

Link of math, art, fascinating in 3-D

In a world of violent video games, where dexterity of the thumb and index finger is infinitely more important than the flexing of the cerebrum, there must be a place for children and their parents to interact and actually learn something from that overpriced multimedia computer/gaming system. Take a deep breath and enter the ROMper



JOE SZADKOWSKI

ROMper room

Room, where learning is a four-letter word — cool.

The relationship between design and number is explored in a breathtaking way in **Art and Mathematics**. Through a simple encyclopedic interface, older students are

exposed to the stunning history of creators indebted to geometric theory, colorful animations, interactive demonstrations and behind-the-scenes numeric conundrums that allow artists to create masterpieces.

Organized into nine modules — Spiritual Geometry, Knots and Links, Magic Squares, Regular Polyhedra, Perspective, Divine Proportion, Ambassadors, New Geometries and Fractal Geometry — the engaging presentations trace the use of mathematics and its artsy side from the father of algebra, Islamic mathematician Al-Khwarizmi, to the cubist movement to current computer configurations.

A very dry text layout appears on one side of the screen with the colorful goodies tightly fit into rectangular boxes to the right. A stop at Divine Proportion, for example, explores the Renaissance and the influence of the early Greek and Roman mathematicians.

Students can learn about Luca



Stuart Little 2 contains five games based on movie action sequences.

Pacioli and his rediscovery of the rhombicuboctahedron (complete with a 3-D animation of the multifaceted crystal), Fibonacci numbers (a sequence of numbers in which each is the sum of the previous numbers — which ultimately can be shown to create a neat logarithmic spiral) and the inspiration of Leonardo da Vinci.

I readily admit I can't draw a straight line, and after trying to read some of the difficult concepts, I'm not sure my math skills are as sharp as I thought, either. Users learn about tessellations, dodecahedrons and Julia set fireworks while seeing the work of Albrecht Durer, Hans Holbein the Younger and Laurent de La Hyre.

Being a math geek and art connoisseur, I loved the program and was completely sold on the pair of cheesy 3-D glasses thrown into the mix. Suddenly, my ability to virtually tie torus knots jumped from the screen, and, like a magician, I astounded members of my

family as they passed by. Unfortunately, trying to explain the theory behind my design may take a master's degree.

Art and Mathematics, Virtual Image, distributed by Tool Factory, \$49.99, for PC systems only.

Stuart Little 2 borrows some of the biggest challenges the little white mouse faces in the current movie and translates them perfectly to the computer screen. Spoiler alert: Those who have not seen the movie will not need to bother after reading the following paragraphs.

The title features five games based on key movie action scenes: Daredevil Driving, which has Stuart maneuvering his little red coupe convertible; Drain Escape, in which Stuart braves the dark and slimy depths of the kitchen sink to retrieve Mother Little's diamond ring; Balloon Jump, which takes Stuart on a ride to the top of the Pishkin Building to save Mar-

galo; Roof Skate, in which Stuart pulls off some skateboard tricks; and Air Dodge, in which players have to help Stuart or Margalo escape Falcon and return home with Mother Little's ring.

All are fairly basic driving, flying and maze-exploring challenges, but the beautiful graphics complement the on-screen action so games such as Air Dodge take place in a lush green Central Park with the New York City skyline in the distance.

Children can choose to play in Story Mode, which sequences the games to follow the movie, or Free Play, which allows players to enjoy their favorites in any order.

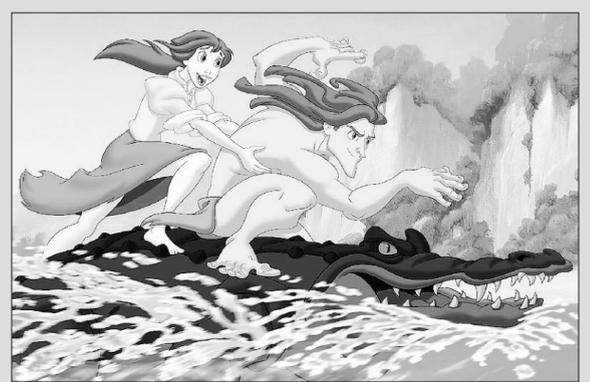
The most difficult game, Balloon Jump, has Stuart ascending the Pishkin Building. Players must help Stuart jump from balloon to balloon, floating ever so slightly higher before the balloons lose helium, causing Stuart's parachute to open and gently float him back to the sidewalk, where players must begin again.

