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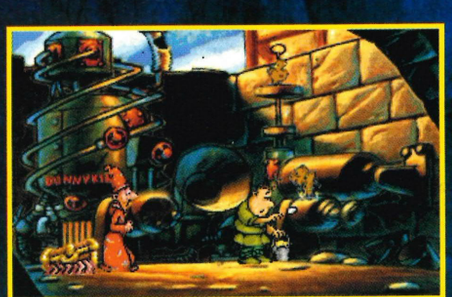
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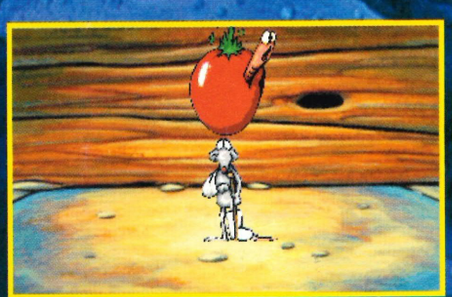
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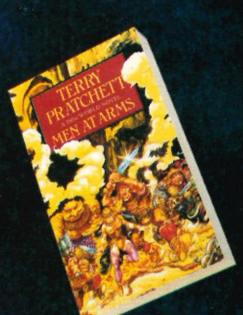
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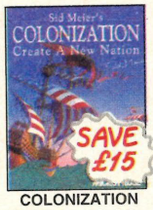
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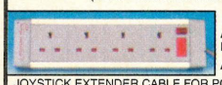
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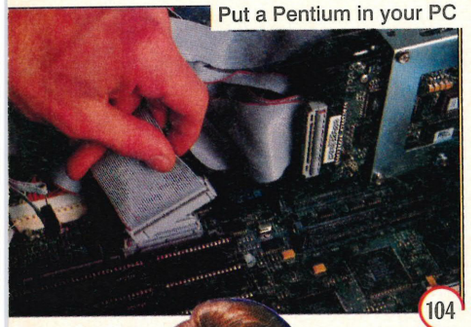
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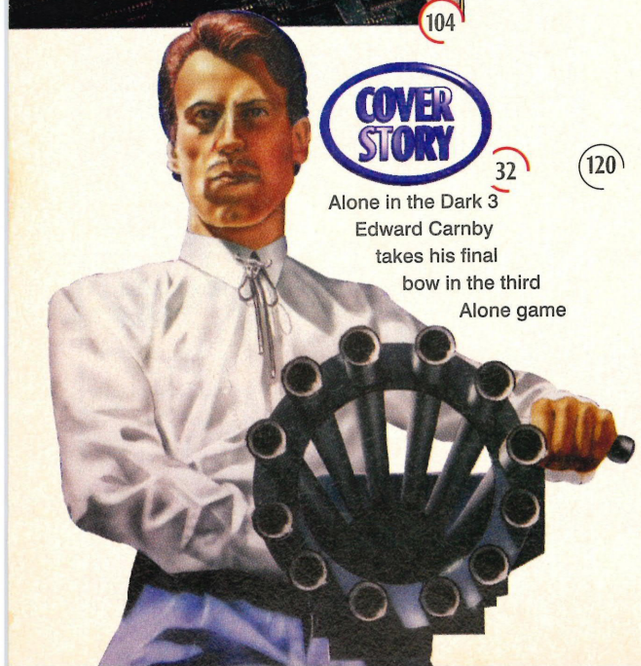
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121 Internet workshop
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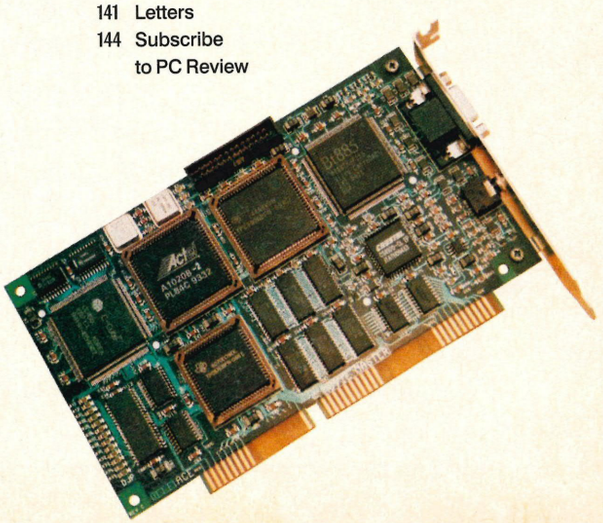
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You can display full-screen video on your PC with an MPEG card. This technology promises to be this year's Next Big Thing and we've got three cards to give away this month.



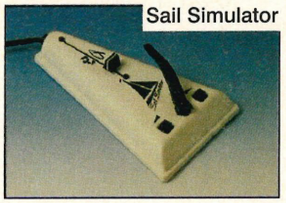
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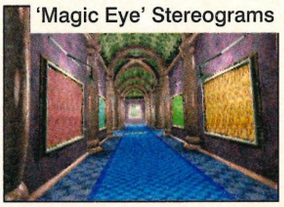
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We've got a comfortable, ergonomic mouse on test this month, plus the latest multimedia upgrade kit.

109 **Multimedia and general interest**
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114 **Educational**
Rosie and Jim make it to the PC this month — well, it was only a matter of time, wasn't it? There's also help with maths from the Math Factory and Stradiwackius, and extra French tuition with Learn to Speak French.

117 **Tried and tested**
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Sail Simulator


'Magic Eye' Stereograms

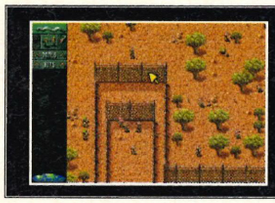

Multimedia upgrade kit

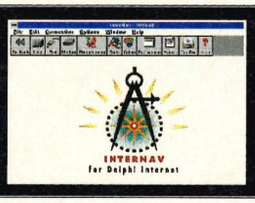
Cover disks



8 **Cover disks**
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Please note: PC Review is printed in two separate versions, one with a cover CD, and one with two floppy disks.







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PC Review Issue 40

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Cover disks



This month we've superb demos of Wing Commander 3, Psycho Pinball and Superfrog. Plus a 440Mb showreel of the making of Wing Commander 3, an access program for Delphi Internet and more!

THE MAKING OF WING COMMANDER 3

The future of CD-ROM games has never looked so exciting. Made using movie as well as gaming techniques, Wing Commander 3 has gone through months of coding, filming, recording and editing, and the result is a true interactive movie.

To celebrate the making of this magnificent feast of a game, Origin has created The Making Of Wing Commander — a 440Mb Cd-ROM documentary of the game, complete with interviews with the stars, the complete game script, and even outtakes from the filming.

How to load

The whole thing runs under Windows, so start it up and either select the Run option from Program Manager, then enter your CD-ROM drive, and Behind.exe, or double-click on Behind.exe in File Manager.

You will need to have Video for Windows installed on your hard disk, and this is included on the cover CD if you don't already have it. Look for the directory Mscolor on the cover CD, and run Setup.exe from that directory.

How to play

All you need to is to click on each image on the main menu to jump to that part of the demonstration. There are two buttons at the top of the screen, marked M and Q. Clicking on the M button will take you back to the main menu. Clicking on Q will return you to Windows.

Hardware required

486, VGA, Windows running in 256 colour, mouse, 4Mb RAM (8Mb recommended).

● *See also our feature on the making of Wing Commander 3 on page 46 and the full review on page 48.*

HOW TO LOAD YOUR PC REVIEW COVER CD

1. Take the PC Review cover CD out of its plastic case.
2. Insert it into your CD-ROM drive and close the drive tray.
3. Wait for the light on the front of the CD-ROM drive to go out.
4. Log on to your CD-ROM drive by typing its drive letter, followed by the Enter key.
5. Now type PCR [Enter] to load the menu screen and select the DOS program you want to load from these pages. This will either run the installation program required, in the case of games that need to copy files from the CD-ROM to your hard disk, or run the program directly from the CD-ROM.
6. Cover CD programs that run under Windows can be installed directly from Program Manager by Running the program file, or from File Manager.

THE MAIN MENU

This is where the programmers and designers get their due credit, and you can find out who did what at Origin to bring Wing Commander 3 to life, in an question and answer format.

Filming on the 'virtual set' (from the rolling demo). The computer generated graphic backgrounds were placed 'behind' the actors in place of that bright green screen.

Wing Commander 3 features a whole host of Hollywood stars and this is where you can get the lowdown on who plays who in the game.



Just select this option for a rolling demo of the story behind Wing 3. You'll see the 'virtual set' technology explained, and some revealing clips of the actors and designers.

Any recording experience has moments of humour, and Wing Commander 3 is no exception, as this segment of video clips clearly shows.

There's little point being a 'virtual actor' if you have nowhere to do your thing, so here are a large selection of virtual sets from the game for you to admire.

A selection from the original artwork used to create the design for Wing Commander 3.

Finally, the complete script to the game. No peeking at the end — in fact, we'd advise not looking through the whole of this if you have yet to play the game!

WING COMMANDER 3

It's a bit of a Wing Commander 3 festival this month, as we bring you not only the Making Of . . . presentation, but also a complete playable mission from the game! You are given full details on the mission at the start of the game, but the aim, as with all of the Wing Commander games, is simply to get out there and blast as many of the opposition into oblivion as you can.

How to load

To play Wing Commander 3, pop the cover CD in the drive, and select your CD-ROM directory at the DOS prompt. Now type:

PCR [Enter]

to load and run the menu. Now select Wing Commander 3 with the cursor keys and the space bar to load and run the game.

How to play

The game is controlled with keyboard or joystick, and it has a hefty number of controls.

CAMERA CONTROLS

F1:	Cockpit view
F1:	Toggle HUD view when in cockpit view
F2:	Left view
F3:	Right view
F4:	Rear view
CTRL-F4:	Rear view in MFD
F5:	Chase camera
F6:	Object view camera
N:	Navigation map
[:	Zoom in (object view and navigation map)
]:	Zoom out (object view and navigation map)
Left Arrow:	Pan left (object view and navigation map)
Right Arrow:	Pan right (object view and navigation map)
Up Arrow:	Tilt up (object view and navigation map)
Down Arrow:	Tilt down (object view and navigation map)

NAVIGATION MAP CONTROLS

S:	Toggle stars
G:	Toggle grid
C:	Centre on player
N:	Select next waypoint
P:	Select previous waypoint
T:	Cycle through targets on screen

SPEED CONTROLS

-:	Decrement throttle 5%
+:	Increment throttle 5%
Backspace:	Set throttle to 0%
\:	Set throttle to maximum
Tab:	Afterburners (while held down)

WEAPON CONTROLS

G:	Select next gun mode
M:	Select next missile mode
CTRL-S:	Engage targetting
T:	Select next target
Y:	Select closest target and match speed
L:	Engage auto-lock mode
Enter:	Fire missile
Space:	Fire gun

COCKPIT CONTROLS

A:	Autopilot
W:	Bring up weapon display



S:	Bring up shield display
C:	Bring up communication display
D:	Bring up damage display and toggle text/Graph
CTRL-E:	Eject
G:	Select next gun type
M:	Select missile mode
[:	Missile mode: Select next missile
]:	Missile mode: activate missile

MISCELLANEOUS CONTROLS

ALT-X:	Exit the demo
ALT-F:	Display frame rate
ALF-2:	VGA mode
ALT-4:	SVGA mode
ALT-L:	Switch mode for fastest frame rate
ALT-P:	Pause spaceflight
CTRL-X:	Alternate flight control
ALT-M:	Activate keyboard controls
ALT-J:	Activate joystick controls
CTRL-Left arrow:	Make demo darker
CTRL-Right arrow:	Make demo brighter

JOYSTICK CONTROLS

Back:	Pitch up
Forward:	Pitch down
Left:	Yaw left
Right:	Yaw right
Button 0:	Fire gun
Button 1 & forward:	Increase throttle
Button 1 & back:	Decrease throttle
Button 1 & left:	Roll left
Button 1 & right:	Roll Right
Double Click Button 1 & Hold:	Afterburner
Button 1 & Button 0:	Fire missile

KEYBOARD CONTROLS

Up arrow:	Pitch up
Down arrow:	Pitch down
Left arrow:	Yaw Left
Right arrow:	Yaw Right
>:	Roll left
<:	Roll Right
Shift & above keys:	Doubles rate

System requirements

486 processor, 8Mb RAM — at least 7,000,000 bytes worth of XMS, 500K of base memory and a double speed CD-ROM drive.

SUPERFROG

Superfrog casts you in the role of the handsome prince who gets turned into a frog after he's met the beautiful princess, and therefore sets off to rescue her. This demo contains a complete level from the game, and the idea is to collect as many coins as needed to open the door at the other end of the level. The number at the bottom right of the screen shows you how many you need to collect.

