

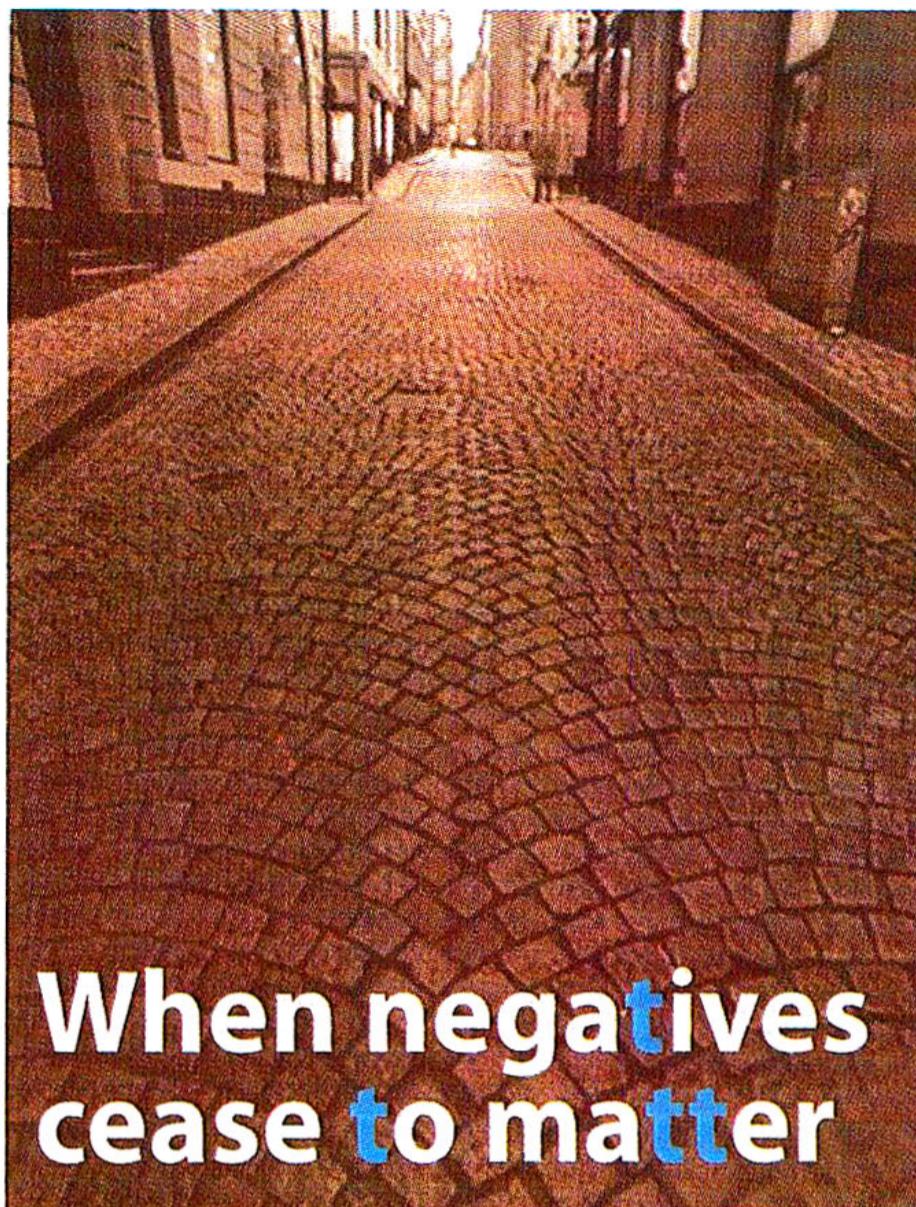
I hated the plane ride, because I spilled orange juice all over my front due to turbulence. And I hated my parents for moving to a whole new country. I mean, I could handle a different district, but a different country?! I looked out the window into the dense clouds and swirling fog, as the plane got ready to land. I could tell this was going to be a dismal country. Everything outside was white and gray. Hey, aren't we landing? How come I can't see the ground? How in blazes are we to land if we can't see the landing strip through this damned fog? Then I realised why it was all white and my bad mood evaporated. It was snow.

That is how I landed in Sweden in the middle of December. I was still pretty much a kid and not too hyped up about going abroad, even if for three years. I mean, they speak Swedish for crying out loud. How am I going to understand what they say at school? But walking in empty streets in the middle of a mild blizzard makes up for your inconveniences. It's like you are in a scene from Max Payne.

Sweden is four times the size of Bangladesh, with less population than Dhaka. Yeah, you heard me right. Only 9 million people 12% of them, are immigrants. So school was a piece of cake really - since they get so many kids who don't speak Swedish, they have special classes. They had me talking pretty good Swedish in a month. I could speak passable English, which helped. But my example doesn't do their abilities justice. They had a Chinese girl - who could only speak Chinese - speak passable Swedish in two and a half months. They were doing the maths tables in class five, which was like heaven for a guy like me who just passed class five in Bangladesh.

Sweden has a Bangali population of 2000 individuals. Apparently, up to the eighties, when people were all pumped up to go to Germany and America, Sweden granted you free citizenship the moment you landed there and expressed the urge to stay. But not many people found out, because no Bangali over there was letting the secret out lest there be too many Bangalis flooding the place.

