



Welcome to the September 1999 edition of BVS Reviews.

The September edition features a review of Music Ace 2. We also check out The Robot Club and America's Greatest Arcade Hits 3D. See our review on FightingForce 64. We read a mystery or two and get trained on Word 2000 . We listen to a new band from Canada and watch Steve Martin in a comedy about evangalists and scams.

We hope that you like our reviews and will keep coming back each month to see what's new.

Bruce Von Stiers - Publisher, BVS Reviews

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Learning Visual Basic From A CD

Bruce Von Stiers

I just got done checking out an interactive training CD. It is from **Microsoft** and came bundled with a book on Visual Basic programming by **Microsoft Press**. The name of the training program is *Mastering Microsoft Visual Basic 6.0 Fundamentals*.

To start out with, there is over 40 hours worth of training on this CD. There are lab instructions, animations, training exercises, a glossary and an exhaustive index.

The program has a series of collapsible lesson listings in the main window. The window is split into two parts. The left side contains the lesson list. The right side has the actual lesson.

You can start out at the beginning of the training material or skip around. Some of the lessons have video clips that go along with the topic. There is also a lot of sample code that can be copied into an actual Visual Basic program.

There are six chapters in this training. The first chapter is Introduction To Application Development Using Visual Basic. Boy, what a mouthful. But this chapter tells you all about the different versions of Visual Basic, the terms used and what they mean, what event driven programming is and an explanation of executable files.

The second chapter is all about Visual Basic Fundamentals. It teaches you about setting properties in design and at program run time. It also explores controls and forms. Chapter 3 is Working With Code And Forms. You learn about Modules and what they mean to the overall programming scheme. Learn how to use the Code Editor Window. It shows you how to set up the environmental controls for your program.

Other chapters include topics like Input Validation, Working With Controls and a major biggie, Debugging. This chapter goes through all the steps it takes to debug programming code.

Each chapter has a lab exercise at the end of it. This is to make user that you understand the training that was covered in the chapter. There is also a set of self-check questions at the end of each chapter.

To run this training CD, you'll need a Pentium 90 PC with Windows 95 and 24 MB of RAM. It will also work on an NT 4.0 machine or with Windows 98. You will need 14 MB of free hard drive space and Internet Explorer 4.01. A CD-ROM drive and a mouse or other pointing device is a must.

Mastering Microsoft Visual Basic 6.0 Fundamentals is a great way to learn Visual Basic. Not only is it good training, it is brought to you from the people who developed Visual Basic 6.0.

You can pick up this training program at most booksellers that have computer related materials. Some software retailers might carry this as well. It lists for \$ 39.95.

For the latest information on the Mastering Series from Microsoft, visit their web site at <http://msdn.microsoft.com/mastering>

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Interactive Office 2000

Bruce Von Stiers

I recently received a book for evaluation. It was called *Step By Step Microsoft Word 2000*. It came from Microsoft Press. In addition to the book, I received an interactive tutorial on Microsoft Office 2000. This CD-ROM disc is titled *Step By Step Interactive: Microsoft Office 2000*.

Once you put the CD into your drive it takes off and installs some file on your system. Then you are prompted to set up a login ID. I guess this is so that nobody messes up your training.

After the program has loaded, you are asked to select a syllabus. The choices are Office 2000 For New Users – Audio, Office For New Users – Text, Upgrading To Office 2000 – Audio and Upgrading To Office 2000 – Text.

You are taken to a window that's a little like Explorer. It has a collapsible listing of all the lessons. Once you've completed a lesson, it is simple to go back to it to review. Just click on the lesson.

The first part of the program is the introduction. It shows you how to navigate the training screens. There are interactive screens that have you perform certain tasks on sample Office 2000 items. There is another window called that Dashboard that has VCR type controls. Use the Dashboard to move on to another lesson or to go back. Use the Stop button to end the lesson or the Pause button to temporarily halt the lesson (potty break, anyone?)

Now on to the lessons. The first section is called Getting Started. This has you getting familiar with the various menus and shortcuts that Office 2000 has to offer. Learn your way around an Excel spreadsheet or a PowerPoint presentation.

The next section is all about Business information. You are shown how to design a handout for a presentation and some easy to do letterhead. You get to learn how to put together a newsletter using Microsoft Publisher. The third section has you editing and making changes to documents. It also covers some topics from Office 2000's relational database program, Access 2000.

There are also tutoring sections on sharing information across networks and as email attachments. You also learn about managing information in another lesson block.

The other part of the training shows the reasons to upgrade to Office 2000. It contains some of the same information and lessons that Office 2000 For New Users has.

If you want a quick and easy to use tutorial on Office 2000, then the Step By Step Interactive CD training is one for your must buy list.

To find out more about this product or other Microsoft Press products, visit their web site at www.mspress.com

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Building Robots

Bruce Von Stiers

Have you ever wanted to be part of a secret club that was dedicated to science? Have a hankering to build things that move? Then have I got a game for you. The game is called *The Robot Club* and comes from **Southpeak Interactive**.

The guys from the Robot Club catch you snooping around, or so they say. They give you a chance to redeem yourself. You can join the club and hang out. But only if you are successful in building a series of robots. These robots will help solve problems around town. The Robot Club has its own special brand of programming language. You have to be sharp enough to understand the language and build a better robot.



The game has six levels and a total of 36 missions. The game intensifies after each successful mission. The members of the club don't hesitate to give advice, or a dig or two, as you progress through the levels. The interaction with the club members comes through a series of video segments where you get your assignments and critiques of your actions.

The game is set up so that you can exchange your robot ideas over the Internet or via disk to other people who have *The Robot Club*. Right about now you might be asking yourself what this game is going to teach. The game teaches logical thinking, computer programming skills and problem solving.

If you get stuck during a mission, there is a Tip button that can be pushed. A tip will appear that will help you over the hurdle. There is also a hint line, but it is a 900 number and costs money.

The Robot Club is for kids 10 years old and up.

Once you've become a seasoned robot builder, your robot can enter a duel with another robot. Fight a robot generated by the computer or build two of your own to fight. The system requirements for *The Robot Club* are minimal. You'll need Window 3.1 and 8 MB of RAM. You'll also need a CD-ROM drive and SVGA graphics. You will only need a 486 PC to run *The Robot Club*.

*For a fun and challenging game that teaches computer programming and problem solving, **The Robot Club** can't be beat.*

The Robot Club has a list price of \$30. You should be able to find it cheaper if you look around. If you can't find it, look for it on the Southpeak web site. It is at www.southpeak.com

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Not So Junky

Bruce Von Stiers

Sometimes a game comes out that is both educational and doggone fun to play. Such is the case of **Southpeak Interactive's** game, *Junkland Jam*. It came out quite a while back but I just now got a chance to look at it.

What is Junkland Jam? It is a game that combines music and science together for an adventure. Kids from six to 10 years old can learn all kinds of cool scientific experiments while playing this game. The music in the game was put together by Bill Bloom, a famous kid's music composer.

The storyline for Junkland Jam goes something like this: Simon Fehfer lives in Drabsville. The place is sooo boring. It is controlled by Lester Pricepoint and his BUY ME Corporation. Lester makes boring stuff for people to buy. The more boring and orderly stuff people buy, the more money Lester makes.

Drabsville is so clean; you could use the street in front of your house for a dinner plate. Simon is just not cut out for this orderly situation. He loves his junk. Simon keeps all of his junk hidden in a closet. One day the closet simply burst open, pouring Simon's junk out all over the place. Simon's mom uses her Junksucker 3BM (a BUY ME Corporation appliance) on the junk pile and sucks it all to Junkland. Even Simon's treasured harmonica.