How to load

Log on to your CD-ROM drive, and type

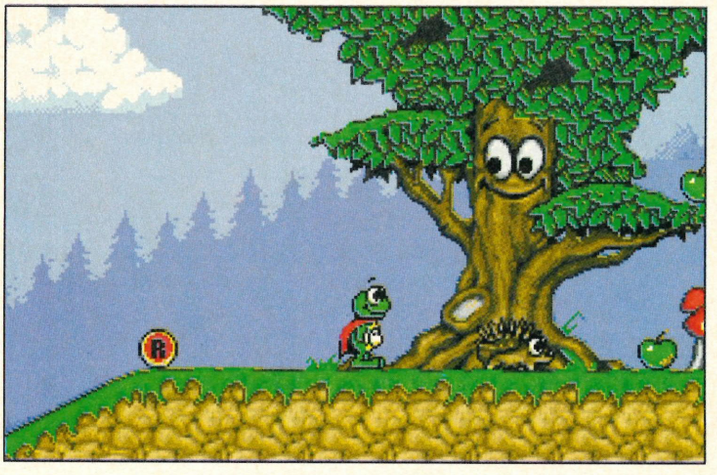
PCR [Enter]

to load and run the CD menu. Select Superfrog with the cursor keys, and then press enter to load and run the demo.

How to play

The game is controlled with joystick or keyboard, using the keys below:

Left Arrow:	Run left
Right Arrow:	Run right
Alt:	Jump
Ctrl:	Use weapon (if collected)



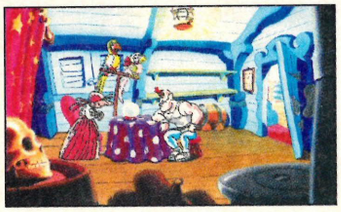
BIG RED ADVENTURE

Core Design's strange new graphic adventure stars a tech-head with a computer, who has an eye on the Crown Jewels!

How to load

Log onto your CD-ROM drive and then type

PCR [Enter]



to load and run the CD menu. Use the cursor keys to highlight Big Red Adventure, and then press return to load and run the game.

How to play

Click with the left mouse button anywhere on screen to move your character. Hold down the right mouse button, to access the four control icons and your inventory. To use, highlight and then click on them.

How to quit

Click on the Exit To DOS icon.

Hardware required

386, 4Mb, VGA, most major sound cards supported.

GFA CAD FOR WINDOWS

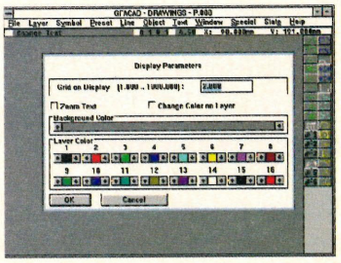
On this month's CD, you'll find one of the most useful precision drawing packages you could want, the stunning GFA CAD For Windows, from GFA Data Media. This fully featured CAD package is complete in every way, and has previously been sold through Data Becker for the value for money price of £75, so with this disk you're getting a real bargain!

How to load

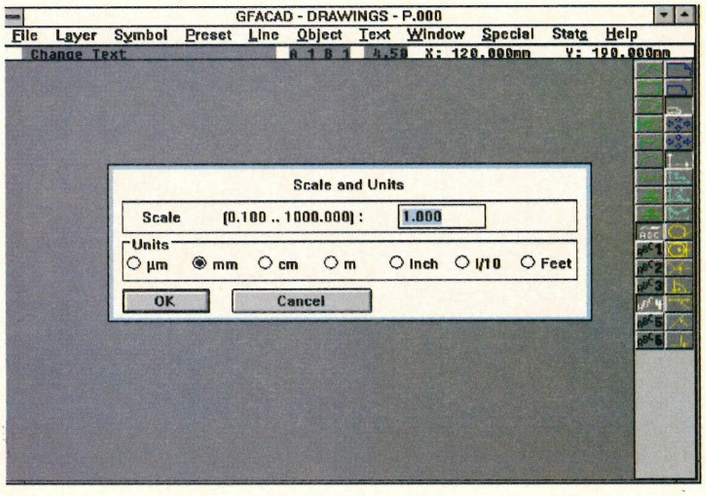
GFA CAD runs from Windows, so boot Windows, and then select the Run option. Choose your CD-ROM directory, and use the Browse option to run GFACAD.EXE in the GFACAD directory.

How to use

GFA CAD is a huge program, and there is no way we can fully explain how to use the program on these pages. The basics of how to use the program are explained in the package itself, in the form of a simple tutorial to take you through your first steps with the program. You can also refer back to the instructions given in PC Review Issue 39, when the program was included on the floppy disk.



Load the package as described above, and then take a look around the main screen. On the right are your drawing tools, along the top are your menu bars, which feature many of the same tools as the tool bar, and in the middle is your drawing area.



CANNON FODDER 2



Cannon Fodder has to be one of the most enjoyable games based around war ever released, something that Sensible Software obviously knows as it has worked night and day on this superb sequel, and here's a complete mission from the game for you to play.

In case you don't know, the aim is to guide a small group of soldiers through the battlefield, taking out just about everything in sight while trying to stay alive.

How to load

Log on to your CD-ROM drive, or floppy drive for disk edition buyers, and then type

PCR [Enter]

to load and run the menu. Select Cannon Fodder 2 with the cursor keys and press return to load and run the installer. This will copy 1.4Mb to your hard disk in a directory called CF2. We suggest you now type Install [Enter], *not* to install the game (you've just done that), but to select Sound Setup to choose between Sound Blaster effects or no sound. After that, exit the menu, and type Cannon [Enter] to play the demo.

How to play

The game is played with the mouse, using the right mouse button to get your soldiers to fire at the crosshair and the left mouse button to get them to run to the crosshair.

How to quit

Press Esc at any point.

Hardware required

386, 605K base memory, 385K EMS, VGA, mouse.



GFA FOR WINDOWS

GFA CAD is huge, as you'll find in the first hour of using it, but you'll be happy to know that help is at hand. A manual for GFA CAD is available from Data Becker, and it will guide you through even the trickiest aspects of CAD. It costs just £10 for almost 500 pages, plus £2.50 postage and packing, and can be ordered from:
Data Becker UK, Unit 4, Bentley Industrial Centre, Bentley, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 5NJ. Tel: (0420) 22707, fax: (0420) 22807
Please make cheques out to Data Becker UK Ltd.

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FREE INTERNET ACCESS WITH DELPHI UK

Try out Delphi UK for free with this very special offer from Delphi and PC Review. Delphi is an online service which offers many of its own forums and special interest groups as well as full access to the Internet — e-mail, newsgroups, the World Wide Web, the lot.

Of its own specific forums, Delphi offers The Times and The Sunday Times on-line, and — yippee! — a PC Review forum! So get your modem ready and try out Delphi with this CD software suite — we'll meet you online.

With the software on this CD, you have five free hours to browse through Delphi and try out the available facilities. After that, you can sign up with the service for real, or cancel your trial subscription — see below for details, and note that is important that you let Delphi know whether you wish to join or not. There are three programs in this Delphi Internet cover CD offer: Internav, Apollo and Air Warrior.

Internav

Internav is a Windows program which enables you to access Delphi and use its facilities in a semi-graphical format. It uses intuitive icons and menus for configuration and logging in, but the Delphi and Internet screens you view will be text-based.

Apollo

Apollo is a Windows-based 'offline reader' for Delphi Internet. An offline reader saves on your phone bills by enabling you to do many of the things you would normally do on-line while you are actually disconnected from the service. You set Apollo to download certain things, such as your mail, or the latest exchanges in your favourite newsgroup, to your PC's hard disk, which means you can peruse these later at your leisure and without running up a large phone bill.

Air Warrior

Air Warrior is a flight sim which can be played on-line within Delphi. It runs directly under DOS and you will need to install the software to your PC's hard disk. To play against other Delphi members online, you need to log on to Delphi and access the Games list from the main menu (type 'games' at the prompt). Then type 'air' at the games menu. Good luck!

However, first steps first. The first thing you need to do is to log on to Delphi.

10 steps to accessing Delphi Internet with the PC Review cover CD

1. With the PC Review cover CD in your CD-ROM drive, load up Windows on your PC.

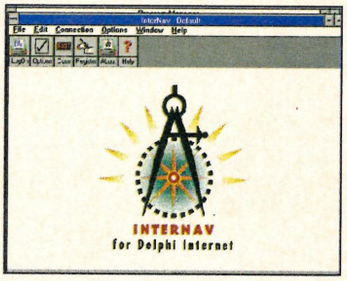
2. Install the Internav software. Either select Run from the File menu in Program Manager, and type D:\INTERNAV\SETUP.EXE, or, open File Manager in the Main window, and double-click on the file Setup.exe in the Internav directory on your CD-ROM drive.

3. Internav will now install to your hard disk. It will take up around 1.6Mb of hard disk space. After installation, it will prompt you to ask if you want a program group and icons created. Say yes!

4. Make sure that your modem is fully connected up to your PC, a power socket and the telephone line, and that it is switched on.

5. Double-click on the Internav for Delphi icon (it looks a bit like a TV transmission tower) to begin the log-on procedure.

6. Your Internav for Delphi opening screen should look like Picture 1 (shown below, here).



Double-click on the Log-on icon at the top left. This will dial up Delphi Internet and take you on-line.

7. Your default 'username' as a participant in PC Review and Delphi's offer is Godelphi, and your default password is PCR. You will get an opportunity to change these later, but when you dial up initially these will be automatically entered at the username and password prompts.

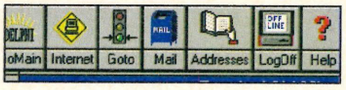
8. You will now be asked some questions about yourself: your name, address, your mother's maiden name (!) to help keep your account secure, and your credit card details.

Please note: you have five free hours on Delphi with the software on the cover CD and you will not be billed for these five hours. If you are at all concerned about your credit card security, even after reading the on-screen reassurances, please call Delphi on (0171) 757 7080 for further details.

9. Follow all the on-screen prompts correctly and you will be registered on to Delphi. Please remember to write down your username and password details so that you don't forget them.

10. Before you go wandering off into cyberspace, don't forget to access the PC Review forum. Just type PCREVIEW, or PCREV, or PCR at the main menu and you'll find a chat area, hints and tips and extracts from forthcoming features. Or you can just drop in and say hello.

How to move around in Delphi

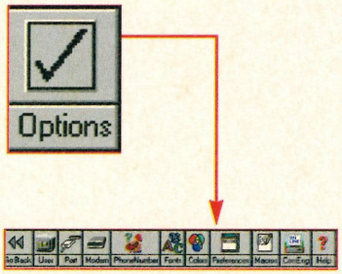


Getting around with Delphi is quick and easy. You can use the icons at the top of the screen to access e-mail and Internet service, or you can use the command line interface. You'll see text-based menus on-screen, followed by a command prompt. All you have to do is to type in your desired menu item. In fact, you can abbreviate the menu items down to one letter, so long as it doesn't then duplicate another item on the menu. For example, to access the menu item PC Review, you can type it out in full, or type PCREV, or PCR, or PC. This principle holds true for all Delphi menus, except those which are numbered — and it's pretty obvious which those are!

Troubleshooting

It won't connect me to Delphi when I double-click on Log On.

The first thing to do if you have trouble initialising your modem or making the Delphi connection, is to check all your system settings. These are easily accessed from the icons at the top of the Internav screen. Click on the Options button to see the strip of settings icons as shown below.

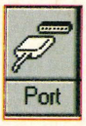




Click here to go back to the Log On screen.



Click here to check and/or alter your user name and password details. You can change these settings so that you can automatically log on to Delphi without having to type out your name and password each time you dial in.



The commonest solution if you can't initialise your modem is that the software is set to the wrong serial port. If your modem is in your COM2 port, for example, make sure it says so here and change it if necessary.



These modem settings should really be left alone. They should be correctly set up for your system.



When you dial Delphi, you can do so through one of two networks, GNS and Sprintnet. GNS operates local access numbers, Sprintnet dials the Delphi London number direct. If you are dialling using Sprintnet, check that your modem's parity and bit settings are 8 databits, none for parity and 1 stop bit, and that you have the correct log on scripts, Logonspr.bmc and Logofspr.bmc selected.

If you are dialling using GNS, check that the modem's settings are listed as 7, even, and 1 stop bit and that the log-on scripts, Logondir.bmc and Logofdir.bmc, are correct.

There are more details regarding GNS and Sprintnet in the Readme file, which is copied to your

C:\INTERNAV directory when you install the software. In the Internav for Delphi program group you should find both the Help file and Readme file represented with icons.



The remaining icons refer to cosmetic changes you can make to the appearance of Internav in Windows.

If you have any unusual problems that aren't answered on these pages, ring Delphi Internet on 0171-757 7080 and they will be pleased to help you.

Air Warrior

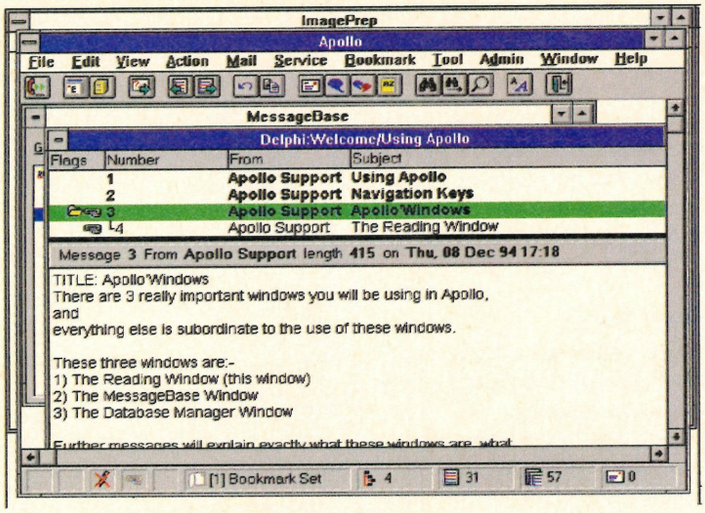
Air Warrior runs under DOS and is installed from the cover CD main menu.