So there were no visits from raucous relatives, no cousins and no cricket. There was some racism from a couple of classmates of mine.



When negatives cease to matter



Apparently I smelled like curry - bad curry at that - even though I took showers before going to school. But lets not talk about depressing stuff.

The food was great [those who have actually seen me, know I have a pot belly, which I acquired over there] and the weather was just plain weird. This one time, we went to the part of Stockholm where the royal palace was. There were people ice-skating in an open-air ice rink near the palace. It was around 5°C. We bought a

can of coke each and were watching the skating. In a matter of about two minutes, the temperature dropped nearly 15 degrees or something. I was cold to the bones in my heavy jacket. The coke in my can actually started to freeze. We bailed as fast as we could.

But there was fun stuff as well. Imagine walking in the snow wearing a sleeping suit. Now that was cool. Normally, when it snows, it's 5°C, then the temperature goes above freezing,

melting the snow into water and then falls below freezing again to turn all the water into ice. That's when it gets dangerous, because you can slip and seriously cause some damage to yourself. And you really don't want to be out there in -39°C.

The cold nights, combined with the deserted streets, can be really scary. Trust me, I know. One time, I had to double back to the house to get the small trolley bag we had for shopping, because

my parents forgot to bring it. On the way home, there was this old guy walking a few paces in front of me, so it was ok. But on the way back to the supermarket, I had to pass this hedge. It was tall, it was dark and it gave me the creeps. I always had a feeling that something was lurking behind it - humanities ultimate fear of the unknown. I remembered something from the Lion King [I said I was a kid, didn't I?], a quote from the infamous Scar: "run Simba, run, and never return" Simba ran alright, and, all of a sudden, I did too. I have never run so fast in my life. For some unknown, inexplicable reason, I was scared witless. Sometimes when I read Stephen King, I remember that night, and I shudder.

Studying in Sweden is pretty cheap compared to other countries. Undergraduate and most postgraduate courses have no tuition fees. That means it's free, ladies and gentlemen. You only have to pay US\$45 as Student Union fee. But the living cost is a little high. You'll need about approx. 7000-8000 Swedish Kronar per month. That's like Tk.80000 per month. You can earn some of it by getting jobs, but don't expect great jobs. If you are lucky, you'll get a job in an Indian restaurant [waiting, washing the dishes, delivering] or some job that no one wants to do, like cleaning public toilets. Ok, it's not that bad, but it's around there somewhere. But one of the drawbacks is that, almost all the undergraduate courses, and some postgraduate courses, are in Swedish. So, even if you cross the hurdle of learning a new language, you can only sell your talents in Sweden. Also, most part-time jobs require that you can speak Swedish.

Another drawback is that, it is a really lonely country. Too few people, loose family ties all around. Most families go crazy over there. 75% of my classmates were Children of Divorce. And you won't believe the politics. There are like three different groups of the two main parties, BNP and Awami League. I mean, come on. 2000 people in a country, none of them can vote for the parties in Bangladesh, but there are ten different parties.

Overall, I would advice you against moving there. It's a beautiful country to visit. They have lots of nice museums and breathtaking scenery and the City Hall [where they hold the Nobel

Alvin and the Chipmunks

FROM CENTER

What follows is a rock satire with some great songs albeit squeaky and a tale about friendship and getting it all. Sounds formulaic? But it works even for a jaded old person like me.

The verdict:

It has humour although it is different from the adult humour that populates most animated flicks these days. The plot line is simple and for a children's movie that's what you need, not something complicated like in Oceans 13 (admittedly it was not CG).

There have been other Chipmunk shows and movies and yes, I saw it all by now. This latest may not be the best but it is fun and interesting enough.

(*Source: Wikipedia)



WORLD IN CONFLICT

FROM CENTER

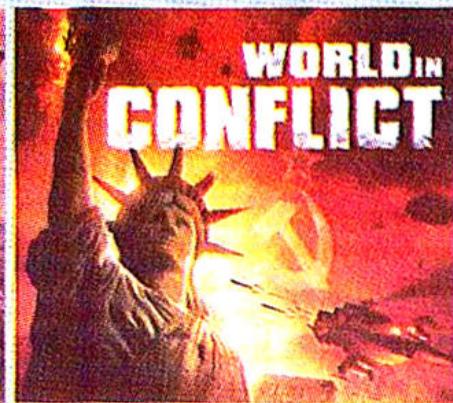
While so far things sound easy, the game cranks up difficulty by adding in time limits leaving little room for error.

The visuals:

Everything looks terrific even when you zoom in close. You can actually see the details on the vehicles and even on the troops. A bombing flyby will have build-

ings throw out shrapnel and send up billowing clouds of smoke. Now that's a lot of details for a strategy game.

The destruction on hand is massive and while it looks great it is not just eye candy. What goes on also affects the tactics of the players involved. You can call up bombers to knock down a bridge to slow down the enemy or flush them out of hiding in the



woods.

Multiplayer:

In multiplayer mode you play as part of a team of eight. The job is to destroy the enemy using teamwork. It's great fun keeping you hooked for hours and days.

The verdict:

One of the best games around that you can play for hours on end. It's got a great story line wonderfully told, superb visuals delivered without the need of PCs from the future and it requires you to think. After all it is a strategy game.