Simon gets sucked into Junkland himself so that he can find his harmonica. He also will try to put a stop to the stranglehold that Lester Pricepoint has on Drabsville.

As Simon travels through Junkland in search of his harmonica, he discovers all kinds of wonderful things. He even meets up with another human, a girl named Sunny. She makes musical instruments out of junk she finds laying around.



There are five areas in Junkland. There is the swamp that Simon lands in after being sucked up by the Junksucker 3BM. Next is the Critterdome, which is a really smelly place where old fruits and vegetables can find friends and happiness. Luma is a bright place filled with old glass and light bulbs. Motomekka is a blessing for scrap metal junkies with all of its junk parts. The Shack is a too cool place where all of the junks bands hang out and play their music.

One additional feature of the game is that it comes with an actual harmonica. Not only that, it comes with a "How To Play.." manual for the harmonica. There is also a song sheet to play songs from the game.

Some of the characters you'll find in Junkland are Neon Dude, Glimmer, Mother and Woody. Glimmer looks like a light bulb and has this weird French accent. He's the personal secretary to Neon Dude.

Woody is some little green, fishy type of creature who knows how to help Simon. Mother is the Queen of Critterdome. She knows everything about everything. And finally, Neon Dude is very bright and loud. He also holds the key to get out of Junkland. IF only he would share the secret!!

The science experiments that are done in the game cover some basic concepts. Learn about compasses and magnets. Density and water surface experiments, as well as electricity and battery experiments, are done. Find out about telescopes, periscopes and what makes a rocket go into the air.

To play Junkland Jam, you'll need a 486 PC with Windows 3.1 or higher. 8 MB of RAM, a CD-ROM drive, a sound card and a mouse are need as well.

Junkland Jam is a fun learning experience. The experiments are challenging, yet not too hard.

You can find Junkland Jam at your local software store. If you can't find it there, or more information about the game, go to the Southpeak Interactive web site. It can be found at www.southpeak.com

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Maestro Max Is Back Again

Bruce Von Stiers

There is this company called **Harmonic Vision**. They are reportedly the leading music education software company in the country. Their premiere product is a learning game titled **Music Ace**. Now Harmonic Vision has come out with **Music Ace 2**. This program takes up where Music Ace left off.

Your host and guide through the program is a kindly old musical conductor named Maestro Max. He is there to guide you through the program and help if you get lost. Max is a little animated grandpa type guy in a tuxedo. His story is that he rose through the ranks of music stardom to eventually become an accomplished conductor, eventually reaching the status of Maestro. Now Max tours Europe doing concerts in places like Paris and Vienna. Max has taken time out of his busy schedule to be your host and guide through the Music Ace 2 program.

Max sounds kind of cute, but what does Music Ace 2 actually teach you? With this program, you will learn Rhythm, Standard Notation, Time Signatures, Intro to Intervals, Syncopation, Intro to Harmony, Melody and other musical things. After going through the program the user should have a better working knowledge of music and how to make it.

Whenever you start the program, the title screen pops up. From this screen go to the sign in screen. The program can keep track of up to 6 users. Just sign in and go to the Main Menu. In the Main Menu is where you'll find your Music Ace sessions. There are a total of 24 sessions in Music Ace 2. Each session takes you through some type of musical learning experience.

The Main Menu is laid out like a book opened to a page. On the right side of the open book is the session. You can scroll through the sessions to get to the end or stop somewhere in the middle. Each session page has a button to click for the Lesson and another for the Game.

Each Lesson will teach you music fundamentals. Max will help lead you through the lesson. After the lesson is completed, play the Game that goes along with it. This game will let you practice what you've just learned. The manual that comes with the program recommends that you start from the first and not skip around. That way you get the full benefit of the program. The learning and skill level escalates with each lesson.

On the left side of the main menu screen is the page with Doodle Pad and Progress buttons. Click on the Progress button and you will see a chart on your progress through the program. It will show how many times you have done a specific lesson. There are also charts for your game progress and to see what your high, or low, scores were.

Also on the left side of the menu screen is the button for the Doodle Pad. Click on this button and you are transported to the Music Doodle Pad. This is a place where you get to play around with notes and make up your own music. Add animated notes to the sheet and watch them perform the song that you've written. You can even save the songs for playing later.

What have I learned from using Music Ace 2? Enough to realize that I really didn't know anything about music at all. I had no idea there was something like a dotted quarter note. I'd heard of 4/4 time, but not 6/8 time. And I found out that my rhythm was really off. I had fun and learned quite a few things about music from Music Ace 2.

If you are looking for a program to enhance your child's musical knowledge, or maybe even for yourself, I can't think of a better program to recommend than Music Ace 2.

To find out more about Music Ace 2, go to the Harmonic Vision web site at www.harmonicvision.com

System requirements:

Windows

Windows 3.1, 95 or 98

386 PC for Windows 3.1 or 486/33 PC for Windows 95/98

4 MB RAM for 286, 8 MB of RAM for 486

12 MB free hard drive space

MPC compatible sound card

CD-ROM drive

3.5? floppy drive for 386 PC version

Macintosh

Macintosh 68030@ 25 MHz

5 MB RAM

11 MB free hard drive space

System 7.0.1 or later

CD-ROM drive

3.5? floppy drive

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Zoo Reading With VTech

Bruce Von Stiers

VTech is the company that has all of those neat electronic learning toys. They make the award winning **Talking Whiz Kid** toys. They also make some really good software programs. I just finished checking out of the software programs. It is called *Virtual VTech Read And Spell With Zoo-Phonics*.

What exactly does this program do? It is an interactive teaching tool for young children. It teaches reading spelling and writing skills to children in a fun and easy to understand way. There are fifteen different activities in the program for children to participate in. This program was designed to enhance a child's learning through the whole-brain approach (hearing, speaking, seeing, touching, moving).

There are two different ways to play the Read And Spell Zoo-Phonics game. The first way is the **Guided Tour**. If you want to have a structured learning set up them or if the child is new to Zoo-Phonics, this might be the way to go. The Guided Tour takes the child through all of the activities at an even pace, advancing the learning curve as the program moves forward.

The second way to play the game is **Try Myself**. This is for children already familiar with the program. The child can move around the game and choose whatever they want to learn.

The main screen features a map of the zoo. At the Zoo you get to meet a lady named Zoophonia and Zeke The Zebra. They will act as tour guides through the zoo. Zoophonia will often use body actions as a signal for a word or letter. Zeke has a walkie-talkie and uses it to sound out a letter or word.

The first activity in the program is the Address Book. This has all 26 letters of the alphabet. The letters all have different pictures shaped like animals in the Address Book. Click on a picture and Zoophonia will say the sound of the letter. She will also make a signal for the letter. The animal's picture will appear in the left corner of the screen. Click on Zeke to hear him do a rap on the letter. As rappers go, Zeke needs a lot of improvement. But how good do you have to be to rap?

In the Hidden Picture Aviary you have to find the hidden zoo animals. There are seven different areas within the Aviary for you to search.

Some zoos have a train and the one here is special. The child has to load boxes onto the train in the correct amount of time. You have to get the right box on the right car. This activity teaches letter recognition, speed, accuracy and symbol recognition.

The A-B-C Pool has you working with Olive Octopus. It seems that she's scrambled her words up. Help get the words in the proper letter order. When you are done Zoophonia will say the word back to you.

Other activities teach about letter sounds, matching skills, word recognition and sentence structure. The Zoo Billboard Mix-Up teaches about word building and grammar. Change the letters on the billboard to spell a word correctly. Then makes sure it fits in the sentence correctly. If it is right, Zoophonia will

repeat the sentence to you.

