany)

Heureka-Klett Softwarevelag GmbH (www.bioscopia.com). Designed for older children, this Myst-like exploration game embeds hundreds of biology facts in an abandoned

research station called Bioscopia. The goal is to find a lost biologist somewhere

in a labyrinth of dilapidated buildings. The solution can only be found by solving puzzles that deal with cell biology, genetics, botany and zoology. The tone of the game is marked by amazing graphics with a clever use of lighting. This is a game that will involve the whole family or classroom.



One of the puzzles (above); the title screen, below (below)

Findus bei den Mucklas (Sweden)

Gammafon Multimedia. (www.gammafon.se). This impressive software succeeds in bringing the characters from a series of books by author Sven Nordqvist into the interactive medium. Fourteen

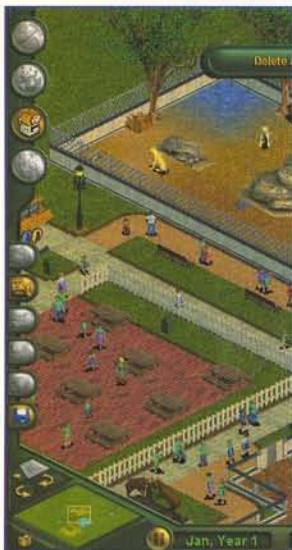
imaginative games challenge a child's logical thinking abilities, and include several difficulty levels for children aged 4- to 9-years. The jurors were especially

impressed by the puzzles that enable a child to build clever inventions in order to trap a mouse or fire a cannon. Also striking are the vivid watercolor illustrations that make the entire experience warm and inviting for the child.





The Principal Jurors, from left to right: Caterina Cangia (Italy), Atsuko Koizumi (Japan), Peter Mollman (USA), Warren Buckleitner (USA) and Thomas Feibel (Germany). Not pictured are the 2002 corresponding jurors, including: Georgia Leguem (France); Susan McLester (USA); Gigi Tagliapietra (Italy); and Kyung Woo Lee (South Korea).



A zoo in progress in Zoo Tycoon

Zoo Tycoon (USA) Microsoft Corporation (www.zootycoon.com)

The well-crafted simulation lets an older child design his or her own zoo from the ground up. To have a thriving zoo, a child learns first hand how to build the correct habitat for as many as 40 different animals, including the Giant Panda and the White Siberian Tiger. Players can make their zoos bigger and better with time, adding fences, flowers, benches, shelters and rocks; all helping to increase the number of visitors and the health of the zoo. Keeping all the animals happy takes research and work, which as in real life, can be a very challenging task.

CHILDREN'S eBook WINNER My First Internet Manual (Italy)

Publisher: Edizioni Piemme
This compelling children's eBook combines a good story with interactive features that help to enhance the mission of the book: to help children better understand the Internet. Jurors noted that the interactive features were successful in enhancing the topic by presenting a variety of internal and external links along with a self-correcting quiz.



The following products made the list of finalists and were awarded citations of excellence

CITATION FOR EXCELLENCE:

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (Windows)
Publisher: Electronic Arts (USA)
With this CD, children explore the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft, which is presented in rich 3D graphics on par with the very best of videogame technology. Unlike most videogames, however, this game contains no worrisome content, with a plot taken from the first book in the Harry Potter series. Jurors noted the well crafted step-by-step tutorials along with the high quality illustration and narration.

CITATION FOR EXCELLENCE:

Ripple Effects: Character Education True to Your Core (USA) Publisher: Ripple Effects (USA)
(www.rippleeffects.com)
Through videos of actual teens, older children are given problem solving opportunities with 60 different topics, including identifying personal values, resisting stereotypes, taking responsibility and practicing tolerance. Of added value are the teacher's guide and the open invitation to discuss the topics in real situations. Jurors noted the simple but clear graphics and sounds which help children personally relate to the content.