

CUSTOMIZED REPORTS

A rich variety of reporting windows includes line graphs of specific factors over time, and a report of your relative success with suggestions of where to go next. Models of your atmosphere, geosphere, biosphere, and civilization allow you to fine-tune each particular system. You can also pull down a picture of Gaia herself, who will give you an instant review of each of your actions. Like the map windows, the reporting windows can be placed wherever you want, allowing you to customize the screen for the specific information you need.

SimEarth is not without flaws. The Mars and Venus scenarios, which require drastic atmospheric changes before the planets can support life, don't adjust air temperature, regardless of your actions, although this is a precondition for a successful terraforming exercise. You can develop a viable atmosphere for life anyway, but I spent a frustrating week trying every combination of factors. Another mistake in these scenarios is in their treatment of the game's time frame. The scenario description states that you have 500 years to terraform the planets. I let the simulation run unattended for 1,500 years without a single indication of having failed.

Be aware, also, that when Maxis says the game requires

Games from Artworx and Microsoft Prove that Doing Windows Can Be Fun

GAMES
by Don Trivette

With *Microsoft Windows* gaining new converts faster than a dog gets fleas, it's not surprising to find a few games designed specifically for the *Windows* interface. *Kaleidokubes*, from Artworx, is a particularly challenging mind-bender that falls into this graphical group. Part Rubik's Cube, part *Tetris*, and part dominoes, *Kaleidokubes* challenges you to place multi-colored cubes on a board so that adjacent edges are the same color. You rotate and position a cube—à la *Tetris*—until you find a place for it to fit. Points are

awarded for the number of side matches: 5 points for one side, and 40 points when all four sides match.

Kaleidokubes can be played against the clock, against the computer, or by two players. Even though play is straightforward, Artworx thoughtfully includes written documentation with the game. Also included is a DOS version for the windowless.

This is one of those games that's hard to put away. It's easy to play, but requires enough skill and thought to keep you occupied. Although scoring is the object, I find considerable satisfaction in watching the colorful

patterns emerge. The longer you play, the more the screen looks like a kaleidoscope.

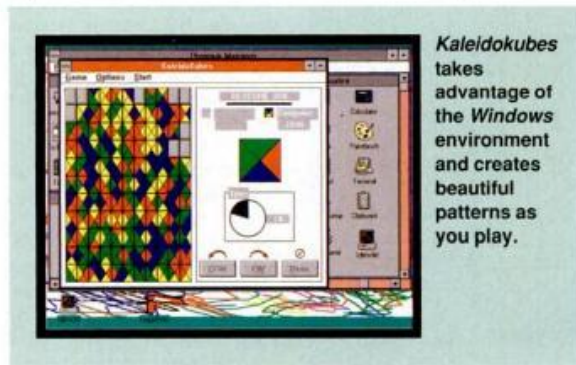
Everyone who buys *Windows 3.0* gets two computer games in the package: A strategy game called *Reversi* and the venerable card game *Solitaire*. The latter is played on an electronic card table with a superb mouse and graphical interface. *Solitaire* is quick, clean, and intuitive—and I wish I had a version that could run under DOS.

Those who want a few more puzzlers should check out Microsoft's *Entertainment Pack for Windows*, which bundles seven board and card games along with a screen-blanking utility (most DOS blankers don't work under *Windows*) for a modest \$39.95.

Golf and *Cruel* are variations of standard *Solitaire* that use the distinctive Microsoft card table. In *Golf*, the idea is to move cards displayed across the top of the screen to the discard pile at the bottom—always following sequence, although not necessarily suite. A six in the discard pile, for example, may be covered with either a five or a seven from the top of the screen. The game ends when, and if, all cards end up in the discard pile.

Cruel is another variation on *Solitaire*, with four aces across the top of the board and 12 piles of cards underneath. The idea is

CONTINUES



Kaleidokubes takes advantage of the *Windows* environment and creates beautiful patterns as you play.

After Hours

Games for Windows

CONTINUED

to end up with all the cards stacked on the aces.

The third card game—really a tile game—is *Taipei*, an Oriental puzzler whose rules are as confusing as a Mandarin maze. It's a *Solitaire* version of the ancient game of mah-jongg, which was all the rage in this country in the 1920s. The purpose is to remove all the hieroglyphic-like tiles from the playing area. It's said to involve both skill and chance, but I never caught on to the subtleties.

Minesweeper is quick fun while you're on hold waiting for the accounting department. The

idea is to locate land mines in a grid with either your foot (as in *Boom!* you're dead) or a mine detector.

The other games in the *Entertainment Pack* are familiar. There's a version of *Tetris*, a 4-by-4-by-4 tic-tac-toe, and a peg-jumping game. The only blemish in the *Entertainment Pack* is a lack of written documentation. Perhaps Microsoft thought that with all the help screens, index fingers, and pointing inherent to the *Windows* environment, paper documentation was unnecessary. Nevertheless, I felt a real need for printed instructions for *Taipei*.

Overall, *Entertainment Pack* gets good marks. Both *Cruel* and *Golf* are entertaining variations of *Solitaire*, *Taipei* is a sure winner for mah-jongg enthusiasts, and the others are long-time



Microsoft's *Entertainment Pack for Windows* includes *Taipei*, a variation on the age-old game of mah-jongg.

favorites redone for the *Windows* interface. The graphics are great, and even if you don't like a particular game, it's fun just mousing around.

List Price: *Kaleidokubes*, \$24.95. **Requires:** *Windows 2.1* or 3.0. Artworx Software Co., 1844 Penfield Rd., Penfield, NY

14526; 800-828-6573.

CIRCLE 546 ON READER SERVICE CARD

List Price: *Entertainment Pack for Windows*, \$39.95. **Requires:** *Windows 3.0*. Microsoft Corp., One Microsoft Way, Redmond, WA 98052-6399; 800-426-9400, 206-882-8080.

CIRCLE 547 ON READER SERVICE CARD