1. Put the PC Review cover CD in your CD-ROM drive and log on to it (ie, type D: if it's called drive D:, or E: if it's E: and so on).

2. Type PCR [Enter] to bring up the cover CD menu. Use the cursor keys to highlight Air Warrior (Delphi) and press Enter to select it.

3. Air Warrior will now be copied across to your hard disk. It will take up around 6.5Mb of hard disk space.

4. Log on to Delphi (see above for how to do this) and at the Delphi main menu, type 'games' for the Games menu, then 'air' to start Air Warrior.



Apollo

Apollo is an offline reader for Delphi which should help you eke out that free time available! You can use it to download items from Delphi which you can then read at your leisure from your hard disk. It runs under Windows and needs to be installed to your hard disk from Windows.

1. Put the PC Review cover CD in your CD-ROM drive and log on to it (ie, type D: if it's called drive D:, or E: if it's E: and so on).

2. Load Windows if you're not already running it.

3. Either select Run from the File menu in Program Manager, and type D:\APOLLO\SETUP.EXE, or, open File Manager in the Main group, and double-click on the file Setup.exe in the Apollo directory on your CD-ROM drive. Either of these procedures will start the Apollo installation process.

4. Follow the on-screen prompts to ensure Apollo is installed correctly. The program will take up around 2.2Mb on your hard disk.

5. There is an extensive Readme file (Readme.wri) in Windows Write format which is copied to C:\APOLLO when you install the software. If you have not used an offline reader before we strongly recommend that you read this file before you alter any of Apollo's settings.

IMPORTANT!

After your five free hours has expired, you need to e-mail UKSERVICE to let them know if you do *not* wish to register with Delphi. If you experience any problems with e-mailing, ring Delphi on 0171-757 7080 to confirm that you don't want to register with the service. If you do not contact Delphi to cancel your trial subscription after the five free hours, you will be treated as a member and be billed at a rate of £10 per month.

HOW COMPUTERS WORK



Have you ever wondered what actually goes on inside your computer? How does the whole thing work? What are all those little beeps and buzzes it makes? How does it draw the screen? How does it understand what you type? What about all its different cards and chips?

For the answers to all of these questions and many more, there really is only one place to look — Mindscape's How Computers Work.

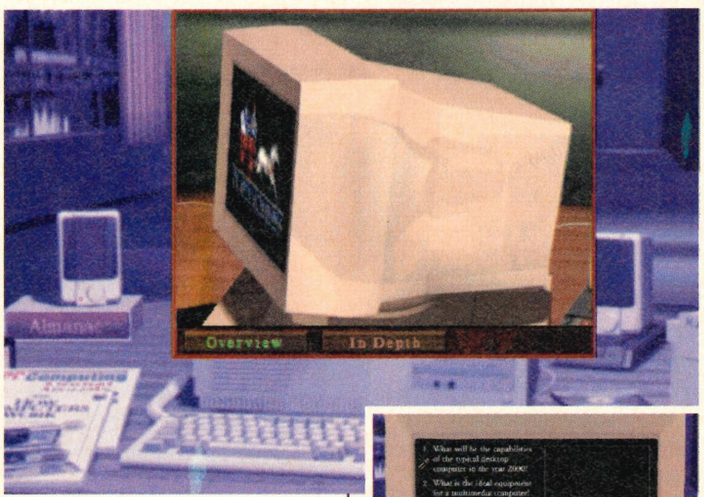


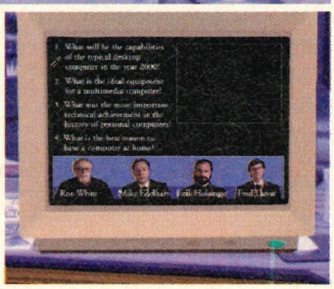
How to load

Load up Windows, and then use the Run option to run the HCW-DEMO.EXE file in the HCWDEMO directory on the CD-ROM. The rest is easy.

How to play

This could not be simpler. Just guide the mouse pointer around the screen until you highlight something, then click with the left mouse button to zoom in on the selected object, or watch a rolling video of the selected item.





How to quit

Just click on the Exit button at the bottom of the screen to return to Windows.

Hardware Required

386, VGA, Windows, 4Mb RAM, Video For Windows (see the instructions for The Making of Wing Commander 3 on page 8 for details on installing Video for Windows from your cover CD, if you don't already have the program.

NEOPAINT

When it comes to shareware, Neopaint is a bit of an industry standard, and PC Review is proud to present the latest upgrade to this market-leading program.

Remember, it is shareware, so you'll have to pay a registration fee if you want the full package with all the support files.

How to load

Log on to your CD-ROM drive, and type

PCR [Enter]

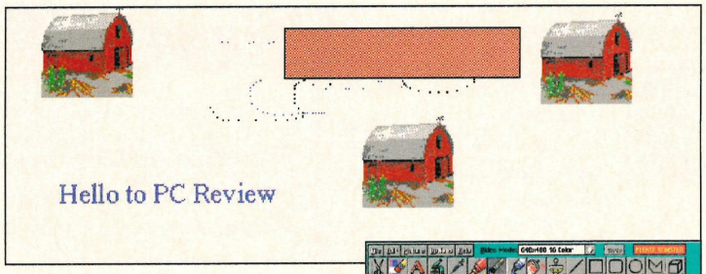
to load the CD menu. Now select Neopaint with the cursor keys and then press enter to load and run the installer. This will copy all the files to your hard disk, and from that point on, just follow the on-screen instructions.

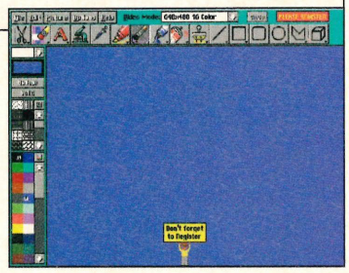
How to use

It's an art package, so the best way to make use of this is to simply have a go at experimenting.

The icons along the top of the screen are your various pens and brushes, and the colours down the left of the screen is your palette. Just play around with it!

Press Esc to quit the program.

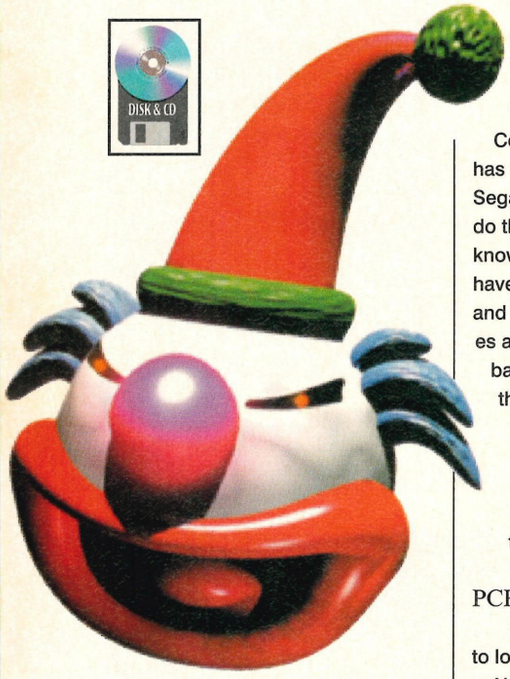




You'll be asked if you wish to save your work so far. Make your choice and you"ll then be returned to DOS.

Hardware required

386-based PC with 4Mb RAM, mouse, VGA graphics.



PSYCHO PINBALL

Codemaster's Pinball simulation has already been a smash hit on the Sega Megadrive, and now it's set to do the same thing on the PC. You know how these things work: you have flippers all around the table, and the idea is to hit as many bonuses as possible without letting the ball fall between the bumpers at the bottom.

How to load

Log on to your CD-ROM, or floppy drive if you have the disk edition of the magazine, and type

PCR [Enter]

to load and run the menu.

Now select Psycho Pinball with the cursor keys and press Enter to install the demo. On disk, type Psycho [Enter] to play the demo.

How to play

The game is controlled with the keyboard, using the following keys.

Shift keys:	Flip bumpers
Enter:	Shoot ball
\ :	Tilt table
/:	Tilt table

How to quit

Press Esc to leave the demo at any point.



Hardware required

486, VGA, 4Mb RAM, and a Sound Blaster card (the finished game will be more flexible regarding specs).

QWIKMENU

Are you fed up with trying to cope with the DOS prompt, but can't stand Windows? Qwikmenu could be just the thing for you.

Qwikmenu is a brand new version of the graphic user interface for DOS, and this demo should show you just how versatile it is.

How to load

Log on to your CD-ROM drive and type

PCR [Enter]

to load and run the menu. Now just select Qwikmenu with the cursor keys and then press Enter to load and run the demo.

How To Use

As Qwikmenu is a graphical user interface, all you need to do is just click on the various parts of the screen with the mouse to see which icon does what.

The demo contains all the information you will need concerning building your own menu.

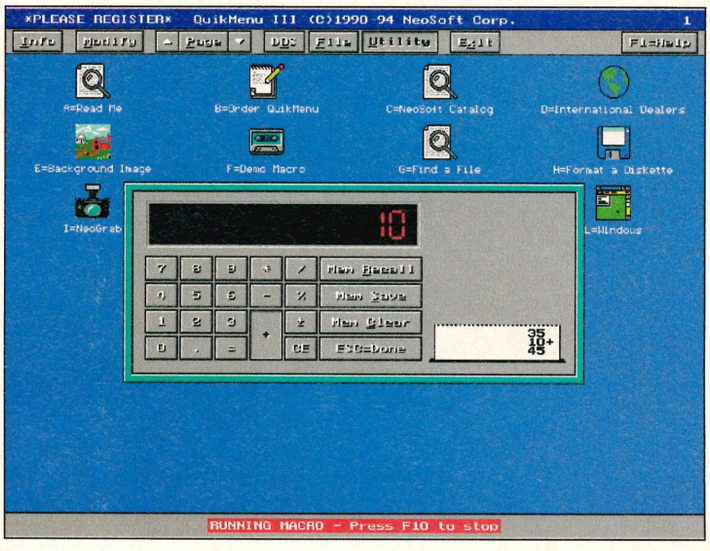
It also includes instructions on how to register for the full version. So go ahead, have a look around.

How to quit

Press Esc at any time to leave the demo.

Hardware required

386, mouse, 4Mb RAM, VGA.



SAIL SIMULATOR

Sailing has to be one of the most relaxing pursuits the upper classes ever got their hands on. It's also *very* expensive, but for those who haven't had the chance to experience the feeling of sea air through our hair and the rudder in our hands, we present Sail Simulator, courtesy of Dutch company Stentec BV and PC Maritime in the UK.

How to load

Log on to your CD-ROM drive, and type

PCR [Enter]

to load and run the demo.

How to play

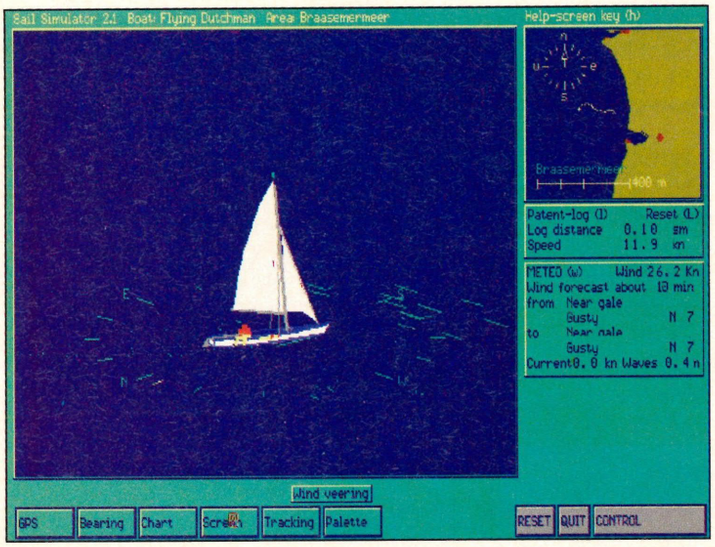
Sailing a ship is a tricky business, and naturally there are a hell of a lot of controls. Far too many, in fact, to list here in any detail, so for information on how to play the demo, check the tutorials on the main menu.You can use the keyboard, joystick, mouse, or even the Sail Simulator Control Unit, a sort of joystick with a tiller, which is sadly not cover-mounted on this issue. If you're really keen contact PC Maritime on (01752) 254205 for more details on the Control Unit, or indeed on Sail Simulator in general.

