

Judging a World of Children's New Media



Juror Observations on the State of Children's Interactive Media

- **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 new breed of videogames, 2001 was not a good year for innovation in the United States.** More interesting products came from Asia (www.littlefoxkids.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/junkbot -- 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.littlefoxkids.com -- a Korean site with some of the best Shockwave programming you can find.

Playing with children's software, smart toys and videogames 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.

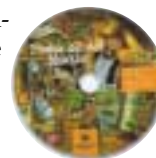


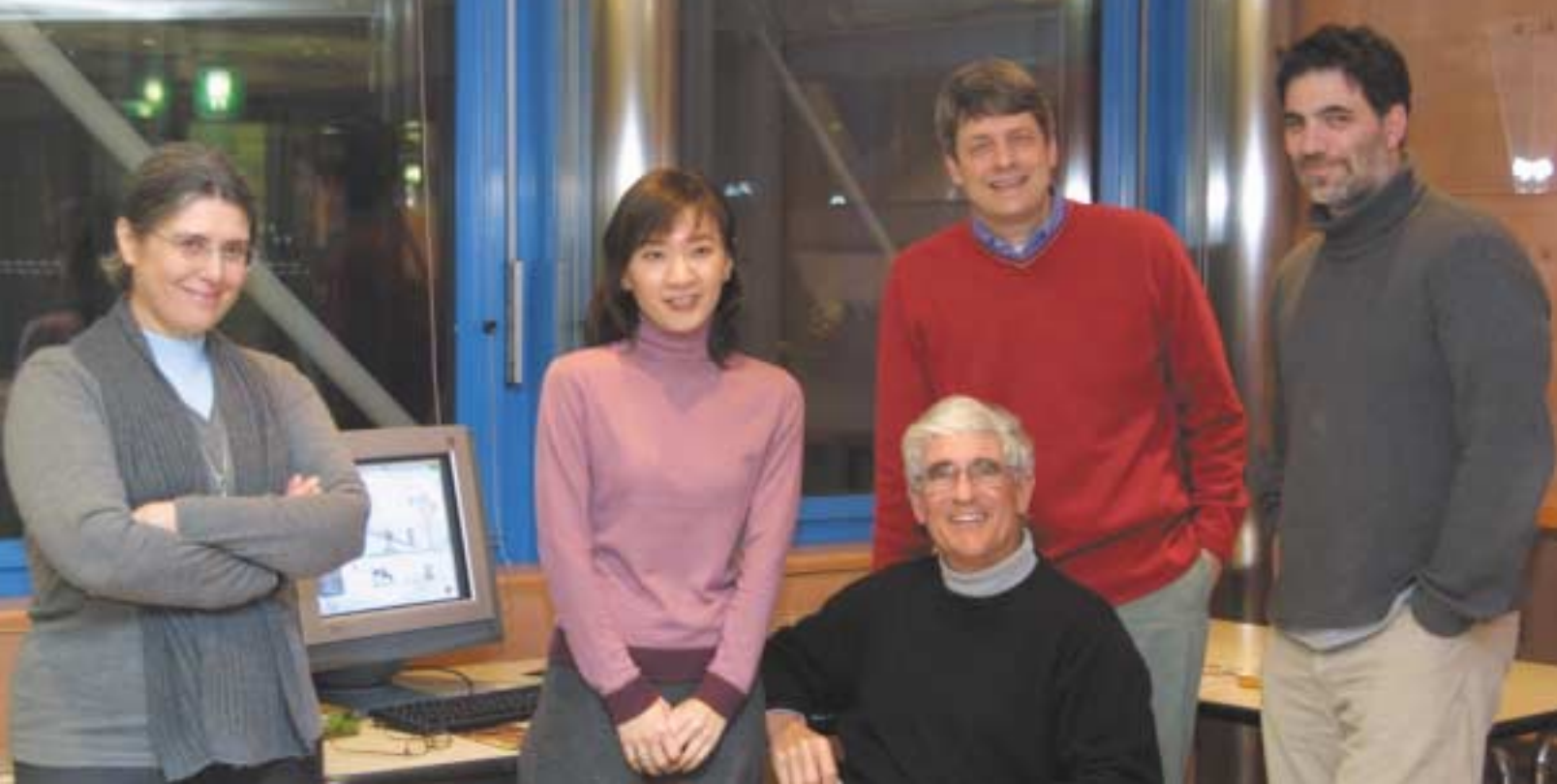
One of the puzzles (above); the title screen, below (below)

