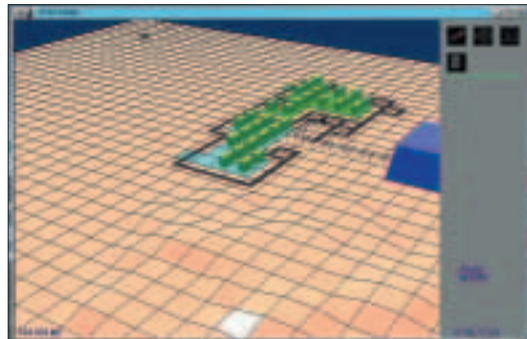


3D simulation games

LET THE GAMES COMMENCE

As Linux develops so do the games available. No longer are we limited to text adventures or graphical puzzle games. Jack Owen takes a look at some of the latest 3D graphic-rich games crying out for a chance to waste your time

It's been all work, work, work here at Linux Magazine recently, so we decided it was about time we gave ourselves a little time out to test the latest batch of 3D graphical simulation games. In previous issues we've taken a look at Railroad Tycoon II, which let you simulate a train empire, as well as two games in the SimCity genre, Mobility and Free Reign – the former being a shareware program and the latter freeware.



City building with Free Reign

Good housekeeping

MandrakeSoft has decided to diversify, catering not only for the home and business markets, but also for gamers. Mandrake Gaming Edition comes with three CDs – a full Mandrake distribution – plus a fourth CD containing a Linux-based version of the Electronic Arts game, The Sims.

Installation of the distribution is the same as any version of Mandrake, and The Sims game loads flawlessly once the security number is entered. Starting the game brings up a full screen version of The Sims and before you know it, several hours will have passed. When playing in KDE we did encounter a minor error, namely that the panel seems to draw over part of the playing area. Unfortunately, this part of the screen includes some of the game's important controls. This flaw was not encountered under GNOME.

In this simulation, rather than controlling an entire city, your actions are focussed on a single household. Gameplay is well timed so that you're always doing something, such as moving the household characters

about to perform tasks. The Sims has earned itself a loyal following under Windows and it's easy to see why.

So is Mandrake Gaming Edition worth the money? If you play games, then the answer is probably yes. The technology that Mandrake has incorporated into this distribution is a version of WineX from Transgaming – who may be about to change Linux gaming by using WineX and enabling subscribers to vote on what should be worked on. Transgaming are already making substantial inroads into getting Windows games running under Linux.

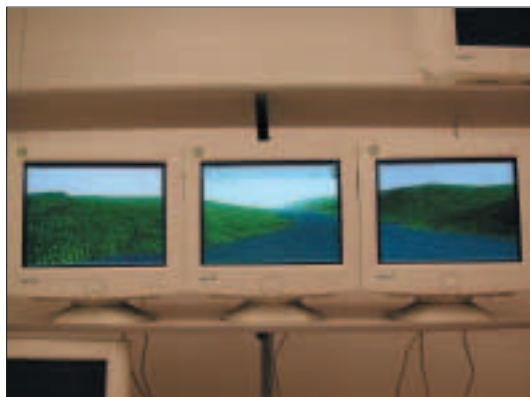
Does the system work? Well, yes and no. The range of games up and running is large and steadily growing. As a test we tried Fallout from Interplay and it did work. Where it fails is with some modern games, which use copy protection that the WineX software isn't yet compatible with. However, we're all going to have a fantastic year finding out which games do work. Subscription to Transgaming is \$10 per month, although you do get three months free with The Sims.



The Sims under Mandrake Gaming Edition

Flight of fancy

After many weeks of playing The Sims and failing to get the characters to kiss (to improve their morale, honest!) we decided to move on to some of the other games for Linux. FlightGear has been around for a while now and was originally proposed in 1996. Like most other simulators, and Free software in



Playing FlightGear on multiple monitors

general, it has only improved with age. This multi-platform (it works with Windows, Mac and Irix as well as Linux) project aims to be the best Open Source flight simulator available by allowing anyone to contribute to its improvement. This really is a wonderful working example of an Open Source project working as its best.

An outlay of 40Mb of disk space gets the basic flight simulator and scenery up and running, and this alone is wonderful. You can however download additional scenery such as the whole of the UK in a 19Mb file, or airport overlays. The scenery is based on satellite imagery and so is very accurate.

Astronomical code is also present so the Sun, moon and stars are all accurately drawn. For frame rate speed, the simulator relies on Open GL and a 3D accelerated graphics card. An MS Sidewinder joystick was fully supported but as the configuration files are in text format, other types and setups are easily configured.

FlightGear can be started via the KDE menu or from the command-line with:

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run fgfs
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If you wanted to you can alter the settings to fly a hot air balloon or an X15 rocket plane. The default plumps for the more standard option of a small plane, based in Arizona. The number of different options is so large that we could spend weeks exploring each but our main task was to play the game, so running with the default options we started to taxi down the runway.

The number of keyboard shortcut combinations can be a little confusing but a printout of the manual at the side of the keyboard soon solved this. Ctrl+U is the most important code as this instantly adds 1,000 feet to your altitude – hopefully giving you the chance to learn the other keys without crashing.

With a 750MHz CPU, GeForce 2 graphics card and plenty of RAM the frame rate per second was around 60, and so was very playable. This rate drops depending on what conditions you are flying in (fog being the worst) and how low you are flying

(drawing airport scenery and the surrounding land is more intensive than blue sky).

You can fly either full screen with no plane panel or even switch to a military style Head Up Display. Should you have the equipment then networking will allow multiple screens to be used at once.

Still want more?

FlightGear is not the only flight simulator for Linux. There is a small but growing bunch with some unusual features. XPlane is currently being ported, and once complete this will enable you to fly in a wide variety of environments, including over the surface of Mars. Current beta programs available include the Plane-Maker and World-Maker, although not the simulator itself.

Silent Wings is a simulator for gliders, whilst Fachoda Complex is ideal for those of you who want to attack each other via a network. Fachoda complex is a toy plane simulator that doesn't rely on 3D graphic accelerator cards. You can bomb targets and trade up different planes. If helicopters are more your thing then you might want to get your hands on Search and Rescue, which is based on Mesa graphics libraries.

At this point we thought simulators could not become anymore accurate. Then we found Racer...



Play the hero with Search and Rescue

Info

Racer (on the CD)	http://www.linuxracer.racesim.net
Transgaming	http://www.transgaming.com
Railway Tycoon II	http://www.lokigames.com/products/rt2
Mobility	http://linux.mobility-online.de
SimCity 3000	http://www.lokigames.com/products/sc3k
Free Reign	http://freereign.sourceforge.net/index.shtml
The Sims	http://www.mandrakesoft.com/products/81/gaming-edition
FlightGear	http://flightgear.org
Xplane	http://www.x-plane.com
Silent Wings	http://home.online.no/~tseval/sw
Fachoda Complex	http://rixed.free.fr
Search and Rescue	http://wolfpack.twu.net/SearchAndRescue