How to quit

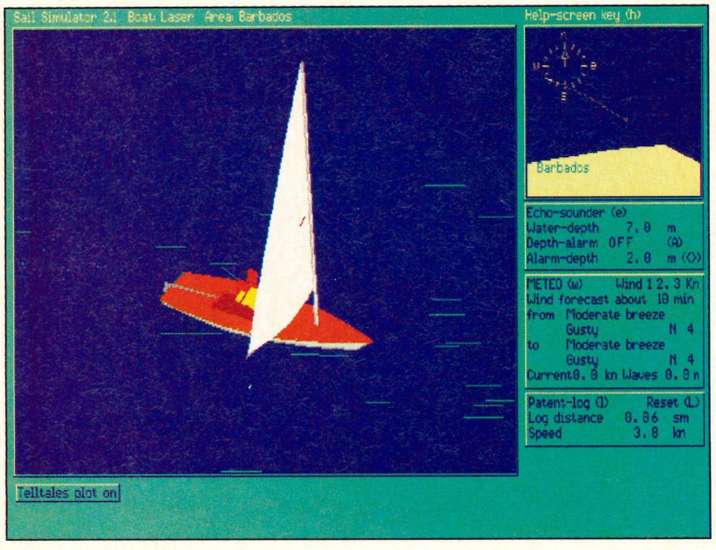
Pressing Esc at any point will return you to the main menu, from which you can select Return To DOS to leave the demo.

Hardware required

Any PC processor type will do, plus 2Mb hard drive space, 550K free RAM, EGA graphics.



There's a good old breeze blowing and you can almost feel the tang of the ozone in your nostrils as you tack from left to right across the screen. Or something like that, anyway.



QUICKIE COMPETITION

Attention CD-ROM edition owners! The first person to write in to PC Review at the address on page 7 with a complete and correct list of all the programs represented on the picture on our cover CD sleeve will win a CD-ROM program. Mark your envelope CD Picture Mini-Compo, and don't forget to include your name and address!



HELP! MY COVER DISK/CD-ROM WON'T WORK



If you're having problems finding your way round the cover disks or CD-ROM disc, or making them work with your PC, then try the PC Review cover disks/CD-ROM disc helpline on (01451) 810788. The helpline operates between 3.00pm and 5.00pm weekdays.

- The PC Review cover disks and CD-ROM discs are rigorously checked and scanned for all known viruses at each stage of production. However, cover disks and cover CDs are used at the reader's own risk. PC Review can accept no responsibility for damage to either data or hardware caused by the use of our cover disks or CDs.



- We also make every effort to ensure that the contents of each disk or CD are exactly as advertised. If however, circumstances should dictate that we are unable to supply the stated program, we will endeavour to supply alternative software.

PC Review, its distributors and retailers, will not be held responsible for any unnotified change to the contents of either the floppy cover disks or CD-ROM cover disc.

HELP! MY COVER DISK/CD-ROM IS DAMAGED

Out of the thousands of cover disks and CD-ROM discs we duplicate every month, a very small number may get damaged during transit. If you think your cover disk or CD-ROM disc might be faulty, we'll replace it. Just pop the cover disk or CD-ROM disc in a jiffy bag with a suitably sized, self-addressed envelope and postage to the value of 28p (55p from overseas) and the form below (filled in), and send the package to the following address:

DiskXpress, Unit 7, Willow Court, Bourton Industrial Park, Bourton-on-the-water, Gloucestershire GL54 2HQ

Please DO NOT send the cover disk or CD-ROM disc back to PC Review — we don't hold stocks of spares.

Name .....

Address .....

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The cover disk/CD-ROM disc (delete as applicable) on my copy of PC Review was damaged. Please send me a replacement — I enclose return postage to the value of 28p (55p if overseas) and the original cover disk/CD-ROM.

News



PENTIUM PROBLEM CAUSES A STIR

Following allegations of a flaw in Intel's Pentium processor, which is being used in an increasing number of PCs aimed at a consumer audience, PC manufacturers have been quick to defend its performance. For once, the questions do not relate to the potential overheating which initially dogged the release of the Pentium, but instead refer to a problem with the Pentium's floating point capabilities — in other words, the processor's ability to count.

The flaw occurs with certain pairs of numbers in large calculations, where the chip has been discovered to produce "a reduction in precision between the 5th and the 19th significant digits". In plain English, the Pentium can come up with the wrong answer when performing some very specific and highly complex calculations.

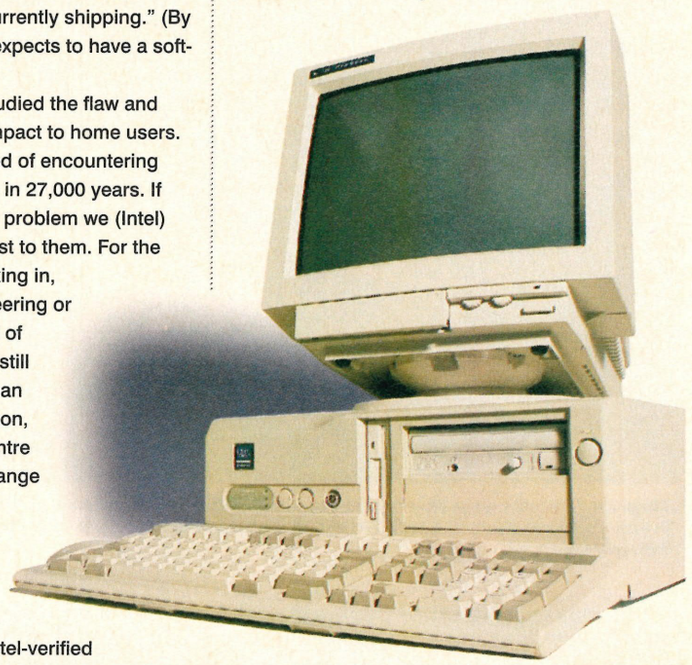
In a recent press release regarding sales of the company's Pentium PCs, manufacturer Viglen described it as "a subtle fault. . . in the floating point unit." Supplier Gateway 2000 went one step further, giving a breakdown on the incidence of the fault, and maintaining that "the Pentium processor is the most tested, most analysed processor in history", and similarly Dell "sees no reason to halt shipment of Pentium-based products".

Since the computer is — at heart — something of an overblown calculator, the suggestion of an inability to count correctly is causing Intel considerable embarrassment.

However the consensus of opinion in the PC industry appears to be that the fault is unlikely to have any effect on home users. Intel's public relations manager Michael Sullivan commented: "There is a very subtle flaw with the floating point divide unit in the Pentium processor. Intel detected the flaw in the summer, and it has now been fixed in versions of the Pentium currently shipping." (By the time you read this, Intel expects to have a software fix available as well).

Sullivan adds, "Intel has studied the flaw and concluded that there is no impact to home users. For these users, the likelihood of encountering such an error would be once in 27,000 years. If any user does encounter the problem we (Intel) will replace the chip at no cost to them. For the highly technical user — working in, say, the mathematics, engineering or scientific fields the likelihood of encountering the problem is still very remote, but more real than for home users. For that reason, Intel has set up a support centre to deal with inquiries and arrange replacements if necessary."

● The Pentium Overdrive chip (P24T) is expected to ship this month. Pricing has not been set as yet, but the chip will fit any Intel-verified 'Pentium Ready' 486 PC. Performance, it is claimed, will be faster than any 486 chip, but the benefit of the upgrade will depend on your current configuration. For example, the performance increase relative to the cost should make the upgrade attractive to users with a 486/25 or 486/33, but less so if you have a 486/66 or a DX/4.



QUARTERDECK TACKLES MEMORY MANAGEMENT FOR GAMES

Quarterdeck, producer of the QEMM series of memory management tools has announced plans to release Gamerunner, a utility suite designed to improve the game playing performance of your PC.

The three utilities included in Gamerunner are intended to be used specifically with DOS games. It is claimed that the software set will do away with the need for inconvenient boot disks, obtain more memory automatically (whether your game needs EMS or XMS) speed up disk access and allow a player to 'cheat' on supported games.

These utilities are QEMM for Games 7 (from Quarterdeck), the Hyperdisk Speed set (Hyperware), and AXIS-The Gamebeater (Baseline Publishing).

Gamerunner will cost between £45 and £50. For further information, contact Quarterdeck, on (0245) 496699.



IN BRIEF

● Logitech has released the TrackMan Live!, a cordless 'mouse' with built-in radio control and a range of up to 30 feet, or six feet with the power-saver battery option switched on. However, gamers looking for the ultimate PC couch potato experience will need deep pockets — the TrackMan Live! costs a mere £169.

● NEC and Videologic are teaming up to produce 3D technology for games and multimedia. VideoLogic will license its PowerVR technology to NEC, and the first products are due out this year — providing photorealistic 3D animations and special effects such as lifelike shadows and shading.

EDITOR'S COMMENT



STARS IN THEIR EYES?

There are times when the commercial breaks on ITV and Channel 4 are more entertaining than the programmes they interrupt. But in the run-up to Christmas they all begin to look the same. Any advert that starts off in black and white and has a woman — or a man — floating around wearing something diaphanous must be for fragrance. The other 50 per cent feature a close-up of a starry-eyed child, some flashing lights and something spacey in the background. These, I have come to realise, are inevitably for multimedia PCs, or possibly the Intel processors inside them.

Now, in your household it may indeed be the case that you cluster excitedly around the PC, Johnny enthusiastically tackles his homework in time to learn the theory of relativity through a sound 'n' vision point-and-click spectacular, and the rest of you look on, clapping your hands and smiling encouragement at the other 1.4 children eagerly awaiting their turn. In my experience, this is about as likely as me letting Danny Baker get past the front door with his twin packs of washing powder.

For the moment, let's assume that you've got this 'family' PC up and running without anyone wanting to put an axe through it in the process. Let's look at those multimedia marvels that will bring the world to your PC screen and let you revel in the wonder of PCs ...

Not the longest of lists, is it?

Hall of fame

What the advertisements — *any* CD-ROM advertisements — don't tell you is that CD-ROM is slow. Even a quad speed drive is slow.

Furthermore, for all the talk of the 600Mb capacity of a CD being enough for the whole of the Encyclopedia Britannia, many CD-ROM reference works are shallow in scope. From the publishers' point of view, they are extremely expensive titles to put together and the copyright/licence procedures for including other people's material are a minefield — thus few CD-ROMs use anything like the full 600Mb — and can still cost up to £1 million to produce.

However, that's enough carping. For all the disappointments that the nuclear family of the advertisements will experience in trying to join the multimedia revolution, there are some products that fully justify that 'wonder of PCs' tag.

Firstly, take Dorling Kindersley's wonderful set of five titles released last year, which included the magnificent Encyclopedia of Science and the gorgeous Stowaway. DK's books are excellent in their own right, but it also managed to do what very few CD-ROM publishers do, which is to offer something on the CD which can't be done in book form.

Secondly, just about anything from Microsoft can be guaranteed to be well presented and easy to use. Encarta has been around for donkeys and hasn't been surpassed by any of the general encyclopedia pretenders and Cinemania is the best film reference guide on CD around. For more specialised tastes, there's Red Shift — for some reason, astronomy and CDs seem to go together really well, there's Multimedia Beethoven and Multimedia Stravinsky, and dinosaurs in Prehistoria.

There are even some great games. As someone who was not overly impressed with Wing Commanders I and II, I approached Wing Commander 3 with some scepticism — and found it awesome. Chris Roberts has crafted a real story — with a plot and characters with personality and everything — to attach to the missions which really do suck you in and make you believe in the world he's created. There are exciting bits and sad bits and heart-warming bits and you couldn't do Wing Commander 3 on disk. Then there's Little Big Adventure, which takes all the weird characters and settings that French programmers seem to specialise in and turns it into a beautiful, cute, and manageable adventure game.

Every CD-ROM publisher should look at these titles and read, mark, learn and emulate. Then we might have a few more starry-eyed children getting the most out of their PCs.

❍ **Christina Erskine**

SPEAK EASY

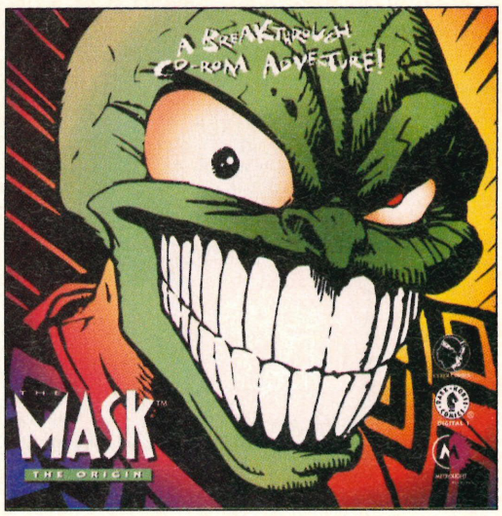
Joystick and multimedia specialist Spectravideo has launched a new range of speakers specifically geared to multimedia PCs. The digital signals which PCs produce are "square", says Spectravideo, and therefore more demanding on speakers, so the new MT Speaker range compensates for this by making use of special airways. This, the company reckons, ensures a cleaner sound throughout the entire frequency band. The speakers in the new MT range have built-in amplifiers, booster circuitry and magnetic shielding, and vary from 10 watt output at £24.99 through to 100 watts at £149.99.

