

# DISCOVERY CHOICE

*Land a 747 or a pterodactyl next to Big Ben—anything's possible when you're the director of this film production and flight simulator package.*

David Sears

## STUNT ISLAND

Back in the early days of filmmaking, daring young aviators often ended a day of breathtaking aerobatics with grievous injuries. Disney Software's Stunt Island—equal parts flight simulator, production studio, and Hollywood magic—manages to extract the danger and intensify the fun. Suddenly, those of us with the urge to barnstorm can prove our mettle for some virtual dollars and even make some movies. More important, however, we can now go behind the scenes and play the roles of director, set designer, property manager, and stunt man. Wearing all those hats proves an educational experience, and as an introduction to Hollywood-style filmmaking, it's a bargain that film school tuition can't hope to beat.

Somewhere at sea, protected from the pesky mainland safety regulations, Stunt Island waits, the site of countless chase sequences, airborne rescues, dogfights, and fiery crashes. The studio anticipates certain dire circumstances and even provides hospital facilities to patch up stunt fliers, but fly straight. If you foul up too often, you'll flunk out of the competition.

Besides just flying around the island scouting locations for stunts, flying in the Stunt Pilot of the Year competition is probably the best way to acquaint yourself with the environs. Each stunt in the competition is controlled by a script similar to the ones used to film entire movies. You'll have a limited number of takes to accomplish the stunt, but each failed attempt costs you

and the studio money. Besides, you should perform dangerous stunts as few times as possible.

In the competition, you'll shoot down a World War II Zero, snag a balloon gondola using a wingtip, pilot a hang glider into a medieval castle, land in a burger stand parking lot, egg-bomb the police from the cockpit of an angry duck, and much more. Through the competition, you'll encounter a few of the many planes that stock the prop department's hangars—everything from the Boeing 747 to the SR-71A Blackbird, the Sopwith Camel to the pterodactyl. Each of these aircraft handles much as you would expect it to, though to allow for seat-of-the-pants flying, the controls seem distilled down to a bare minimum.

The simulator itself is top-notch, especially considering the number of planes available. Except for the organic craft, each vehicle offers a detailed cockpit view along with

the traditional left, right, rear, and spotter plane perspectives—and what a view! On a speedy 80486, you won't notice any stick sluggishness even with 100-percent detail and dithering options active. These and other simulation characteristics are controlled from a pop-up panel accessible throughout the game.

The island itself is small enough to cross in a Curtiss June Bug without too much monotony, but it's probably the largest back lot Hollywood has ever seen. Practically any action sequence imaginable can be made here.

Stunt Island's educational value doesn't lie in its nifty flight simulator, though the chance to fly the 45 available planes is worth the purchase price. Actually, Stunt Island gives you the chance not only to fly stunts but to engineer and script them yourself.

From the Set Design screen, you can select any island location as your site.



Once you have a site in mind, stock your set! You may place up to 40 props on the set at one time, but only the first 8 will act as cameras. Of these, slot 1 belongs to the stunt plane, and slot 2 to the spotter plane. The rest of the slots can hold any object and be placed anywhere.

The cameras can take the form of objects, visible or invisible. Even the stunt craft and the spotter plane can become any object. From the hundreds of props, you might find the letter W makes an excellent and unique spacecraft—and why not? It's your movie. Why not film an invasion sequence as angry consonants storm the earth? Props range from historic landmarks, such as Big Ben and the Eiffel Tower, to the more mundane, such as road signs and boulders.

Positioning objects on the set and imparting them with motion characteristics such as pitch, yaw, and roll takes seconds using the pop-up control panels. If you can imagine in 3-D, planning an interesting set takes very little time; if not, the superb 3-D modeler puts everything onscreen for you as you place it, from the perspective you choose.

As mentioned, pilots complete stunts according to parameters set up by scripts. A script consists of events that you define using a set of intuitive pull-down menus within the Set Design screen. For example, you might want the pilot to guide his Bristol Bulldog between two trees to the left of a road. From the menus you can define the area between the two trees as a collision window. Then, whenever the aircraft passes through the window, an event has oc-

curred, and the program will follow further instructions you give for that event. These instructions can check time limits and aircraft speed, change the shape of objects, and trigger animation or sound. This abbreviated list only hints at the potential hidden under the Event option. Any stunt you can imagine, you can script here, and the process is much less taxing than writing even a simple program in BASIC.

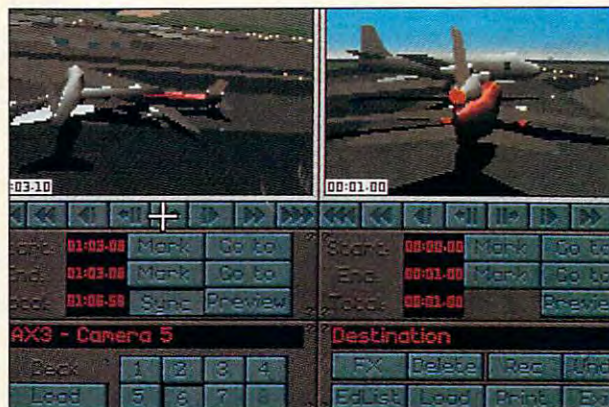
At the screening room, you can view the dailies—so called for their timeliness. If you choose to record a free flight instead of a stunt, you'll see a pilot's perspective of the flight. If, however, you fly a stunt with scheduled cuts from camera to camera and choose Auto Editing, you'll see the sequence unfold much the way it was intended, complete with point-of-view changes to props besides the aircraft and, of course, multiple shots of the same stunt. You can position the seven cameras with impunity. After all, in the virtual world of Stunt Island, both the cameras and the film are free, so you can use more than the average film budget could afford.

No studio can complete a motion picture without this postproduction essential: editing. Stunt Island gives you the opportunity to try your hand at a variety of techniques, such as cutting on action or using parallel action to heighten tension—and it also allows you to make some terrible decisions and put together a grade D film out of grade A takes. Essentially, the editing studio consists of eight video recorders that, if you use eight cameras when flying the

stunt, will hold up to eight separate rolls of processed film. These recorders can also load stock footage from other stunts, should you care to open the vaults.

To edit footage, you just mark the beginning and end of the footage you'd like to use in your film, using the logically labeled onscreen buttons. Next, copy the footage to the destination VCR. As you switch from source deck to source deck, fast-forwarding and rewinding, you soon develop a feel for construct-

**IBM PC or compatible (16-MHz 386SX or faster), 2MB RAM, VGA, hard drive with 13MB free; supports most sound cards,**



ing believable action sequences. The most valuable lesson that Stunt Island's editing room can teach neophyte filmmakers is that inspired editing can sometimes salvage the worst footage. For this to happen, editors must practice, and a few good books on editing could prove invaluable.

Aimed at film buffs and flight-simulator fans, Stunt Island seems too rare and too powerful to simply be called a game. With its straightforward approach to moviemaking, it could find a home in film school editing classes, and it just might inspire the next Spielberg—possibly you. □

**Joystick or mouse recommended—\$59.95**

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