To use this program, you'll need a Pentium 90 PC with Windows 95/98 (it can run on a 486 DX2-66 with 8 MB of RAM, but it'd be real slow). You will need 16 MB of RAM and 1 MB of free hard drive space. A 4x CD-ROM drive is required and an 8-bit sound card. Your graphics display needs to be at least 256 color SVGA.

Zoo-phonics is already a proven teaching tool for schools. Virtual VTech Read And Spell With Zoo-Phonics is a great tool for your pre-k to 1st grade child to learn with. It's entertaining and fun to use. Getting beyond Zeke's rapping might be a chore, but the kids will enjoy it.

To check out more programs from VTech, visit their web site at www.vtechsoft.com

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Phantasy Of Horrors

Bruce Von Stiers

Sierra On-Line has come up with some good games. They even have bundled them together in sets. When **Phantasmagoria** first came out, I never did get it. Now Sierra has packaged the game together with its sequel, **A Puzzle Of Flesh** in a boxed set that they call ***Phantasmagoria: Stagefright***. *I just took a test drive through Stagefright. What I found was both revolting and intriguing.*

The first game in Stagefright is its namesake: Phantasmagoria. This is a live action role-playing game that deals with evil spirits and a haunted house. You, the player, get to decide the actions of Adrienne Delaney. She is a mystery writer. Adrienne and her husband, photographer Don Gordon, have just purchased an old estate. What Adrienne and Don don't know is that evil lurks in hidden areas of the house.

The graphics in the game are really good. The music is haunting and intense at times. The gist of the game is for Adrienne to go about the house and discover things. She gets to explore the basement after finding a tool to open a trap door. She'll grab a 5-dollar bill out of a drawer to later purchase a dog bone. And she'll find a hidden chapel that seems to have a dark cast about it. Opening a box in the chapel spells disaster for all the people of the house.

The storyline of Phantasmagoria is pretty lame as far as horror stories go. You are expected to believe that Adrienne is not smart enough to mention to Don that she found a hidden chapel. And the eeriness of the room itself should have been enough to have Don come and check it out. But instead, she lets something loose in the house. This thing ends up invading Don's body, turning him into some kind of psycho fiend.

Each segment of the game is set up as a chapter. There are a total of seven chapters from start to finish.

The violence and sex are pretty tame until the fourth chapter. The beginning scene of the fourth chapter has Don and Adrienne making up while she is in the bathroom getting around. What should be a romantic interlude turns quickly into a rape scene. Even though the rape was simulated, it got the point across. From then on the violence escalated.

Adrienne keeps getting mental pictures of past murders done by Carno, a magician who had owned the house a century before. Carno was a good magician who took some knowledge from the dark side to perform better magic. Somehow it consumed him and he became a maniac.

This evil spirit that had lived in Carno now lives in Don. It is all Adrienne can do to stay away from Don and stay alive.

In the end it's either kill or be killed for Adrienne. If you make the wrong choice or aren't quick enough, you get to see Adrienne's skull split open. Talk about a ripe melon. Or if you're fast enough someone else dies. Depending on how you play the game, you might see a whole bunch of dead bodies lying around.

The cast of the game is pretty good. [Victoria Morsell](#) plays **Adrienne**. [David Homb](#) is **Don Gordon**. [Steven Bailey](#) and [V. Joy Lee](#) play **Cyrus** and his mom, **Harriet**. There are small roles for actress [Stella Stevens](#) and veteran character actor [Hoke Howell](#).

Although Phantasmagoria was fun to play, I have a couple of complaints. The first is that the plot wasn't very good. The story was pretty one-dimensional. The second complaint is that it wasn't nearly long enough. It only took about eight hours to complete. That's a very short completion time for a game that's supposed to be that intense.

Overall, I liked Phantasmagoria. If it had been longer, with a stronger plot, it would have went from being mediocre to great.

*Now to the other game in the Stagefright collection, **Puzzle Of Flesh**.*

Have you ever read a book or watched a movie and been so disgusted, you wonder how you ever got through it? That's how I felt after playing ***A Puzzle Of Flesh***. **So revolted by the gore in the game, I almost threw it in the trash.** There is violence and gore and there is over the top. Sierra definitely went over the top with ***A Puzzle Of Flesh***.

A Puzzle Of Flesh isn't so much a game as it is an interactive movie. Click on a person or item and you are treated to a video clip. The only interaction is when you pick up something to add to the inventory. You can even combine some things in inventory to accomplish tasks. *Yipee!*

There is some nudity in the game. And the sexual themes are rampant throughout the game.

The storyline of A Puzzle Of Flesh concerns Curtis. It seems that Curtis works for a company with some secrets. Curtis just doesn't know it yet. One of his co-workers is murdered in Curtis' cubicle in soft sort of bizarre ritual. This starts Curtis' downhill slide into madness. Or so he thinks.

Curtis sees blood coming out of boxes, people with eyeballs in their mouths and entrails streaming from bodies. The player, playing as Curtis, is treated to all of this gore through video clips. *Watching the entrails clip made me glad I hadn't eaten anything recently. It about made me want to throw up.*

The nude scenes involve Curtis and a couple of women. There's the gratuitous nude bedroom scene with Curtis' sometime girlfriend and co-worker, Jocilyn. Then there are a couple of scenes with Therese, the bad little office worker. One of the scenes with Therese include some S & M and voyeurism.

The storyline is pretty muddled as you try to figure out if Curtis is being set up by someone. Or is Curtis a psycho schizoid who committed the murders in some kind of fugue state? And why had Curtis been in a mental institution a year before?

The cast has [Paul Morgan Stetler](#) as **Curtis**. **Jocilyn** is played by [Monique Parent](#) and **Therese** is portrayed by [Ragna Sigrun](#). Other actors include [Paul Mitri](#) as **Trevor**, [Warren Burton](#) as **Paul Warner** and [Michael Taylor Donovan](#) as **Tom**.

The game was produced by **Ken Williams** and directed by **Andy Hoyes**.

I wish that I could say that A Puzzle Of Flesh was enjoyable, but I can't. The violence and gore was much more than I've even seen in some slasher movies. And the nudity seemed to be there to draw in the voyeuristic crowd.

If you're into violence, gore, and gratuitous sex, then A Puzzle Of Flesh is your game. If you're sensitive to gore and would like your sex packaged in a PG format, don't buy this game.

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Classic Game Mania In 3D

Bruce Von Stiers

Some of us are so into Retro stuff, that we just can't get enough. For the folks like me that live in the past, GT Interactive's WizardWorks division and Webfoot Technologies have put together a four game set called *America's Greatest Arcade Hits 3D*.

The four games in this set are **3D Munch Man**, **Tetri-Madness**, **3D Alien Invasion** and **Qube Jumper**. Munch Man is based on PacMan. Tetri-Madness is based on Tetris. Alien Invasion is based on Space Invaders and Qube Jumper on Qubert. All of these original games were hits in arcades across the country during the 1980's.

The character in 3D Munch Man is Munchie. He is a ball like creature with eyes and a huge mouth. Move him up and down the roads in the game, gobbling up things and avoiding the pesky ghosts. There are certain things to not gobble up. If Munchie moves onto a glue tile, he gets stuck and can't jump or move. A Death tile means "**he's dead, Jim**".

Watch out for things like a key or colored arrows. Keys unlock certain tiles and the colored arrows push Munchie in a certain direction very quickly. You get an extra life at 10,000 points and in 20,000-point increments after that. Each time Munchie gobbles up pellets you get points. Eating special pellets allow Munchie to eat the ghosts.