Action requires basic keyboard commands and usually little more than being able to click on the right or left arrow, sometimes giving the space bar or enter key a click.

Children should rack up points quickly, giving even the youngest of players a feeling of accomplishment while honing reflex and puzzle-solving skills. When a player finishes a game, he is rewarded with a special Bonus Gallery from the movie. After all the pictures are collected, a certificate of completion can be printed out and displayed.

Stuart Little 2, Infogrames, \$19.99, for PC systems only.

ROMper Room is a column devoted to finding the best of multimedia edutainment. Write to Joseph Szadkowski, The Washington Times, 3600 New York Ave. NE, Washington, D.C. 20002; call 202/636-3016; or send e-mail (jszadkowski@washingtontimes.com).



The DVD "Tarzan & Jane" has lots of action and a strong female lead.

Double delight

Here are two multimedia or entertainment items to try:

■ **Tarzan & Jane** by Buena Vista Home Entertainment, for DVD-enabled home entertainment centers and computers, \$24.98. Edgar Rice Burroughs' Disneyized monkey man swings into homes through a new digital video disc presenting adventures reminiscent of the current television series.

When Jane can't figure out how to celebrate her one-year anniversary with Tarzan, she enlists the help of Terk the gorilla; Tantor the orange elephant; and her bumbling father, Professor Archimedes Q. Porter, to offer a few ideas. This clever device lends itself to the introduction of three episodic stories with a common theme: All introduce an adversary and feature a confrontation of that adversary, with the heroes always coming out on top.

Plenty of animated action should keep the younger male demographic thrilled with the likes of exploding volcanoes, ferocious panthers, biplane duels and deadly crocodile battles, while the girls should love the strong female lead, who often wears the loincloth in the family.

Bonus features include a Build the Tree House activity, which has the Professor directing the child while he or she uses the mouse or DVD controller to select pieces; an adventure creator, which allows children to develop an illustrated story; and something I could do without, Phil Collins and Mandy Moore rehashing the hit "Two Worlds."

■ **Soccer Mania** from Electronic Arts for Game Boy Advance, \$39.99. The lands of Danish building blocks meld with a World Cup atmosphere as up to four children play a feature-packed sports simulation on their hand-held gaming systems.

Within the four-on-four match-ups (including the goalie), players not only get theme-based arenas ranging from an arctic wilderness to medieval castles, but they also can select from on-field avatars such as knights, pirates and cowboys on their quest to win the Lego Cup.

After using training exercises to hone skills, especially adept players enter the qualifying rounds and can use power-ups that include exploding balls and invincibility to stymie opponents. The easy-to-control action and fun graphics should keep junior screaming "Goooooaaal!" for quite awhile.

SUNDAY, AUG. 4

Ice cream program — 1 to 3 p.m.
Green Spring Gardens Manor House, Alexandria. In summer, the foods people crave are cool, refreshing and full-flavored. Sample the delights of ice creams, sorbets, sherbets and granitas, and enjoy a full English tea in this Fairfax County Park Authority event. Cost: \$20. Information: 703/642-5173.

American women art exhibit — 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington. Drawn from the Corcoran's collection of American art, "The Gilded Cage: Views of American Women, 1873-1921," features more than 35 paintings, works on paper and sculpture and runs daily (except Tuesdays) through Aug. 27. Cost: \$8 for families, \$5 for adults, \$3 for seniors and member guests and \$1 for students. Information: 202/639-1700.

MONDAY, AUG. 5

Mexican dance ensemble — 10:30 a.m.
City Hall Concert Pavilion, Gaithersburg. Mexico's rich history, traditions and culture are brought to the stage by the Los Quetzales Mexican Dance Ensemble in this program sponsored by the city of Gaithersburg. Free. Information: 301/258-6350.

Bamboo exhibition — 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Green Spring Garden, Alexandria. A summer-long Bountiful Bamboo exhibition, sponsored by the Fairfax County Park Authority, will highlight all aspects of bamboo culture, including its history and uses for food and home and garden decorations. The exhibition is open daily except Sunday and runs through Sept. 8. Free. Information: 703/642-5173.