For further information contact Spectravideo on (0181) 900 0024.

PLAYING FOR FUN IS OVER



V·I·R·T·U·A·L · G·O·L·F



MASK ON PC REVEALED

Activision is to release a series of interactive multimedia comics. It will start with The Mask: The Origin, based on the popular Dark Horse comic series which was recently made into the film The Mask starring Jim Carrey.

The Mask: The Origin is a compilation of the first five Mask comics and features over two hours of music and dialogue, plus comic-style illustrations and QuickTime movies.

The series is being developed by Cyber Comics together with Metrolight Studios, the company which provided the special effects in the movie Total Recall. "It's not like a game, cartoon or movie. Through Metrolight's wizardry we've come up with something completely different, combining original art, animation and sound effects to take the user on a wild adventure which can be followed in either a linear or non-linear fashion," said Frank Evers, president of Cyber Comics.

Jim Kristoff, president of Metrolight, added, "We haven't just re-purposed the original comic book — we've created a new medium altogether."

The Mask: The Origin will be available in January on CD-ROM priced £24.99, followed in April by The Mask Returns.

For details, call Activision on (0181) 742 9400.

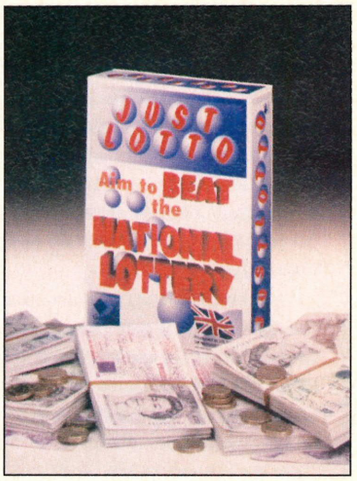
JUST THE TICKET FOR THE LOTTERY

If your dreams of becoming a National Lottery millionaire have yet to be realised, two Windows-based prediction programs have just been released to help you pick those all-important six numbers.

Justlotto (Cosmi UK, £19.99) is based on mathematical theory rather than birthdates, lucky numbers and superstition. The theory behind it is that the balls cannot be exactly the same weight and the revolving drum will have some bias, so that after several weeks some patterns are bound to occur. By analysing the winning numbers each week, Justlotto claims to be able to predict which combinations are likely to appear, and that its accuracy increases with time. What it doesn't take into account is that there are two lottery machines and two sets of balls which are chosen at random each week, so what sounds like a good idea in theory may be less accurate in practice.

Lottery for Windows (VCI, £14.99) is designed around the parameters of the US State Lotteries on which our own National Lottery is based. It allows you to make your own selections based on whether you prefer to follow winning sequences, choose numbers which are due to come up or make a random selection. The program allows you to keep a database of winning numbers in addition to your own entries, and includes a print facility.

Contact VCI on (01923) 255558 and Cosmi UK on (01923) 284930 for further details.



ICY START FOR ART OF MIND

Blue Ice is a brand new CD-ROM game from a brand new publisher. Art of Mind Productions has been set up by two ex-Empire employees, including development manager Rik Yapp. Its first game, Blue Ice is a surreal adventure game, inspired by both Salvador Dali and the Tim Burton film Edward Scissorhands. You find yourself in Icia, a colourless, inert world which you must bring to life to provide a future for its people. The game is portrayed in 256-colour VGA and will be accompanied by a sound track featuring known bands from both Europe and the USA.

Blue Ice is due for release this spring and further details are available from Art of Mind Productions on (01268) 273315.





SIGN OF THE TIMES

ONE YEAR AGO

After surveying children playing computer games, the Communications Research Group came to the conclusion that concern that video games caused violent behaviour were largely unfounded — though the debate still rages on. And IBM also conducted some customer research and discovered that nearly eight out of ten PC buyers need expert advice on operating the machine when they get it home. *Plus ça change*, eh?

Oh, and we put a little shareware game called Doom on our cover disk — now whatever happened to that title?

Top rated games in February 1994: Alone in the Dark II and Hand of Fate.

TWO YEARS AGO

Intel announced that it had a new chip in the pipeline which it intended to call a Pentium, rather than the more logical 586 monicker. We reckoned that once the Pentium came out, the 486 would still have a good couple of years left, so we weren't too far out with the prediction.

Microsoft announced the release of Cinemania and Encarta, two seminal CD-ROM titles which still lead the field today.

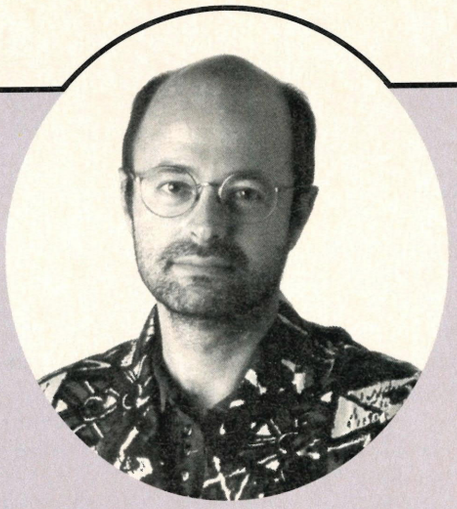
Top rated games in February 1993: Car & Driver, F15 III and Wizkid.

THREE YEARS AGO

Wow, we said. Here's a cheap CD-ROM player from Optech — a snip at just £299. *How much?* Yes, three years ago a single-speed CD-ROM drive was £300 plus the VAT; by next month, you could be able to buy a quad speed for £150. That's progress.

Top rated games in February 1992: Falcon 3.0 and Chessmaster 3000.

THE COOKE REPORT



BUYING BRITISH

Companies as diverse as Warner Brothers and Sega have been queuing up to get their paws on British programmers and games designers over the last year, and the reason for their interest isn't hard to find: we have some of the best programmers in the world.

Why are we so good at games production? How long will this last? And how can *you* become a famous games designer and sell your company in 2005 for loadsamoney?

To take the first question first. There are companies in America that specialise in games design. This tradition owes a lot to fantasy role-playing. Ever since Gygax and Arneson developed D&D in the 70s, people have been designing RPG scenarios. And the essence of RPG design is storytelling — it's about character interaction, conflicts, and monstrous beasts.

British game designs fall into several categories. Some, for example, are based on a single twist of gameplay combined with clever programming. Sensible Software excels in that department. Others, such as Argonaut and ATD, pursue technical superiority. But there are very few that follow the American model.

The British tradition of games design is very technology-aware. Almost all designers in this country started as programmers, a very different activity from RPG design. The older generation (of whom few are still active) cut their teeth on Acorns and Nascoms or even earlier dinosaurs.

Then came the Spectrum generation. That machine was so inextricably linked with programming that the Basic commands were actually printed on the keys. By 1983, the ideas of game design and programming were already inextricably linked, and it's this ground-zero awareness of registers and stack pointers that gives us programmer/designers like Peter Molyneux of Bullfrog or Sensible's Jon Hare.

Alas, no more. I gave a lecture last year about games to a group of computer science undergraduates at a university that shall remain nameless. There were about 70 people in the audience. At the end of the talk, I asked how many programmers were in the audience. Not just assembler programmers, but programmers in *any* language, including Basic. Just five people put up their hands. So much for tomorrow's games industry in this country.

It's fine to argue that the games of the future will require content, not technology. That is true to some extent. But they will also require slick interfaces, gameplay mechanics, execution speed and originality that comes only with a real understanding of the medium. Good cinematographers understand emulsion, exposure, and film stock. I think we're making a big mistake if we think that programming is a dirty word and that design is everything.

So, if you want to sell your company for millions in a few years time, sort out the technology first. Once you understand the medium, the message will come of itself.

❍ **Steve Cooke**

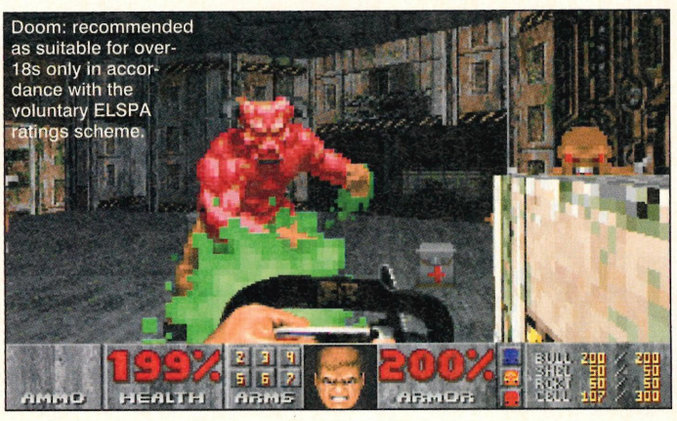
ELSPA CONFIRMS RATING SYSTEM SUCCESS

The European Leisure Software Publishers Association (ELSPA) is claiming a successful start to its games rating system .

Members of ELSPA have been carrying ratings since September 1994, since when 80 per cent of computer and video games have been rated as suitable for all ages (according to figures from the Video Standards Council). Almost 14 per cent of all new games have been rated as suitable for children of 11 years upwards, only five per cent as suitable for 15-year-olds or above, and only a tiny one per cent fell into the 18 years or older category.

According to Roger Bennett, director and general secretary of ELSPA this 'demonstrates that the vast majority of computer games really are suitable for all ages, and goes a long way towards reassuring parents of this fact.'

● *See this month's feature,Censored!, on page 40 for more on games ratings.*



Doom: recommended as suitable for over-18s only in accordance with the voluntary ELSPA ratings scheme.

NOW YOU CAN PLAY FOR REAL

THE SCOTTISH OPEN

V·I·R·T·U·A·L · G·O·L·F

PC CHARTS — FULL PRICE

Position/Title			Publisher
(previous week's position in brackets)			
1	(1)	SimCity 2000	Maxis
2	(3)	Doom 2	Virgin Interactive
3	(2)	FIFA International Soccer	Electronic Arts
4	(4)	Winter Olympics	US Gold
5	(6)	TIE Fighter	LucasArts/Virgin
6	(8)	Theme Park	Bullfrog/EA
7	(5)	Star Trek: 25th Anniversary	Interplay
8	(9)	Microsoft Flight Simulator v5	Microsoft
9	(–)	The Lion King	Virgin Interactive
10	(10)	Mortal Kombat	Virgin Interactive
11	(16)	All New World of Lemmings	Psygnosis
12	(14)	Microsoft Space Simulator	Microsoft
13	(7)	Civilization	MicroProse
14	(12)	Colonization	MicroProse
15	(–)	Indy Car Racing	Virgin Interactive
16	(11)	Transport Tycoon	MicroProse
17	(20)	NASCAR Racing	Virgin Interactive
18	(13)	Rise of the Robots	Mirage/Time Warner
19	(–)	Cannon Fodder	Virgin Interactive
20	(–)	Aladdin	Virgin Interactive

Week ending December 17, 1994
Charts compiled by Gallup. Copyright of ELSPA

PC CHARTS — CD-ROM

Position/Title			Publisher
(previous week's position in brackets)			
1	(1)	Magic Carpet	Bullfrog/EA
2	(2)	MegaRace	Mindscape
3	(–)	Wing Commander 3	Origin/EA
4	(5)	Theme Park	Bullfrog/EA
5	(4)	Doom 2	Virgin Interactive
6	(3)	Rise of the Robots	Mirage/Time Warner
7	(–)	Little Big Adventure	Electronic Arts
8	(6)	Nascar	Virgin Interactive
9	(–)	Creature Shock	Virgin Interactive
10	(7)	Rebel Assault	LucasArts/US Gold

PC CHARTS — BUDGET

1	(3)	Xmas Lemmings '94	Psygnosis
2	(1)	Monkey Island 2	Kixx XL
3	(2)	Formula 1 Grand Prix	Powerplus
4	(4)	Dune 2	Hit Squad
5	(5)	Championship Manager '94	Domark
6	(8)	Easy to Learn Computing	Premier Collection
7	(9)	Doom (TS)	Titanium Seal
8	(6)	Doom (MS)	Micro Star
9	(10)	Battle for the Ashes	Audiogenic
10	(–)	Eye of the Beholder 3	Kixx XL

Become a Klik & Play champion!

If you've bought a copy of Europress's Klik & Play games creator program, you'll know what a potentially powerful program it is. And PC Review is giving you the chance to show the world just how good your Klik & Play games are. In conjunction with Europress Software, we're looking for the best original game created using Klik & Play. Your game could make you the official PC Review Klik & Play champion, with your opus included on the PC Review cover CD-ROM for all other readers to play (and admire). Not only that, but the PC Review champion will win Klik & Play baseball jackets, plus £250.

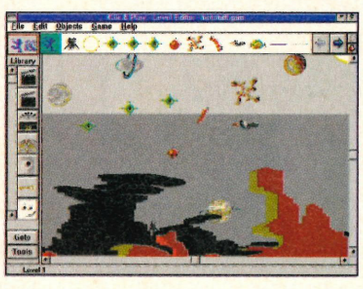
Furthermore, the winning game will go through to a UK Klik & Play competition, so you could, through PC Review become the UK's Klik & Play champion. The UK champion also wins a holiday for two in Florida, complete with spending money. And after that Europress hopes to extend the competition abroad and eventually find an international winner.