The game is controlled by keyboard. Use the space bar to jump and the directional arrow keys to move around.

In 3D Alien Invasion you have to protect your space station from some rowdy invaders. They are grouped together in rows and are advancing fast. You hide behind the turrets of the space station and blast those suckers when they get in your sights.

While you are blasting away at the invaders, they are shooting back at you. If they shoot you, you're a goner. They can also damage the space station, blasting away part of the turrets. Score points by shooting the aliens. Sometimes a special power up will fall down when an alien is shot. These power ups give you added firepower and sometimes even a missile or two.

With Qube Jumper, you get to be Jumpy. He's a likable little guy who jumps from cube to cube on a 3D tower. Jumpy changes the color of a cube by jumping on it. When all of the cubes have changed color, the level is completed.

There are some nasty things that Jumpy has to avoid. There is a boulder that keeps dropping on Jumpy at the most inopportune times. And then there is this snake that wants to get up close and personal. Also wanting to be Jumpy's buddy is some frog that keeps hopping from cube to cube. And to top it all off, there is some icky spider that wants Jumpy for a snack.

A couple of good things that Jumpy can find on the cubes are hourglasses and beach balls. An hourglass

will freeze all objects on the board for a few seconds, allowing Jumpy to get a step ahead. If Jumpy gets a beach ball, all of the enemies on the board are destroyed and he gets to start at the top tile again.

Now to my favorite game in this set. 3D Tetri-Madness is great. It is based on Tetris, one of my all-time favorite games. Game pieces drop down from the top of a chute. Rearrange the pieces so that they form a row at the bottom of the chute. When a row is completed, it disappears. And so on and so forth until you clear the number of rows required for each level.

There are special pieces like New Geometry, Anchor, Weights, Row Goblins, Column Goblins and Bombs. Each one of these can either help you clear a row or really mess you up.

The game is as frustrating as it is fun. Just when you think that a row will be cleared, the game gives up a weird piece that won't fit where it's needed. Or you turn it the wrong way and the piece lands in a bad spot. Then you're in a big heap-a-trouble pardna .

All of the games in this collection have good jazzy soundtracks. Even if you can't win the games, grooving to the tunes isn't too bad.

The system requirements are too heavy. You'll only need a Pentium 120 with 16 MB of RAM. A paltry 25 MB of free hard drive space is required. You will need a CD-ROM drive along with audio an audio and video card that supports DirectX.

For a fun and entertaining glimpse into the past, with a twist of today, grab a copy of America's Greatest Arcade Hits 3D. If you can't find it at your local software store, visit the WizardWorks web site at www.wizworks.com

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Sony PlayStation

Jade Cocoon - *Epic adventure from Crave Entertainment*

Nintendo 64

Fighting Force 64 - *Fight an evil scientist and his goons to stop the destruction of the world in this game from Crave Entertainment.*

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It's All Up To You, Cocoon Master

Josh Von Stiers

You are Levant the son of Riketz the Cocoon Master of Syrus, but when he suddenly disappears for the search of "true purification" (Note: I will Explain about it later).

Then the Locusts of Apocalypse put most of the people in the village in a sleep from which they will not wake unless if the legendary Calabas Herb is found.

Your first Girlfriend ,then wife Mahbu thinks that life is a major bummer because she doesn't like her role of performing the purification of Levant's Minions and she Dislikes the law of the traditions.

Purifications first start when Levant captures a "Forest Minion" then you take the minion trapped in the cocoon to Mahbu then she purifies it so you can summon them in battle.

Koris the Blue Cocoon Master will teach you the arts of a Cocoon Master.

I was really surprised at the game

I thought o.k. Another lame RPG, but the graphics are great.

The game has a game play style like Final Fantasy VII.

You must rescue your village friends and companions countless times in this thrilling RPG about the struggles of a super-natural world of friends families and distruction of the world of which we know it.

This it the best RPG I have ever played even out edging Final Fantasy VII. But who knows with Final Fantasy VIII coming out 9-9-9, There might be a new favorite coming out soon. (Trust me I've seen previews).

This is Great, I love the game. By the way the Name of the game is **Jade Cocoon: Story of the Tamamyu** from **Crave Entertainment**.

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A Force To Be Reckoned With

Bruce Von Stiers

There is this group of unlikely heroes. They have a common goal. They have to stop a madman from ending the world. This is the premise behind *Fighting Force 64*, a new game from **Crave Entertainment** and **Eidos Interactive**.

To say that this is a new game is a slight exaggeration. It has already been released on both the PC and Sony PlayStation platforms. In fact, Crave Entertainment is getting ready to roll out *Fighting Force 2*. But on the N64 side of the house, this is pretty new.

The game really doesn't have that much of a background story. Evil Dr. Zeng wants to bring about the end of the world. One of his lab assistants, Snapper, has an attack of conscience. She contacts Private Detective Mace Daniels to put a stop to Zeng's plans. Mace enlists the help of Hawk Manson, Ben "Smasher" Jackson and Alana McKendrick to bring down Zeng.

Hawk Manson is a vigilante street fighter who used to do mighty things for the freedom fighter groups around the world. Now that Mace has approached him, Hawk can get back to being one of the good guys.

Ben "Smasher" Jackson is a permanent guest of the world's prisons. He is as big and bad as they come. The prison system makes money off of Smasher by renting him out to people like Manson. Hawk sets up a kind of rent-to-own program with Smasher's current prison so the he can help with the fight against Zeng.

Alana McKendrick is a dancing machine the clubs call a raver. She spends her nights dancing and her days in classes. Now that the school semester is done, Alana doesn't have much to do. So when she is approached to help fight Zeng, she goes for it. Plus the fact that she has a good reason to put down Zeng. Alana is Zeng's illegitimate daughter and she wants him accountable for her and all of his other indiscretions.

Private Eye Mace Daniels is a rough and tumble little cookie. At the ripe age of 21, Mace should be courting a boyfriend and not criminals. As tough as she is beautiful, Mace wants to bring Zeng down on no uncertain terms. She can spin kick you into oblivion and then get you to spill sensitive information with the sexy way she talks. With her team of fighters by her side, Mace has a better than average chance to stop Zeng.

From this background, you might assume that the fighting is intense and the off-screen action is even heavier. But this game is like most of the others in the genre. The fighting is there all right, but it offers nothing new. And when you're plucking down good money for a game, some innovation would be nice.

The fighting is fun, however. Wade through and get rid of a whole bunch of minor punks. There are special moves that each of the heroes have. Use these to dispatch enemies quickly.

And the weapons that you can find! There are all kinds of guns and things lying around that can be used as weapons. See that tire lying off to the side? Throw it at somebody and knock them down. Then finish them off with that lead pipe you just found. And if that isn't enough, you'll find pistols, machine guns and even bazookas to use on Zeng's goons. To find some of the better weapons, you'll have to smash up things like soda machines and cars.

The game can be frustrating at times. Trying to line up an accurate headshot with your pistol can be tedious. And the controls seem sluggish at times.

The good news, I guess, is that there is a multiplayer mode. This way, your friend (or your dad), can play along with you. But trying to get a rhythm going with two players might take some time.

Overall, I'd say that Fighting Force 64 is a good game. Not great, but good. It has all the fighting elements that most games of this genre have. And Mace and company being able to stop Zeng is a goal that's hard to accomplish.

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There are no hardware reviews this month. Please check back next month.

