

# The Reviews Are In

Matthew Jones

As computers become a critical component of more companies, schools, and homes, more hardware and software products are being developed to support the growing number of users. But who has time to sort through all of these products? The web sites featured in this article offer hardware and software reviews that help guide you in the right direction. After you have weighed the options, you can check out this month's network resource and games, and you can read all about the new products I have found. (See "Product Snapshots.")

## WEB SITES

TheView (<http://www.the-view.com>) offers in-depth reviews of hardware products, from hard drives to complete desktop systems. You can search for a particular product by keyword, or you can access reviews in a range of hardware categories. You can also view the latest hardware-related news, and you can take advan-

tage of a price finder that allows you to find the lowest price on the Internet for any product you are interested in.

Benchin' Software Review (<http://www.benchin.com>) allows users to post their own reviews of hardware and software products. You can read reviews posted by other users, or you can post your own review if you register as a member of Benchin' Software Review. With this free membership, you can also participate in product discussion groups, and you can view contact and ordering information for each product.

To access a review, you can search by keyword for a particular product, a particular company, or a type of hardware or software. In addition, you can browse several hardware and software categories. You can even purchase and download many software products directly from this web site.

ReviewBooth (<http://www.reviewbooth.com>) provides a comprehensive catalog of hardware and software reviews that are

## Product Snapshots

When I am surfing the Internet, I often find new and interesting products. Product Snapshots gives you a quick overview of the most useful products I have found during the last month. (Please note that these are first-look reviews.)

### MICROSOFT NATURAL KEYBOARD PRO

Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro incorporates the latest advances in keyboard technology. As with previous versions, Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro features the popular split-keyboard layout. In addition, Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro features 19 new keys. Five of these keys function as Internet hot keys, enabling you to launch a web browser and surf the Internet directly from your keyboard. These Internet hot keys provide many of the same features offered by web browser buttons. For example, you can use them to go back, to go forward, to stop loading, to refresh a page, or to access links to your favorite web sites.

Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro also includes several multimedia hot keys that you can use to perform various tasks, such as controlling your CD-ROM drive or adjusting the volume on your speakers. In addition, you can use the sleep hot key to suspend and to restore your computer if that computer supports power management. Other new keys allow you to open the My Computer window, run the Windows Calculator utility, and launch any file or program you choose, such as an e-mail program.

Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro includes two Universal Serial Bus (USB) ports. With these ports, you can plug a USB device directly into your keyboard, instead of using the ports in the back of

your computer. To connect Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro to your computer, you can use a USB connector, your computer's standard keyboard port, or both.

Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro supports Windows NT, 98, and 95. You can purchase Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro through retail channels at the suggested retail price of U.S. \$75. For more information about Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro, visit Microsoft's web site (<http://www.microsoft.com/products/hardware/keyboard>). You can also call 1-800-426-9400 or 1-425-882-8080.

### CAPTAIN NEMO

Captain Nemo from runtime Software is a shareware utility that allows you to mount a NetWare 5, NetWare 4, or NetWare 3 drive on a Windows 98/95 workstation. To use Captain Nemo, you physically connect the NetWare drive to the workstation, reboot the workstation, and launch Captain Nemo. The NetWare drive is then mounted automatically.

Once the NetWare drive is mounted, you can copy files between the NetWare partition and the Windows 98/95 partition. Captain Nemo offers a familiar, easy-to-use interface that is similar to that of the Windows Explorer utility. In addition, Captain Nemo supports long filenames and drives that are more than 8 GB in size. However, Captain Nemo does not support NetWare volumes that span multiple drives.

Captain Nemo supports Windows 98 and 95. (A DOS version is also available.) You can download Captain Nemo from <http://www.runtime.org/download.htm>, and you can then register this product for U.S. \$90. For more information, visit runtime Software's web site (<http://www.runtime.org>). You can also call 1-775-884-3922. ●



The new NetResources section on the NetWare Connection web site

located all over the Internet. You can search for a particular product by the product name, the company name, or the type of hardware or software. You can also browse a variety of hardware and software categories. For example, if you select the CD-ROM category, you can access links to web sites that offer reviews of one or more CD-ROM drives. You can see which product is reviewed and the date of the review, and you can click the corresponding link to read this review.

#### NETWORK RESOURCE

If you are looking for utilities, your first stop should be the new NetResources section on the *NetWare Connection* web site (<http://www.nwconnection.com/resources>). You can find detailed reviews for everything from anti-virus tools to year-2000 tools—all of which are fully compatible with NetWare. These utilities include shareware, freeware, trialware, and beta products, which you can download directly from this web site. In many cases, you can also view screenshots and take advantage of links to the company's home page. You can even submit a utility to be posted on the NetResources page.

#### STANDALONE GAME OF THE MONTH

**Sinistar: Unleashed** from THQ Inc. is a space combat game that is based on *Sinistar*, an arcade game originally created in 1983. In the game, you are a lone space pilot trying to save the universe. A newly discovered space-dwelling species is on the verge of creating a new biomechanical weapon called the *Sinistar*. The *Sinistar*'s worker drones are frantically trying to collect *Sinsites*, which are energy crystals that are necessary to power the *Sinistar*.

*Sinsites* are also necessary to power your spaceship, which is a living, sentient

weapons system to defeat the *Sinistar*.

You can choose from six spaceships, and you can battle more than 25 dynamic enemies. As the game progresses, you fight your way to the center of the cosmos, which features realistic, render-on-the-fly 3-D graphics.

**Sinistar: Unleashed** supports Windows NT, 98, and 95. You can purchase *Sinistar: Unleashed* through retail channels at the suggested retail price of U.S. \$39.95, and you can download a demo version from <http://www.thq.com/sinistar/downloads>. For more information, visit the official *Sinistar: Unleashed* web site (<http://www.sinistarunleashed.com>). You can also call 1-818-880-0456.

#### NETWORK GAME OF THE MONTH

**Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings** from Microsoft Inc. is the long-awaited sequel to *Age of Empires*, the popular real-time strategy game released in 1997. As in *Age of Empires*, *Age of Empires II* requires you to help your civilization advance and to defeat your enemies.

With *Age of Empires II*, Microsoft has improved almost every aspect of the game. You can now choose from 13 civilizations, including the new Celt, Viking, and Byzantine civilizations. Each civilization offers unique buildings, technologies, and battle units, which you can use to improve your civilization's economy and to develop a strong military.

You must develop your civilization's economy by gathering food, wood, gold, and stone. You must also create battle units in preparation for combat. *Age of Empires II* includes new combat options, such as the ability to garrison battle units for their protection.

In addition to traditional combat mode, *Age of Empires II* includes a new

vehicle with a potent weapons system. You must shoot your way through asteroids to collect as many *Sinsites* as you can before the worker drones get to them. If the worker drones gather enough *Sinsites*, they can complete the *Sinistar*, and you must then use your spaceship's

game-play mode called *Regicide*. If you select this type of game play, your objective is to protect your civilization's king or queen as you try to assassinate your enemy's leader. *Age of Empires II* also offers history-based campaigns, enabling you to lead the armies of Joan of Arc, Genghis Khan, William Wallace, and other historical figures.

You can play *Age of Empires II* with up to seven other people over a network or an Internet connection. You can also play with one other person over a modem or a serial connection.

*Age of Empires II* supports Windows NT, 98, and 95. You can purchase *Age of Empires II* through retail channels at the suggested retail price of U.S. \$49.95. For more information about *Age of Empires II* or to download a demo version, visit Microsoft's web site (<http://www.microsoft.com/games/age2>). You can also call 1-800-426-9400 or 1-425-882-8080.

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