TUESDAY, AUG. 6

Anacostia River cruise — noon to 12:45 p.m.
Bladensburg Waterfront Park, Bladensburg. Join a park naturalist for a cruise along the Anacostia River every Tuesday and Thursday through Oct. 31, sponsored by the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission. In addition, cruises are planned for every Friday and Sunday evening in August from 7 to 7:45 p.m. and in September from 6 to 6:45 p.m. Free. For the more adventurous, the parks offer a canoe tour, scheduled on the second and fourth Wednesday of the month through Oct. 2. Cost: \$10 for residents of Prince George's and Montgomery counties, \$12 for others. Information: 301/779-0371.

WEDNESDAY, AUG. 7

West Nile Virus program — 7:30 p.m.
Takoma Park Municipal Building, Takoma Park. Learn how to reduce the mosquito population known to carry the West Nile Virus through the Mosquito aNILEators Program, a volunteer program hosted by the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services and the Montgomery County Volunteer Center designed to educate and assist in eliminating potential mosquito breeding sites. Free; registration required. Information: 240/777-2600.

Concert and artists' reception — 7 p.m.
Mount Airy Mansion, Upper Marlboro. The Mount Airy Mansion Fine Arts Series presents a concert of ancient music performed by Tomas Najbrt and Michael Pospisil followed by a "meet the artist" reception and informal tours of Mount Airy Mansion, a 17th-century mansion. Cost: \$15 for adults, \$5 for students. Reservations are suggested. Information: 301/856-9656.

FRIDAY, AUG. 9

Twilight concert — 7 p.m.
City Hall Concert Pavilion, Gaithersburg. The city of Gaithersburg presents the sounds of blues musicians Melanie Mason

Something to do

Check out these events in Maryland, Virginia and D.C.

Band, part of the city's Live on the Lawn concert and entertainment series. Free. Information: 301/258-6350.

West Side Story performance — 7:30 p.m.
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall & Arts Center, Northern Virginia Community College, Alexandria. The community college's drama department presents the musical West Side Story, directed by Washington theater veteran Stephen Shetler with choreography by Amy Miharou Hough. The play also will be presented Aug. 10 at 7:30 p.m. and Aug. 11 at 2:30 p.m. Cost: \$7 for general admission; and \$5 for senior citizens, NVCC students and faculty. Tickets will be available at the door. Information: 703/845-6158.

Used book sale — noon to 5 p.m.
Truro Episcopal Church, Fairfax. The Truro Episcopal Church is sponsoring its annual used book sale, including adult and children's books, videos and cassettes. The sale also runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Aug. 10 and from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Aug. 11. Free. Information: 703/644-6512.

Outdoor concert — 6 to 8 p.m.
King Street Station, Alexandria. The choir Voices of Alleyne will offer soul-stirring gospel sounds at this event sponsored by the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association and the city of Alexandria. Free. Information: 703/838-5005.

SATURDAY, AUG. 10

Birds of prey program — 3 to 4 p.m.
Long Branch Nature Center, Arlington. Adults and children ages 6 and older can learn about the birds of prey native to Northern Virginia and the important role they play in our environment during this Arlington County Parks and Recreation program. Free; reservations required. Information: 703/228-6535.

Bugfest nature program — 1 to 4 p.m.
Watkins Nature Center, Upper Marlboro. Families can join the fun at Bugfest, an afternoon event sponsored by the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission that will feature a live insect zoo, butterfly and outdoor bug hikes, information booths and edible insects. Cost: \$3; registration requested. Information: 301/218-6702.

Tomato and pepper tasting — 10 to 11:30 a.m.
Green Spring Gardens, Alexandria. Every gardener has secrets on how to grow the tastiest tomatoes and peppers, including growing conditions, structures and heirloom varieties, and staff horticulturist Cindy Brown will share hers in this program sponsored by Fairfax County Park Authority. Cost: \$7. Information: 703/642-5173.

TUESDAY, AUG. 13

Textile show — 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Torpedo Factory Arts Center, Alexandria. The Potomac Craftsmen Fiber Gallery presents "Techno Textiles," an exhibit demonstrating how textiles and fiber art have changed for the 21st century and what we can expect in the future. The exhibit runs through Sept. 8; weekday hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and weekend hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Free. Information: 703/548-0935.