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Hands on training from the experts at Adobe Press

[PDF With Acrobat 4 Visual Quickstart Guide](#)

Ease into Acrobat 4 with this little self helper from Peachpit Press

[Special Edition Using Microsoft Access 2000](#) - *Help for users of Access 2000*

[Special Edition Using Microsoft Excel 2000](#) - *A self help book for Excel 2000 users*

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Quick learning from Microsoft Press

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Intense training manual from Microsoft Press

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Ones And O's

Bruce Von Stiers

About a year and a half ago, I read a book called *Exposure* by **R.J. Pineiro**. It was very good. I recently came across Pineiro's new book and couldn't wait to read it. The title of the book is **01-01-00**. A strange name for a book? Not really. This mystery novel deals with the new millennium. It was copyrighted in 1999 and published by *Tom Doherty Associates*.

Susan Garnett is an analyst for the FBI. She deals with computer related crimes. When we first meet Susan, she is about to take her own life. Susan is very despondent over the death of her daughter and husband. It seems some hacker had messed up traffic lights, resulting in an accident that killed Susan's family. She got the hacker and helped prosecute him. Now she works for the FBI, grabbing all those nasty hackers and putting them in the slammer.

Something is happening to the computer systems in the world. All of them stopped for twenty seconds. Then it happens again. Susan and her boss, Troy Reid, try to find out what kind of virus caused the problem and who is behind it. They end up enlisting the services of the hacker that caused the death of Susan's family.

They find the source of the virus. It is coming out of the jungles of the Yucatan Peninsula in Central America. Trying to trace the source leads Susan to anthropologist Cameron Slater. Cameron, Susan and their team go south to find out what's going on.

In the mean time, two other groups are looking for the source. One group is headed up by a couple of scientists, Ishiguro Nakamura and his wife, Jackie. They are tracing radio signals from the cosmos. The scientists are going to the same area as Susan's team.

There is also a criminal element checking for the source. Antonio Strokk used to be an agent for a Soviet Bloc country. With Communism on the ropes, Strokk finds other means of support. He, along with his sister Celina, does all sorts of nasty business in the name of capitalism. They are searching for the source of the computer virus. Their aim is for profit, not science.

What Susan finds out is that there is a sequence to the computer stoppages. It all somehow ties into a Mayan temple deep in the jungle.

To say much more about the book would give away too much of the plot. Let's just say that if you read the book all the way through, it is well worth it.

01-01-00 is a thought provoking mystery. Do we really know what's out in the universe? And how will our dependency on computers hinder or help the world in the new millennium?

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Strange Happenings In Moose County

Bruce Von Stiers

Koko and Yum Yum are two sleuthing cats. They are the sidekicks, so to speak, of Jim Qwilleran, a former reporter. All three solve mysteries in "The Cat Who" series written by *Lilian Jackson Braun*. The latest book in the series is *The Cat Who Saw Stars*. It was copyrighted in 1999 and published by G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Summer in Moose County is usually peaceful. This July things aren't going to be that way. A backpacker who had visited Magnus Hawley had disappeared. There is a new chef at the local restaurant. And there are rumors of people seeing UFO's.

Qwilleran checks out the story of the missing backpacker. He also tests out the fare that the new chef put forth. There is something not quite right about the chef and her husband. Why are they all the way up in Mooseville when she could be working at any top notch restaurant Down Below (the local term for any place south of Moose County)?

Some mysterious sand dunes appear and the chef's husband disappears. More and more people report having seen a UFO. Moose County is suddenly a very strange place to be in.

As Qwilleran, along with Koko and Yum Yum, gets to the bottom of the mysteries, he finds that some people are not what they seem. And are people really seeing UFO's or are they just a little crazy? And what is the deal with the sand dunes, anyway?

The Cat Who Saw Stars is a light and funny mystery. If you are a fan of this series this is a welcomed addition. If you're new to Koko, Yum Yum and Qwill, this book will be a treat for you. Then you'll want to go back and read all of the other The Cat Who... titles. There are twenty other books in this series.

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Digging A Hole For Leo

Bruce Von Stiers

Leo Waterman is an unusual P.I. in Seattle. He trades barbs instead of punches and has a crew of drunks that work for him. Leo's back in an all-new book called *Last Ditch*. It was published by *Avon Books*. The writer of the Leo Waterman books is *G.M. Ford*.

Leo inherited a huge house from his parents. He and his significant other, Rebecca, have moved in and are making changes. He is going to do some landscaping in the back yard. He grabs his sometime group of helpers, known as the Boys, and sets out to work. One of the men, Ralph, refuses to work and leaves, letting Leo know that it wasn't good to make changes. A little later in the day they find the remains of a body. Ralph might have known something?

It seems that the remains were of an investigative reporter named Peerless Price. He had been missing for many years. At the time of his disappearance, Peerless was at war with Leo's father, Wild Bill Waterman. Bill was a mover and shaker in the Seattle political scene. Holding various positions and running for mayor often, Wild Bill had a lot of power. Peerless Price wanted to take Wild Bill down. Just when it seemed that Peerless might be getting one over on Bill, he disappeared.

All fingers seem to be pointing towards Leo's father as Peerless' killer. Leo has to go to great lengths to try to clear his father's name and find the true killer.

Along the way, Leo has to face some very uncomfortable truths about his family. Was his father so bent that he killed Peerless Price or ordered it done? What did his father have to do with a judge that Leo just helped prosecute for murder? And what did Wild Bill have to do with the woman at the head of a Chinese crime empire?

Last Ditch is a good read. It has humor, violence, romance and all the other elements that make up a good mystery novel. Leo Waterman is the kind of detective who gets things done his way. It may not always be the most politically correct way, but Leo gets the job done.

Other books featuring Leo Waterman are *Slow Burn*, *The Bum's Rush*, *Cast In Stone* and *Who In Hell Is Wanda Fuca?* They are all published by *Avon Books*.

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Learning Acrobat By Example

Bruce Von Stiers

I recently had the opportunity to check out a self help book about Adobe Acrobat 4.0. The book is called **Adobe Acrobat 4.0 Classroom In A Book**. It was a good learning tool and easy to go through. The book was published by *Adobe Press* and copyrighted in 1999.

What is a Classroom In A Book? Basically, it is a step-by-step tutorial. There is a CD-ROM disc that comes with the book that has practice files for you to work with. You learn the various aspects of the software program by working through the exercises in the book.

The book starts out by introducing you to Acrobat and making sure that your computer has all the essential requirements to run the program. It then takes you through copying the practice files from the CD. It then lets you know about where to find additional resources on Acrobat and about Adobe's certification program for professionals.

The book then takes you through a quick tour of Acrobat. Learn about navigating through a PDF document. Learn how to annotate and edit a PDF. Don't know what a PDF is? It is a document (Portable Document Format) that can be viewed on multiple platforms. Put together a PDF on a Mac and view it on a Windows based machine. Or email a PDF to someone without any loss of fonts or graphics.

There are 15 lessons in the book. They range from taking a walk around the Acrobat environment to making a multimedia project from a PDF file.

The first two lessons get you familiar with the work screens and various tools that are available. Learn about the Status Bars and the information that they contain. You are shown the various ways to view a page in a PDF. It goes through the various buttons on the toolbars and on the hidden (or extra menu) buttons. You are shown how to move the page around the viewing screen and about magnifying it for proper reading.

The third lesson has you create a PDF file by using the PDFWriter and the Distiller. These are specific document conversion elements within Acrobat. The lesson then has you compare the two conversions. Lesson 4 has you creating thumbnails and bookmarks for your PDF document. Lesson 5 takes you through the various ways to modify a PDF.

Lesson 8 has you creating forms in a PDF file and putting them out on the Web. Lesson 9 does some fancy things with buttons. Learn how to effectively distribute your PDF files in Lesson 13.