How to enter

Using Klik & Play we want you to create the best original game you can. Then send it on disk to PC Review, Klik & Play Creator competition, Priory Court, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU. Your entry should also include the coupon below — or a photocopy of it if you don't want to spoil your copy of the magazine.

Please make sure your disk is clearly labelled with your name and address and the name of your game. If you wish to supply accompanying notes and instructions, they can go on paper (again, labelled clearly), or you can supply these as an ASCII (plain text) file on the disk.

The closing date for this competition is March 1st, 1995 — slightly more time than usual, so that you can get your creative juices flowing.



RULES

- Employees of EMAP Images, Europress Software, their families and associates, are not eligible to enter this competition.
- All games entered for this competition must be original creations of the entrant and not derivations of the example games provided with Klik & Play or any other commercial games.
- No cash equivalent to the prizes is available.
- All entries in the Klik & Play Creator competition are governed by the Klik & Play licence concerning commercial use as set out in the user manual. Entrants agree to make their games available for cover-mounting on participating magazines at the discretion of those magazines and subject to the permission of Europress Software. They also agree to such games being used for promotional or other non-commercial purposes by Europress Software.
- The editors' decision in all matters relating to the competition is final and no correspondence can be entered into.

PC REVIEW KLIK & PLAY CREATOR COMPETITION

Name .....

Address .....

.....

Daytime phone number .....

Your game title .....

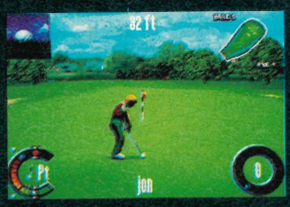
❑ Data protection: tick this box if you do not wish to receive further information or other offers or services in the future

❑ I am under 18. ❑ I am 18 or over.

Closing date March 1st, 1995 *PC Review Issue 40 February 1995*

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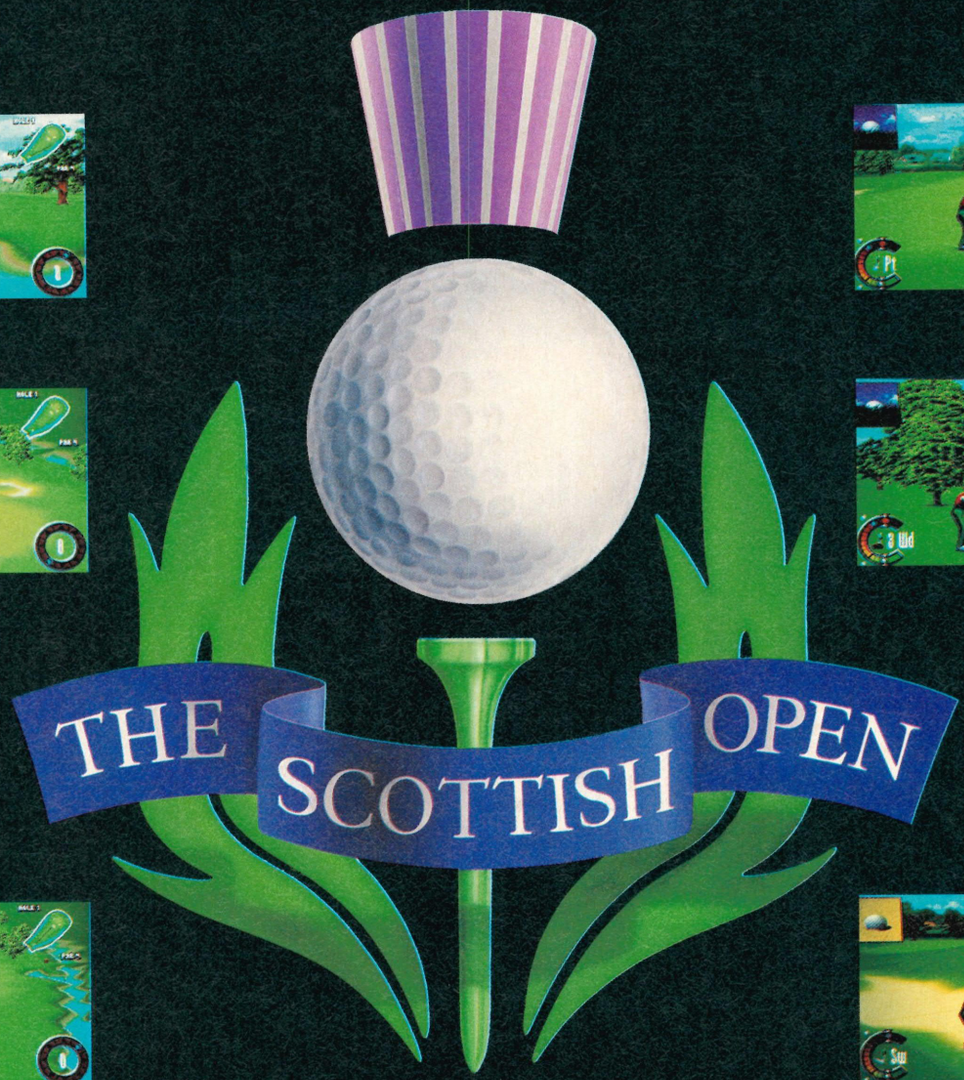












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MICROSOFT WINDOWS

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Prints and the new power generation

COVER STORY

Inkjet printers have already proved themselves the best pound for pound home printers you can buy. The latest models all bring first class colour capabilities straight to your desk, and over the following pages we will be explaining the pros and cons of the inkjet colour revolution and then putting the market leaders to the test.

For fun and games, your first port of call may be a sound card or a CD-ROM drive. For practical purposes, the essential PC peripheral has to be a printer. Having decided that you need to buy a printer, you will find a situation that is both pleasant and unusual in PC hardware: you aren't faced with a bewildering plethora of specifications and technologies.

For 99 per cent of home users looking for a new printer, the decision is simple: "Which inkjet printer should I buy?"

Why an inkjet? Well, printer technology has broadened considerably since the early days when dot-matrix was the only affordable option. On the simple criteria of cost and performance, dot-matrix printers are yesterday's machines.

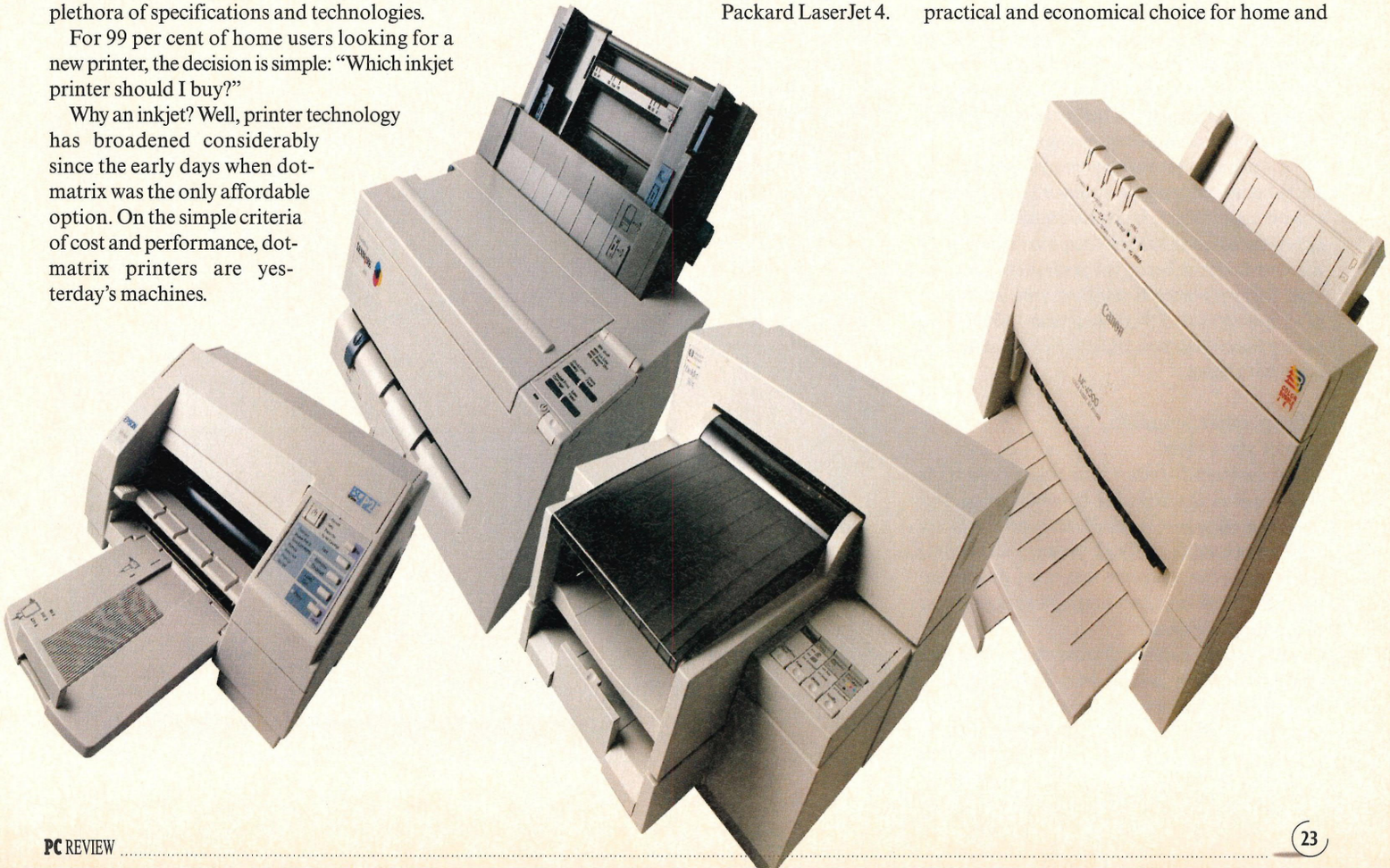
Nowadays the only place you're likely to see a new dot-matrix printer is perhaps in an accounts department or similar office environment, where it will be churning out reams of that chained paper-printout (remember the stuff?). Even then it's more likely that it'll be a laser printer doing the workhorse job — probably something like the industry standard Hewlett Packard LaserJet 4.

Laser printers are ideally suited to take on this role: they're quick, capable of handling large print jobs smoothly and they're as silent as a mouse — or at least they are by comparison with the whirring and clacking most dot matrix printers produce.

But lasers have traditionally been far too expensive for all but the most affluent homes. Although there are some lasers cutting in at around the £500 mark, the average price keeps them out of reach of most home users. Colour laser printers? Forget it.

There are other alternatives: dye-sublimation (which offers excellent colour quality) and wax thermal printers both have their advantages — specifically for colour printing. But once again the cost is generally prohibitive. A good dye-sub machine will set you back £1,000 without batting an eyelid, and wax thermal printers are very expensive to run.

So that leaves us with the inkjet as the most practical and economical choice for home and



small business printing, and inkjets sales have boomed over the past two years.

Inkjets are inexpensive (cheaper mono models can be as little as £130 on the street) and they offer a good compromise between print quality and speed (much better definition than a dot-matrix, but not quite as sharp or fast as a laser since they print the page in bands rather than as a single pass). They're also quite quiet, running costs are low and they're usually very compact (even portable, sometimes).

They're also the only affordable way for you and I to go about acquiring a colour printer.

A potted history

So what exactly is an inkjet printer, and how does it work? Well, inkjet printing is a non-contact process (in other words, the print head does not actually touch the page) which involves squirting ink on to a page at very high pressure, through microscopic holes in a cartridge head.

If computer industry legend is correct, the process was discovered as much by accident as anything else. A Canon researcher mistakenly touched a syringe of ink with a soldering iron and a jet of ink shot out of the tip of the syringe. From what can only be described as a fortuitous bit of research, Canon went on to develop its highly successful BubbleJet range — and the vast majority of inkjets work on the same principle.

It's a simple system. Heat is applied within the cartridge, and some of the ink starts to boil. This creates a vapour bubble, which in turn builds pressure within the ink and forces it through the nozzle. The heat is turned on and off by the printer, and as the cartridge head moves across the page a tiny droplet of ink is expelled, creating a single dot on the page.

The only problem with this is that the ink has to dry quickly (or you have a page that will smudge too easily and text that is far too fuzzy because the ink will spread too much on contact with the paper). But quick-drying ink will eventually clog the nozzles. Hence the reason why almost all inkjets have a head-cleaning facility which needs to be used quite regularly.

As a printing technology, inkjets are continually being refined and improved (with added colour capabilities, increased resolutions and speed enhancements) to the point where they are now far from being the poor relation to the laser they once were. If anything, they have more of a future ahead of them than lasers, which have pretty much reached the limit of what can be done with them.

Cheap, quiet, capable . . . what's the catch?

The principal advantage of an inkjet printer for home use is the balance between price and output quality — essentially they offer exactly the level of quality and performance most people are looking for at a price that most people are prepared to accept and that no other printing technology can match.

However, the generic disadvantages of inkjet printers are fairly easy to spot. Firstly, they are best suited to reasonably low volumes of work, and their paper handling facilities are usually pretty limited. Don't expect an affordable inkjet to take kindly to printing and collating 20 copies of a 30-page document twice a day. It'll undoubtedly give up in disgust.