Please send family-related calendar announcements to the Family Times calendar, The Washington Times, 3600 New York Ave. NE, Washington, D.C. 20002. Announcements must be submitted at least two weeks before the event.

PEACE AND QUIET



Heidi Begany talks to her 5-year-old Palomino, Butterscotch, before she exercises him at Kaldeer Farm in North Carolina. Mrs. Begany rides Butterscotch about five times a week. It's one way she keeps busy while her daughters are at camp.

Summer camps give respite from busiest parenting season

By Kelly Starling
RALEIGH NEWS & OBSERVER

Kathy McLane walks into the Durham (N.C.) Arts Council with her 9-year-old son, Jeffrey, who clutches a notebook and chatters by her side. They check in for his day camp, and he keeps talking at warp speed. He wants to show everyone his latest masterpiece: a black-and-white drawing of a toucan breaking out of an egg.

"He can change his voice so he can sound like a parrot. He can fly — swoosh," he says, holding out his arms at both sides like an airplane.

Then he makes eye contact with someone else, and his story and mimes begin again. Mrs. McLane stands by patiently, interjecting from time to time that they have to go in.

"Oh, and did you know that . . ." Jeffrey says, turning his head as they walk away, trying to get in one last bit.

Summer camp may be for the children, but parents get something out of it as well. Just ask Mrs. McLane. With Jeffrey studying art for a few hours each day, she can go home and do what she wants.

"I just enjoy being alone," the stay-at-home mom says. "I can take a nap and do things that before I couldn't. I run errands, go grocery shopping, go to the mall — things that are difficult to do with Jeffrey. He's a tough kid sometimes."

Other parents at the art camp know what she means. Jeff Goll drops off his 7-year-old

daughter before heading home.

"I can do errands while she's here — catch up on e-mail or cleaning up the house," says Mr. Goll, who is self-employed as an artist. "I get a little work done in the studio if I can."

When his daughter is with him, he makes less headway on his art, he says.

"You partly do day camp to get more freedom for yourself," he says, "but also, you're helping your child explore her interests."

"It gives me individual time with each child," stay-at-home mom Rosemary McLaughlin says on her way back to her car with her 6-year-old son after dropping off her 7-year-old son at camp. "Usually, I have both of them, and they're playing with each other."

For parents whose children are in overnight camps, a week or two alone can give them precious moments for reconnecting or pursuing their own interests.

"Some of them use it as an excuse to take a vacation themselves," says Chris Ogden, Girls in Science specialist for the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences and coordinator for the museum's coastal "Ed-venture" camp. "Some of the parents this time . . . took advantage of it to go camping nearby. Others are using some of the time to catch up on work."

Wendy Lassiter cooks supper at New Life Camp in Raleigh, N.C., a weeklong Christian retreat her sons attend every year. Then she heads home to an empty, quiet house without young people stopping by or the phone ringing constantly.

"The first day without them, it's weird," says Mrs. Lassiter, who lives with her husband in Raleigh. "And by the third day you

miss them. But we always plan things to do while the kids are gone."

Last week, she and her husband went out to dinner, rented movies and made plans to see the movie "Minority Report" with friends.

"I still get to see them each day, but I say bye and I leave," she says, laughing.

Phil and Heidi Begany send their three daughters to Camp New Life each year, too. "When the girls are [home], someone has soccer. Someone else has a riding lesson. We go to the pool. Each child is into something different," Mrs. Begany says. "My life is basically centered around them, especially in the summer. During the school year, I have my days. So I look at the summer as their time."

For one week, though, it's her time again. Her first day alone, she usually cleans and then thinks of everything she wants to do. Most mornings, she rides her favorite horse at a nearby stable. She goes to the pool some afternoons. For lunch, she eats with friends. Evenings may bring special dinners with her husband.

"I just play it by ear," she says. "That's something you can't do with the kids around."

Each day her girls are gone, she sends them notes or small gifts to let them know she cares. Still, she says she wouldn't give up her week of peace for anything.

"I personally feel I'm a better mother when I have a break," she says. "I don't work outside the home, so this gives me a little relaxation before I need to gear up and start all over again."

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