Each lesson has a review question and answer session at the end of it. These help make sure you understand what was done during the lesson.

If you are brand new to Adobe Acrobat, then this book is a must for your self training. If you've been around Acrobat for a while, this book will help you get familiar with the new features of Acrobat 4 without all the hassles of an upgraded product learning curve.

You can find Adobe Acrobat 4.0 Classroom In A Book at most bookstores. It has a list price of \$ 40.

Find out more about the Classroom In A Book series from the Adobe Press website. They can be found at www.adobepress.com.

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PDFing The Easy Way

Bruce Von Stiers

Anyone who's read any of my reviews on computer books knows that I really like the [Visual Quickstart Guide](#) series that Peachpit Press puts out. The one that I just finished reading is no exception. It's called *PDF With Acrobat 4 Visual Quickstart Guide*. It was written by *Ted Alspach* and copyrighted in 1999.

This book is broken down into 19 chapters. Isn't that a lot of chapters? Not really, because each chapter is only 10 to 20 pages long. The book only has a total of 189 pages. It is also a soft cover book. This makes for a small, lightweight self-help manual.

The first chapter covers the bare basics of Adobe Acrobat and what led up to the latest version. Acrobat converts documents from various formats into a standardized one called Portable Document Format or PDF for short. PDF's can be shared across several different platforms, be it Mac, PC or UNIX. This first chapter also tells about the various components that make up Acrobat.

The second chapter deals with creating PDF files. The third chapter tells about the Acrobat Reader. This is the utility that is needed to read a PDF file. It will work on most platforms and is free from Adobe Systems. Chapter 4 goes into more detail about Acrobat Reader and some of it's advanced features.

Chapter 5 walks you through the Acrobat Distiller and what it does. Learn about editing a PDF in chapter 6. In chapter 7, you are shown how to create bookmarks and thumbnails of your pages in Acrobat. The chapter also deals with editing text and adding multimedia objects to a PDF file.

Other chapters include instruction on annotating pages in a PDF and the various security features that are available. There are two chapters on strategies. Chapter 18 deals with font strategies while Chapter 19 walks through some graphics strategies.

Chapter 14 walks you through the Web Capture and Paper Capture features of Acrobat. Paper Capture is about capturing scanned documents into Acrobat. Web Capture allows the Acrobat user to grab Web pages, even a whole web site, from the Internet and put them into a PDF file.

As with others in this series, the book is laid out with two-column pages. One column will have the instructional text while the other will feature an illustration based on the text.

For a fast, easy way to learn about Adobe Acrobat 4, grab a copy of [PDF With Acrobat 4 Visual Quickstart Guide](#). It covers all the bases in using Acrobat 4 without bogging you down with a bunch of techno-babble that usually pops up in those other self-help books.

PDF With Acrobat 4 Visual Quickstart Guide is available at most bookstores. The list price is \$ 17.95.

For more information about the Visual Quickstart series or other books by Peachpit Press, visit their web site at www.peachpit.com.

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Read Access Only

Bruce Von Stiers

The above title sounds kind of tough. I don't mean it that way; it was just a gimmick to get to read this article. Anyway, I'd like to tell you about a new book by the Que Corporation. It is called Special Edition Using Microsoft Access 2000. It was written by Roger Jennings and copyrighted in 1999.

Roger Jennings has been writing books about Access since Microsoft had version 1.0 out. He's got several other computer topics under his writer's belt as well.

This book has eight sections, including the appendix. These sections range from Learning Access Fundamentals to Programming And Converting Access Applications. Each one has several chapters dealing with the theme of the section.

There is also a CD-ROM disc that comes with the book. It has sample files from the book and some coding examples. There are also design samples to get a good idea of the graphical capabilities of Access forms and reports.

The first chapter tells you all about the new features in Access for those who've used previous versions. The second chapter has you using the Database Wizard, which puts together your database in a few graphical steps. This chapter goes into detail about what the basic building blocks of Access 2000 are and what you can do with them. It goes over tables, forms, reports and even the sometimes dreaded VBA modules. Chapter 3 goes over the navigating of the Access program. You learn about all the elements of the toolbar and the various pull-down menus.

Chapters 4 through 7 deal with Access tables. You learn how to enter data into a table and be able to filter or sort the data for a report. Learn how to link to another table in the database or even a table or query in a different database file. You also learn about a new feature in Access, the subdatasheet.

The second part of the book is all about queries. Chapter 8 is Designing Access Queries. It explains the different queries that you can do in Access by using the Query Design window. The Query wizards are explained as well. Chapter 9 goes over the expressions and proper syntax for a query to produce the proper results. Chapters 10 and 11 cover some of the more advanced query topics like multitable and crosstab queries. There are also Action queries that update a table due to something that is done during the execution of the query.

Part 3 goes through forms and reports. Chapter 12 shows you how to create forms and chapter 13 puts a spin on the whole thing by introducing customizable forms. Chapter 14 shows how to make up simple reports and put out mailing labels. Chapter 15 gets into the meat and potatoes of advanced report structure.

Chapters 16 to 18 deal with intra and Internet usages for Access. Chapter 17 works through getting material from the database and putting it out on the Net. Chapters 19 through 21 are all about using Access 2000 with the other components of Office 2000.

If you are real good at using Access, parts 6 and 7 of the book are just for you. Part 6 shows you all about advanced Access techniques with chapters like Working with Structured Query Language and Creating Access Data Projects. Part 7 is all about programming and changing applications to fit your current Access set up. Chapter 26 goes through the ups and downs of writing Visual Basic Applications, or VBA for short. Chapter 29 deals with Combo and List Box programming. And chapter 31 shows how to bring your old Access applications up to speed with their Access 2000 brothers and sisters.

I know that I've not gone into any detail about the contents of the book. If I did that, this review would span several pages. I wanted to give you an overview of what Special Edition Using Microsoft Access 2000 is all about. You can take a look at the book see if it's really what your reference collection needs.

Me, I liked the book. It was informative and gave some insight into aspects of Access that I hadn't considered. The tips that are sprinkled throughout the book are a great heads-up for any Access user.

Special Edition Using Microsoft Access 2000 can be found at most bookstores. The list price for the book is \$ 39.99.

For more information about the "Special Edition Using" series or other books by the Que Corporation, check out their web site at www.quecorp.com.

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More Than Something Just To Look At

Bruce Von Stiers

I have been taking a look at some of the books covering Microsoft Office 2000. The latest book that I checked out is *Special Edition Using Microsoft Excel 2000*. It was written by *Patrick Blattner* and *Laurie Ulrich* with some help from *Ken Cook* and *Timothy Dyck*. The book was published by **Que Corporation**.

Most of the Special Edition books are huge, having more than 1000 pages and weighing a ton. This one is no exception. This book has 1066 pages. And it weighs in at about 5 pounds. Therefore, you will be in for a lot of heavy reading with this book.

The book starts out with something real neat. It has a full color tear out section called "Four Keys To Success With Excel". This pullout goes through proper list structure, variance tables and impressive formatting.

Using Excel 2000 is broken down into ten sections. From the first section, Worksheet Basics, through Customizing and Automating Excel, the chapters describe features and usage of Excel in great detail.

Going through the chapters, you'll find that they have titles like Constructing Excel Formulas, Editing Cell Content, Printing Excel Worksheets and Using Excel On The Web. Other chapter titles include Building Charts With Excel and Customizing Excel To Fit Your Working Style.

Chapter One is Getting Started With Excel. For you who're already using Excel, or have at least kicked its tires, this chapter may be boring. It tells about the worksheet area, what column headings are, and the other elements that make up an Excel workbook.