Secondly, since inkjets work across the page in lines, there is a tendency to produce visible 'banding'. This is most apparent when printing graphics, especially if compared to a laser printer's output of the same image. Most of the major manufacturers have proprietary technologies to minimise this effect, and using coated paper can also make a considerable difference.

Smudging is another potential problem. The inkjet process can leave the ink wet as the page arrives in the paper tray (depending on how good the 'quick drying' ink really is): brush your hand across the text in the first few seconds and you're likely to smudge the print. However, over the past two years the improvements in inks has again managed to reduce what was once a major drawback to a minor irritation.

And lastly, inkjets do prefer their own glossy paper. Of course, you can use bog standard 75gsm photocopier paper (otherwise inkjets would be a complete non-starter for home users), but if you want the best results then the only solution is to use a glossy paper to cut down on the ink bleeding (in other words, sharply defined text rather than furry letters).

And of course, some printers are more demanding in this respect than others: for example in the following pages you'll see that the Lexmark ExecJet IIc is a bit of a stickler for coated paper, whereas the HP560c is far more tolerant of standard paper. This is just one of the factors taken into account in our group test of inkjet printers which starts over the page.

COLOUR PRINTING AND COMPOUND BLACKS

The addition of colour to a document — whether it's headings, logos, diagrams, illustrations, photographs, or whatever, can make a huge difference to the overall impression.

But colour printing is a feature which costs an arm and a leg using any of the other printing technologies. Inkjets certainly provide the affordable solution.

However, don't expect multi-colour miracles. Inkjet colour printing at this price bracket is remarkably good, but we're not talking magazine quality here (no snide comments, thank you very much).

All four of the printers on test in the following three pages use a combination of cyan (a light blue), magenta and yellow inks to create the colour print.

Some printers have individual cartridges for each, and a specific black cartridge. Consequently, strong black text can be printed on the same page as complex colours without any fiddling about.

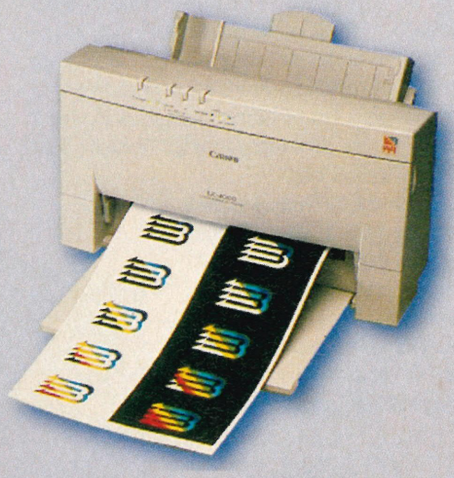
However the majority use a single cartridge divided into three different inkwells containing the three inks.

This makes black printing a little more complicated; the Lexmark, for example, can only have one cartridge installed at any one time, therefore if you are printing a colour file and the printer needs to print black it will use a combination of the cyan, magenta and yellow inks.

This is otherwise known as 'compound black'.

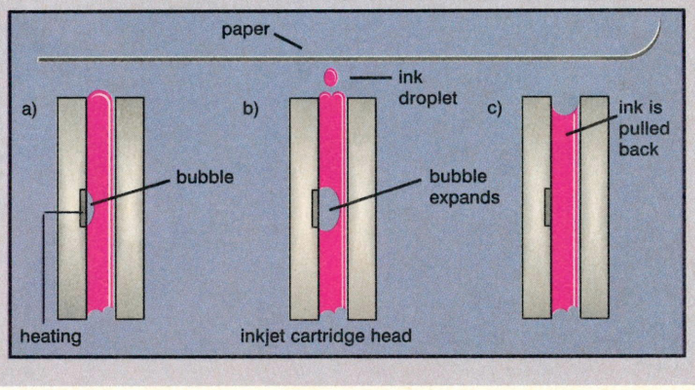
Unfortunately compound black produced this way has a nasty tendency to print as a murky green colour. The only other way is to blank out all the black and print the colours, then change over the cartridges, put the black back in the document and remove the colour, rerun the same page through the printer but this time just printing the black. What a lot of hassle.

As a result one of the first things to check with a colour inkjet printer is whether it has a specific black cartridge, and if not how well it handles printing a compound black colour.



HOW AN INKJET WORKS

The inkjet principle is relatively simple:
a) heat is applied to ink, creating a bubble of vapour.
b) the bubble expands and forces a drop of ink through the nozzle.
c) the heat is turned off and the bubble collapses, pulling the ink back thus 'printing.'



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COVER STORY
PC GROUP TEST

Which inkjet printer offers you the best combination of price and performance? Alan Clark puts four of the latest offerings from the big names in colour inkjet printing through their paces to find out.



The Lexmark ExecJet IIc gives impressive results: colours are clear and bright, details are well defined and text is crisp.

The four printers tested over the following pages are all suitable for home use. Some are especially suited to the home user, particularly the Lexmark ExecJet IIc and the Cannon BJC-4000. The two others, the more expensive Hewlett Packard DeskJet 560C and the Epsom Stylus Colour, are good examples of printers aimed at home and small business users wanting a high level of performance and a wider range of features.

Each of these printers has the capability to print in colour as well as mono — a feature which is normally prohibitively expensive using any of the other printing technologies, such as dye sublimation, wax thermal or colour laser printing.

What's more, each printer uses a combination of cyan, magenta and yellow inks to create the colour print, either by means of a single cartridge with multiple reservoirs, or with specific colour and black cartridges (see the panel on compound printing on page 24) to print true blacks within colour images.

What I am looking for in each of these inkjet printers (and the main criteria for buying any new inkjet printer) is a solid combination of good print quality for both text and mono graphics; decent — and preferably built-in — paper handling facilities; a sensible compromise between speed and quality of colour printing; and compact design and ease of use.

And with inkjet printing it is also important to see what effort each manufacturer has made to minimise the principal drawbacks of the inkjet method — notably banding and smudging, and the demand for special coated papers.

Whilst reviewing these four machines over the past weeks, I used four main samples; two 640x480 colour images, one mono image and a text sample for comparisons in both print quality and speed.

Lexmark ExecJet IIc

The ExecJet IIc from Lexmark is the company's first low-cost colour inkjet and at around £350 (including VAT) the results are very impressive; colours are clear and bright, details are well defined and text is a crisp.

The printer driver gives you control of all the printer's features and everything is laid out sensibly and logically. Normally, the Lexmark has a resolution of 300dpi, which is pretty much the standard for printers within its class. However, by using special print enhancement software, resident in its printer driver, the Lexmark ExecJet IIc can also print text at a higher resolution of 600x300dpi.

Still, to get the best out of this printer I strongly recommend the use of quality, coated paper as the inks have a tendency to bleed more than I'd expected on standard copier paper. This is the sort of fussiness that can become irritating if you're after a no-nonsense printing workhorse.

However, the Lexmark ExecJet IIc provided one of the first surprises of this group test: the compound black printing, while still a little 'greeny' in shade, was easily one of the best I've come across on a printer in this class and, surprisingly, even better than the considerably more expensive Hewlett Packard DeskJet 560C when set to print a compound black. Apart from the Canon (see below) you'd be hard pressed to find an inkjet in this price bracket which uses specific colour/mono cartridges, so this compound print quality is an important argument in favour of the Lexmark.

Printing speeds are a little on the slow side (I was getting a rate of just under one page per minute in mono and the complex colour page samples took up to seven minutes — which is about par for the course, but could be better).

Anyway, aren't all good things worth waiting for? Because even if it is a little slow off the mark, its combination of low price, capacious paper handling, quality compound printing and sharp text, the Lexmark ExecJet IIc is one of the best low cost *colour* inkjets available.

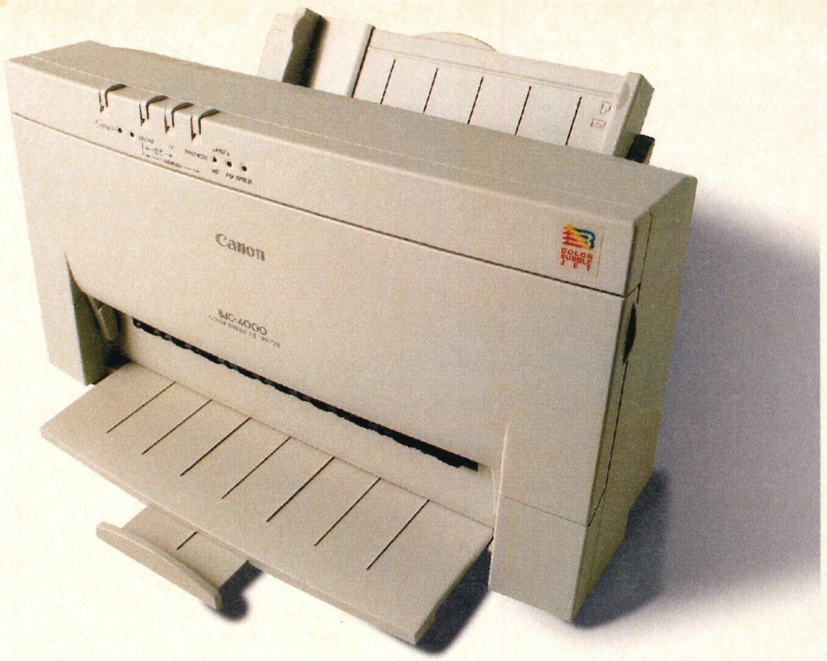
EXECJET IIC	
Supplier:	Excellent performer for the price.
Lexmark International	
Contact:	
01628 481500	
Price:	
£351.33	rating 8

Canon BJC-4000

Canon has a longer tradition than any other company of churning out inkjet printers — one of its lab technicians actually invented inkjet printing by accident — and naturally, it was one of the first companies to put a colour inkjet printer on sale.

The BJC-4000, a 360dpi A4 colour inkjet costing around £450 (including VAT), is its newest and most refined colour inkjet yet.

Unusually for a sub-£500 machine, the BJC-4000 is a four-colour printer, with one combined cyan/magenta/yellow cartridge and a separate black cartridge. This is a major plus, as it means that it both prints proper blacks, rather than



The Canon BJC 4000: has established a new price/performance level for colour inkjet printers.

composites, and is flexible enough to be a useful text printer and a colour printer, without costing a fortune in ink cartridges. Ideally, colour inkjets should have one cartridge per colour, to get maximum usage out of each, but no one would expect that on such a cheap printer.

Not that you'd think the BJC-4000 was cheap by looking at its output. Canon has used its head start in the inkjet printer market to refine its ink technology steadily, and the result is an impressive lack of ink bleeding, particularly on coated papers, but more noticeably, on photocopier paper. Banding is also impressively minimal.

Performance also belies the BJC-4000's price: monochrome images and text pages on average take just over a minute to print, and we found that a full colour, page-sized image generally printed out in about five minutes.

This compares favourably with inkjet printers costing twice as much. The cost of running a BJC-4000 should be around the average for a colour inkjet — Canon claims that a black cartridge should be good for about 130 pages, and a CMY one for about 100.

In other words, if you're a small business or home user in need of colour printing capabilities, you should definitely have a look at the BJC-4000. It puts a lot of the opposition to shame, and has established a new price/performance level for colour inkjet printers.

CANON BJC4000

Supplier: Canon

Contact: (0181) 773 3173

Price: £450.75

A very classy all-rounder.

rating 8

HP Deskjet 560C

Like the Epsom Stylus and the Canon BJC-4000, the Hewlett Packard Deskjet 560C can take both cartridge sets at once therefore printing true black within a colour image; or at least that's the theory.

The DeskJet 560C will print at 600x300dpi as standard in both colour and monochrome which should also, in theory, produce a much finer, clearer print.

What's more, the 560C software driver uses something called 'Colour Smart'. Basically what this does is to analyse the file being printed and automatically choose the appropriate printing method. As far as detecting the file type goes, Colour Smart works extremely well, but unfortunately the printed results are a bit of a let down at the end of the day.

Whilst the colours are exceptionally bright and vibrant, the images are rather grainy — which tends to spoil the overall effect.

And, even with both cartridges installed, any blacks that appeared in the colour images used for test purposes were printed as compound blacks (rather than true blacks) that didn't even come up to the standards of the considerably cheaper Lexmark ExecJet IIc.

All in all, Hewlett Packard's DeskJet 560C was rather a disappointment for a company with such a history of producing market leading printers.

This one is effectively an HP550C printer with an enhanced driver; the Colour Smart technology is a great idea that takes a lot of the guess work out of colour printing and generally

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The standard wargame just got a whole new set of standards.

Features:
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- Tactical, turn-based hex wargame
- Full scenario builder & unit editor
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- Fully animated movement & combat.



Pull up information on any class of units



IBM PC SVGA Screenshots may vary

Full scenario builder and editor

Impressions

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Unit 9, Princeton Court,
Felsham Road, Putney,
London SW15 1AZ



The Hewlett Packard DeskJet 560C: out of all the machines on test here the HP DeskJet was the fastest to print of them all and was equally happy printing on cheap copier paper as it was on good quality coated paper.

here by a fair margin, and it is equally happy printing on cheap copier paper as it is on quality coated paper.