Findus bei den Mucklas (Sweden)

Gammafon Multimedia. (www.gam-mafon.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 Cangià (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.

The State of Children's eBooks

New to the Bologna New Media prize this year was a collaboration with the International eBook Award Foundation, in which we evaluated nearly 100 children's eBooks. Of these, the jurors selected one winner and gave two Citations for Excellence. The entries were accepted on three formats (.pdf, .lit and REB). We quickly realized that children's eBooks are in a very early stage of evolution. Here are some of the jurors' comments.

- The eBook can be a powerful, exciting new medium for children that is a nice complement to (rather than a replacement of) a printed book. Its potential applications, enhancements, delivery formats, and even range of content are yet to be fully realized.
- The growth of the eBook industry hinges on the ability of hardware designers and developers to create easy-to-use, full-featured, appropriately priced reading devices. Industry sales keep pace with the technologies that are available. e-Publishing will reach critical mass once the right devices exist. The consumer will ultimately decide the critical features to access (video, audio, interactivity, linking, and more).
- The design and release of soon-to-be released eBook hardware such as tablet PCs, will greatly help the children's eBook category.
- Today's eBook publishers, authors, and software and hardware developers are pioneers of a new technology.
- A new breed of author is evolving--one who is capable of exploiting the potential of interactive technology to help enhance a story. The best eBooks will become a joint venture among author, editor, publisher, graphic artist, hardware and software designers, who, together, will enrich the end product with features such as annotation, dictionaries, music, audio, links, videos, photo images, and more.



eBook Links

Here are some useful links to learn more about the emerging world of children's eBooks (some URLs are hyphenated; so type accordingly)

- **E-Book Primer:** An Introduction and Guide to the World of Electronic Books
(www.epublishingconnections.com/ReadersPrimer/e-book_web_sites.htm)
- **International eBook Award Foundation** (www.iebaf.org)
- **The Open eBook Forum** (www.openebook.com)
- **Open an eBook** (www.openanebook.com)
- **Adobe** (www.adobe.com/epaper/ebooks/main.html)
- **Microsoft** (www.microsoft.com/reader/default.asp)
- **Gemstar REB eBook** (www.gemstar-ebook.com/cgi-bin/WebObjects/eBookstore)

CITATION FOR EXCELLENCE:

www.littlefoxxkids.com (Korea)

<http://www.littlefoxxkids.com>

This subscription-based Internet site for children combines an impressive number of stories, games and exercises with a comprehensive didactic plan best suited to children aged 3-7 years. Jurors noted the high standard of graphics, sound and animation compared to other Internet sites for children; but especially noted the pedagogy underlying many of the activities. In their words "quality and good taste pop up from every frame of this site."

CITATION FOR EXCELLENCE:

The Bible and the Life of Jesus (Italy)

Publisher: Dami International

Specifically developed for the younger reader, this colorful eBook

incorporates beautiful illustrations with well-written text. This is an example of simple and effective eBook interactivity, including internal links and a second level of supporting text for the older reader, teacher, or parent.

CITATION FOR EXCELLENCE:

Les Histoires Epouvantables de Maitre Frisson (France)

Publisher: Editions 00h00

By combining an interesting story with a variety of internal branching links, this eBook gives an older child the option to have a say in the direction of the plot.

For the latest information about the Bologna New Media Prize, please visit

www.bookfair.bolognafiere.it