Chapter One also starts the Tip, Note and Caution tidbits from the authors. These are small pieces of information that the authors feel you should be aware of and pay attention to.

Section Four has chapters on functions and formulas. The chapter, Constructing Excel Formulas, takes you through the various types of formulas that can be used in Excel. The chapter has items like Understanding Basic Formula Concepts and Understanding The Order In Which Excel Performs Mathematical Operations.

That last one may not seem so important now. But just wait. Not know how Excel does calculations could cause you to have erroneous results from your data. And that is really not good. Especially if this is for an annual sales report or something else major for your boss.

Section Six gets into some of the real meat and potatoes of Excel. It is called Analyzing And Managing Your Data. There are six chapters in this section with titles that range from Setting Up A List Or Database In Excel to Using Excel's Analysis Tools. The chapters in this section take you through some of the more complex areas of the Excel world.

Section Seven is called Taking Excel To The Next Level. In this section, you'll learn the various

techniques to make the most out of Excel. It covers creating Gantt Charts in Excel and making 2D and 3D matrixes. Also learn about professional formatting techniques like making a presentation chart on a filled bevel chart.

There is also a CD-ROM disc that comes with the book. This disc has the complete text of the book along with the material from the illustrations. That way, you get to try to work with actual data examples from the book instead of trying to duplicate them yourself. There is also some third party software that comes on the CD. The Passkeeper is all about passwords. The Spreadsheet Detective helps analyze your spreadsheet for errors and helps correct them.

Special Edition Using Microsoft Excel 2000 is a good book for anyone who is serious about learning Excel. It has a wealth of information about the proper way to use the program. The tips and cautionary notes are very helpful in keeping on track when using Excel.

Special Edition Using Microsoft Excel 2000 can be found at most bookstores in the computer section. It has a list price of \$ 39.99.

For a listing of more "Special Edition Using" books check out the Que Corporation web site at www.quecorp.com.

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Stepping It Up With Word 2000

Bruce Von Stiers

Ever get to the point where you really need a self-help book on a new Microsoft product? And when you check out the selection of books, do they all seem to be still over your head? Well, Microsoft Press has a solution to your problem. They have a series called Step By Step that takes you through all the basics of a Microsoft program. One of the latest in this series is Step By Step Microsoft Word 2000. It was published by Microsoft Press in conjunction with Catapult. A whole slew of people are listed in the Catapult structure but Liz Wolk and Shellie Tucker are named as the writers.

One of the first things that the book does is give you some examples of what is covered in the book. This is called the Quicklook Guide. It lists things like Inserting Clip Art, telling which lesson it's from and pointing to an example on the page.

The second thing that the book does is lay the book into sixteen different lessons. These lessons range from creating simple documents to creating mail merges and editing web pages. Each lesson is twenty to thirty pages long.

The book is broken down into four parts. The first part is Getting Started With Word 2000. The second part is Increasing Your Editing Skills. The third part is Developing Advanced Editing Techniques. And the fourth part of the book is called Collaborating Online. At the end of each part there is a review and practice session.

Each lesson begins with a checklist of what you will be taught. There are also shaded boxes in each lesson with the title of either Important or Tip. The information in these boxes is something extra that the authors want to bring to your attention. At the end of each lesson there is a three-column Quick Reference section that helps if you get stuck.

The first lesson takes you through the basics of getting Word 2000 started and making a document. It also goes through some of the basic editing techniques used in Word. In Lesson 2 you get to move text around with the mouse or a button. Linking two documents is easy after the book tells you how.

Lesson 3 takes you into the world of paragraphs and characters. Learn how to justify text by just a click of the mouse. Use the same formatting over and over again in easy steps. Lesson 4 is all about printing and previewing your document. There is a section on printing envelopes and even one on shrinking a document to fit the printed page.

Lesson 5 works with tabs and tables while Lesson 6 is all about automating Word 2000 tasks. Lessons 7 and 8 deal with formatting pages and working with forms and templates.

Lesson 9 is a must read. It deals with mail merges. If you have to send the same letter to more than three people, you need this lesson. This lesson even shows you how to filter your mailing list before doing the mail merge.

Lesson 10 goes through some advanced techniques like creating columns and adding art to your document. It takes you through adding a drop cap to a paragraph and putting a 3D graphic on the page. Lessons 11 and 12 are all about designing and editing web pages with Word 2000.

Lessons 13 through 16 show you technique to work with your documents online and in group settings. Sending a document through email is snap with the instructions provided in the lesson. And linking data with Excel or Access has never been easier when the book shows you how.

On top of everything else, there is a CD-ROM disc that comes with the book. This disc contains the practice files from the book. It also has some multimedia files that show you how to perform certain tasks in Word 2000.

Step By Step Word 2000 can be found at most bookstores. It has a list price of \$ 34.99. You can also buy it online from Microsoft Press at mspress.Microsoft.com.

For a quick, easy to understand and use tutorial on Word 2000, you won't find a better read that Step By Step Word 2000. It covers all the basics of Word 2000 and more.

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A Guiding Look At Visual Basic 6.0

Bruce Von Stiers

Sometimes people like myself need a leg up when learning a software program. Every once in a while I'll even read up on software before even getting the program. That's what happened in the latest computer book I read. It deals with Visual Basic. I hadn't gotten the program yet but decided that I needed to learn more about Visual Basic 6.0. The book I read is called *Microsoft Visual Basic 6.0 Programming Guide*. It is from **Microsoft Press** and they call it *The Essential Guide To Microsoft Visual Basic 6.0*.

This book is set up into two parts. The first part is called Visual Basic Basics. The second part is titled What You Can Do With Visual Basic. There are a total of 17 chapters along with a four-part appendix. Unfortunately, there is no CD-ROM with sample files from the book. That would have been helpful so that a person wouldn't have to type in the code. But sometimes hands-on is better for you.

The first chapter introduces you to Visual Basic and how to install and use it. It also describes the different editions of Visual Basic. There is the Learning edition, the Professional edition and the Enterprise edition. It tells you the basic system requirements to run the program and about using Help. There are code samples in Help if you're really stuck. The program allows you to copy the examples from Help into the code you're working on.

Chapter 2 takes you right into putting together a Visual Basic application. It covers the concepts of the program and what it will and won't do. You learn what Integrated Development Environment (IDE) is all about. The first project has you create a form that has a button and a text window. Click on the button and the message, "hello world" is displayed in the text window.

Chapter 3 shows what the different elements of the interface are. Learn about designing a form, entering text and defining buttons that perform functions. This chapter shows you how to put together a menuing system, with pull-down and pop-up menus. The fourth chapter helps you set up and maintain the integrity of your projects.

Chapter 5 gets into some of the more complex operations. Learn about public versus local variables and what each means to program execution. Find out about static variables and what constants are all about. It goes through the various data types like Boolean Data, Objects Data and Byte Data.

The second part of the book begins with Chapter 6, which has you go through the steps of making up a user interface. Learn some more about forms and advanced feature that you can include on them. Put together some exhaustive menus and neat toolbars. After reading this chapter, you should be able to set up dialog buttons with no problem.

Chapter 7 has more information about the controls included in Visual Basic and how to use them to create more dynamic applications. Chapter 8 works through some programming concepts and techniques. Chapter 9 is about programming with objects and chapter 10 deals with programming with components.

Learn how to process user input through either a mouse or keyboard in chapter 11. Chapter 12 is about

putting graphics and text to goods use in your application. Learn how to specify line width on a form and painting a graphic in the right spot on the screen.

Chapter 13 is an all-important part of the book. It shows you how to debug your code and fix the problems you might encounter. It goes through the various methods to debug code and how to use the Immediate Window to test out procedures and data. The chapter has a section with a guide for working with complex error handling. If your code becomes an unyielding monster, these guidelines can help ease the error correction process.

Chapters 14 through 16 take you through other aspects of Visual Basic. Chapter 14 is about working with the various files in your application and how they can be stored. Learn about replacing records in a file and opening it for binary access. Chapter 15 works through some of the design options for peak performance in your application. Chapter 16 tells you about various things to consider if you are distributing your application to other countries. Learn what International Software is. Learn what a Localization model is and why some things work better in the Double-Byte Character Set. Chapter 17 goes through the various ways to distribute your application. The appendixes deal with additional topics like Native Code Compiling switches and putting Help into your application.

I found out a lot about Visual Basic through this book. There is enough information in the book to take you from a beginner's level and bring you up to a point where programming in Visual Basic is not only fun, but also relatively easy to do.

Microsoft Visual Basic 6.0 Programmer's Guide lists for \$ 39.99. It can be found at most bookstores in their computer section. You might also want to check out the Microsoft Press web site at mspress.Microsoft.com.

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[Get Ready](#) - *Grooving to the Lord with this break out album by the girl group, Virtue*

[Wild River](#) - *Debut album by Canadian Indie band, Big Meteor*

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Get Ready For Virtue

Bruce Von Stiers

You have heard of the girl groups like Spice Girls and B'Wicked. There is a new girl group on the Christian Music scene as well. They call themselves **Virtue** and man are they good. If you don't have dancing feet and aren't spirit filled after listening to this group, then you really weren't hearing the music. The CD I just heard from **Virtue** is entitled *Get Ready*.

There are songs with titles like **Put Your War Clothes On** and **Angels Watching Over Me. Now's The Time** tells you to get God by your side and serve him. The song has a light jazzy beat to it.

My favorite song on this CD is **Love Me Like You Do**. The chorus goes like this **"..how can I be worth it? I'm so far from perfect.."** This is about how God loves us with all of our mistakes and flaws. It has a good message and is even great to dance to.

Other songs on Get Ready are **Be Grateful** and **Don't Take Your Joy**.

The women of Virtue are **Negelle Sumter, Shauonne Sampson, Karima Kiblle** and **Ebony Trotter**.

Get Ready is from **Verity Records** and can be found at your favorite Christian retailer.

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Mild River Ride

Bruce Von Stiers

Sometimes I'll get an email asking me to check out a new product or web site. I recently got such an email from **David Wimble**. David fronts a band called **Big Meteor** and they are promoting their album over the Internet. The title of Big Meteor's release is *Wild River*.

First of all the band is from Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. David is the lead singer and finds his music has been deeply influenced by Jim Morrison and Bob Dylan.

Most of the songs on Wild River have more of a country flavor to them. Especially the song *To Whom I Must Confess*. This song is in the style of Hank Williams with a light drum and steel guitar background.

Tap On My Shoulder and *Alive In Every Hour* are ballads. *Honest Man* is an acoustic rock song.

Unfortunately, most of the songs on Big Meteor are mediocre. The only song that really has any promise is *Wall Of Ice*. It has a really upbeat sound. David's voice gets above its usual monotone.

That's the problem with most of the songs on Wild River. The vocal range hardly varies at all, making the songs sound dull and unpolished.

But, hey, what do I know? My wife says that I can't sing and my dancing is terrible.

If you want to check out Big Meteor for yourself (if nothing else but to see how wrong I might be) go to their web site at www.bigmeteor.com There are samples of songs that you can download. You can even but the CD from the web site.

I think that David Wimble and Big Meteor will be big someday. But they will have to work on the singing techniques. The music is very good and once the vocals improve, Big Meteor will be a force to be reckoned with.

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[Leap Of Faith](#) - *Steve Martin and Debra Winger in thie comedy about evangalists.*

[Land Of The Free](#) - *Jeff Speakman and William Shatner in a forgettable political thriller.*

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A Big Leap

Bruce Von Stiers

On the road, ready to head toward the next revival, Jonas Nightengale and his evangelical tour hit a snag. More specifically, a part blows in one of their trucks. They pull up in Rustwater, Kansas and proceed to set up a revival there.

This is the starting storyline of *Leap Of Faith*, a comedy that stars **Steve Martin** as Jonas Nightengale. Jonas is consummate con man with just the right scam. Along with his partner, Jane (**Debra Winger**), Jonas fleeces the people attending the revival meetings. He tricks them into believing that he performs miracles.

Jonas has got it all going for him until he lands in Rustwater. Right away he has trouble. The local sheriff, Will (**Liam Neeson**), smells a rat and tries to get Jonas to leave town. But Jane works her charm and Jonas threatens lawsuits so the sheriff lets Jonas and company set up in Rustwater.

Jonas meets the beautiful Marva (**Lolita Davidovich**) who is a waitress at the local café. As Jonas pursues Marva, he meets her brother Boyd (**Lukas Hass**). It seems Boyd lost his ability to walk in the same accident that killed their parents. Now Boyd would give anything to be able to walk again.

After Jonas does some trickery to make the people believe he has performed a miracle, Will exposes his criminal past. Jonas turns it around and gets even more support.

As Jonas tries hard for Marva, Boyd wants Jonas to heal him. Marva wants no part of it, knowing Jonas for the true con man that he is.

It all comes to a head on one fateful revival night.

One of the supporting cast is somewhat of a surprise. **Meatloaf** plays Hoover, one of the front people in the revival tour. His character could have been flushed out more, but overall it was a good performance.

That goes for the film as a whole. *Although it could have been a total cheap shot against revival meetings and evangelists, Jonas redeems himself in the end. Leap Of Faith was one of the best videos I've seen recently.*

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I Wish It Were Free

Bruce Von Stiers

In the continuous rush to crank out movies, **PM Entertainment** has a bunch of chop-socky videos on the shelf. When they tried for something a little heavier, the effort fell kind of flat. That effort is a video I just watched from them called *Land Of The Free*. It stars **Jeff Speakman** and **William Shatner**.

Frank Jennings (**Speakman**) is the campaign manager for PR mogul Aidan Carvell (**Shatner**). Carvell is running for Senator in California. Jennings stops an attempted assassination attempt but later finds out it might have been a scam. At least according to the FBI.

It seems that the FBI has been watching Carvell. They think he's fronting for a paramilitary anti-government group. They convince Jennings to break into Carvell's office and steal incriminating computer files. Jennings is almost caught by Carvell's nasty right hand man, McCuster (**Charlie Robinson** in a lackluster role). In a silly escape sequence, Jennings survives to bring Carvell to justice. Or so he thinks.

Jennings now is in the government's Witness Protection Program. Their agent is Thorton (**Chris Lemmon**), who we find out is one of Carvell's Land Of The Free thugs. He sets up Jennings and his family to be killed. They get away though, but not before a huge chase scene with lots of car crashes and explosions.

The end result is that Carvell goes to court and with the help of a crooked judge, is set free. Then Jennings sets upon a one-man crusade to bring Carvell down. He blows up a house, a helicopter and some other things. And ends up killing Carvell. The FBI covers for Jennings and makes it seem like the deaths were an accident.

Lisa Darr plays Jennings' wife Annie and **Cody Dorkin** plays their son, Randy. In for a cameo role as a newsman is **Bernie Kopell** of Love Boat Fame. Director **Arthur Hill** also checks in for a cameo as the corrupt judge.

Land Of The Free could have been a great political thriller, but it wasn't. It could have been a good action movie, but it wasn't. It really wasn't much of anything. If you could watch it for free, the price would be right. But if you have to rent it, don't waste your time.

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