Unfortunately the overall results were less than expected from a printer that typically costs around £500 (including VAT). The advantages of having both colour and black cartridges also seem to be lost within the Hewlett Packard DeskJet 560C. The Colour Smart software should automatically switch between the two but even when printing a mono image the driver still used the compound black producing a very poor printout.

Text wise the quality is just about on par with the cheaper Lexmark printer, and graphics output is the DeskJet 560C's biggest let down, with bright colours, but a grainy overall image output that subdues fine detail.

DESKJET 560C

Supplier: Hewlett Packard

Contact: 01344 361263

Price: £481.75

rating 5

Fast, but generally an average performer.

The Epson Stylus Colour

The first thing that has to be said about the Epson Stylus Colour is the fact that it's the most expensive printer here with a typical street price of almost £640 (including VAT).

So straight away you'd expect the print quality to be second to none; and thankfully you wouldn't be wrong. The Epson Stylus Colour can print at resolutions of either 360dpi — which is standard fare for the better inkjets — or, a first with inkjet printers in general, a whopping resolution of 720dpi.

At a resolution of 360dpi the Stylus Colour seems to be just another colour inkjet. But set the resolution to the higher 720dpi, make your-higher resolution print quality is phenomenal; colours are bright, detail is sharp, transitions between colours are smoother, blacks are true black (no muddy greenery here) and the overall picture quality is quite astounding.

Even with plain text you'd be hard pushed to notice the difference between this output and a low cost laser printer — and that is quite an impressive feat.

But of course to achieve this sort of print quality there are a few sacrifices that have to be made; the first, as already mentioned is the printing speed.

At 360dpi, the Epson Stylus Colour was only marginally behind the HP DeskJet in terms of print speed. But set the Epson Stylus Colour to 720dpi and while printing a colour file, you'll have more than enough time to make a coffee and and sip away happily (or not) for the next 15 minutes it takes to print.

mind spending a little bit more on the paper you put through it, but it's worth bearing in mind that this does up the overall running cost quite a bit.

The only thing that really goes against the Epson Stylus Colour though is the price. But if you view this as a fast, competent colour inkjet in its basic mode, with the option of real high quality colour output and superbly crisp text when you need it, it may begin to justify the starting price. In quality terms, there really is no competition under £1,000.

STYLUS COLOUR

Supplier: Epsom

Contact: 0800 220546

Price: £633.33

rating 7

Glorious quality, but a stiff price to match.



The Epsom Stylus Colour Printer: one of the most expensive printers on test here, but its print quality is phenomenal; colours are bright, detail is sharp, and the overall picture quality is quite astounding.

THE BIG RED AdVENTURE



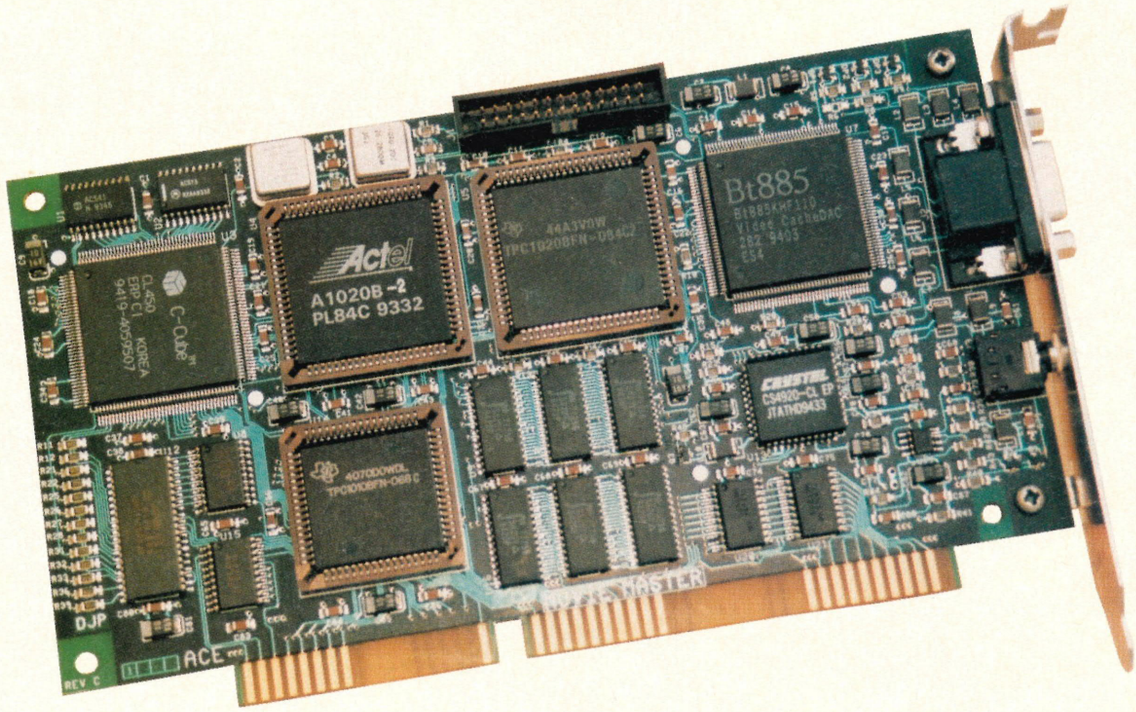
AVAILABLE ON PC, PC CD-ROM & AMIGA 1200

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Tel: (01332) 297797 Fax: (01332) 381511
The Big Red Adventure © Core Design Limited

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Win!

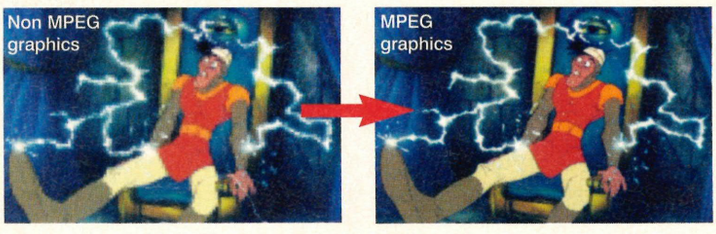
The Ace Coin MovieMaster 24



Put the power of full-motion video on your PC by winning one of these three 24-bit MPEG cards from Ace Coin!



Plus! Five lucky runners up will receive copies of the latest VideoCD movies and software titles.



This is your chance to add fantastic movie-quality video capabilities to your PC with an Ace Coin MovieMaster 24 MPEG card — because we have got not one, but *three* to give away as first prizes! Whether it's movies or music videos, or the new generation of ultra-high resolution FMV MPEG games using real life actors and the latest techniques in digitisation — the MovieMaster 24 can handle them with ease.

CD-ROM and the Internet were the hot topics of 1994, but 1995 is set to be the year of full-motion video and MPEG, with a host of new titles ready to hit the shops from the start of this year.

MPEG stands for Motion Pictures Expert Group and it's a standard for compressing and playing back full-motion video (hence the FMV bit) on your PC. Translate that into normal English, and what we're talking about is a card that you slot inside your PC to enable you to play special CDs which run games and video at TV quality in full screen mode (not some tiny window).

The £349 MovieMaster 24 is one of the most advanced MPEG cards available, with a host of features unmatched by its rivals.



The new generation of MPEG video cards like the new Ace Coin MovieMaster 24 bring stunningly smooth, TV-quality high resolution video to your PC screen — the whole screen, not just a tiny, fuzzy and slow moving window like the one at the top here!

For a start, the MovieMaster 24 is capable of displaying 16,000,000 colours (true 24-bit graphics rather than the more common, but limited, 16-bit equivalents).

It uses bi-cubic interpolation to smooth out rough edges in the video image, and you can grab frames (in either MPEG or Targa formats) from the videos or games that you are using on your PC.

What's more, the MovieMaster 24 runs in both DOS and Windows using a true overlay to put text and graphics on top of the MPEG picture, and it has the unique PTS image control system to keep the sound and video in perfect synchronisation.

What better way to turn your PC in to the multimedia marvel you've always wanted than with the Ace Coin MovieMaster 24 MPEG card!

Our runners' up prizes this month are a set of VideoCD titles for five lucky entrants who don't quite make the big one.

● *Please note: The MovieMaster 24 requires a minimum of a 386/33 PC, with 4Mb of RAM, a double speed CD-ROM drive and Windows 3.1 or better. The VideoCDs as runners up prizes require an MPEG-level 2 standard FMV playback card.*

HOW TO ENTER

If you want the chance to win one of these superb prizes, there are only two simple things you have to do. First, answer the three following questions (correctly!). Second, put your answers on the coupon below (or use a photocopy if you don't want to cut up the mag) and send it to the following address:

MovieMaster Competition
PC Review
Priory Court
30-32 Farringdon Lane
London EC1R 3AU

And now, the all-important questions . . .

1) MPEG stands for . . . ?
- a) Movie Personnel Eliminate Games
- b) Motion Pictures Expert Group
- c) Massive Picture Expels Grain

2) The MovieMaster 24 is a . . . ?
- a) 7.25-bit card
- b) 16-bit card
- c) 24-bit card

3) FMV stands for . . . ?
- a) Full-Motion Video
- b) Fast Movies for Video
- c) Fat, Mauve and Violent

Your entry must arrive at the dark and forbidding offices of Emap Towers (traffic beacon on the information highway) by February 15, 1995 (whereupon the winning entry will be drawn by a suitably random method). As February 15 is the closing date for the competition, any entries arriving even a milli-second after this date will be treated with the scorn they deserve. We jest not.

COMPETITION RULES

- Employees of Emap Images, Ace Coin, their families and associates are not eligible to enter.
- No multiple entries, please.
- No cash equivalent to the stated prizes is available.
- No entries received after the closing date will be accepted.
- The editor's decision is final.

MOVIEMASTER COMPETITION

Name .....

Address .....

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.....

.....

Answers

1 .....

2 .....

3 .....

❑ Data protection: tick this box if you do not wish to receive further information on other offers or services in the future.

❑ I am over 18 or over ❑ I am under 18

Closing date February 15 *PC Review February 1995*

Alone in the Dark 3



Edward Carnby has a brush with death before taking his final bow in the last game in the Alone in the Dark series.

After battling a platoon of Lovecraftian monsters in Alone in the Dark and sinking a ship-full of zombie pirates in Alone 2, you'd have thought it was time for detective Edward Carnby to hang up his deerstalker, put on his carpet slippers and write his autobiography. But no. There's no rest for the wicked, it seems, and poor old Ed has been summoned from his San Francisco office to look for a missing film crew.

Alone in the Dark 3, the final game in the Alone trilogy, not only features Ed as the hero but also sees the reappearance of Emily Hartwood, the heroine of Alone 1. This time, however, she takes a more passive role as the token damsel in distress, thanks to a particularly disastrous career move. Emily has always dreamed of making a name for herself in Hollywood, and after travelling to the fabled town, she's managed to land herself a job as a script girl on a western movie.

Unluckily for her, the film is being shot on location in the delightfully named Slaughter Gulch, a small ghost town deep in the Mojave desert. And when I say unluckily for her, it's because this ghost town is quite literally that — a town absolutely stuffed full of ghosts.



Left: remember the jumping stones bit in Alone in the Dark? Well, here it is again. This time, the water has been replaced by lethal lava, so make like Bob Beamon and lift those legs.

Zombie pirates

The principal villain is one Jedediah Stone, a ruthless man who, some 50 years previous to the game, desecrated an Indian burial ground in his quest for gold. But despite being killed in an explosion, Jed and his men have returned as zombies to exact their revenge. If this plot seems a little similar to Alone 2 (in which Ed had to rescue a kidnapped girl from zombie pirates), it's no coincidence. Jed Stone is none other than the son of Elizabeth Jarrett, the evil

Voodoo priestess killed by Ed in Alone 2. No wonder Stone bears a grudge against the mustachioed private investigator.

Ed Carnby's latest adventure is his most dangerous yet. During this particularly lethal game of cowboys and Indians, Ed will have to go to some pretty extreme lengths in order to get his man — even if it means sacrificing his own life in the process. But never fear. You can't keep a good man down and a little of the old Indian magic will bring him back from the dead — if only as a mountain lion.

Room with a view

Visually, Alone 3 bears a startling (if hardly surprising) resemblance to its predecessors. The first game was revolutionary in its use of 3D polygon characters, with 2D bitmapped backgrounds, a combination which gave it a unique, quirky look. In addition, each location was viewed from a series of different angles, so, for example, at one end of a room you might be looking at your character head on, but if you walked to the other end the view would switch, so that you'd see him from above. Although this was a little difficult to get used to at first (particularly during combat when a view-change could be very disconcerting), it added to the game's spooky atmosphere.

Alone 2 took this idea and enlarged on it, with more graphic detail and (following criticism that the first game was a bit on the short side) a larger gaming area. However, the greater emphasis on combat didn't please everyone, so this has been rectified in Alone 3.

The trouble with Alone 2 was that the monsters were too tough (armed, as they were, with tommy guns) so that even if you knew the solution from start to finish you still couldn't make it through without dying with frustrating regularity.

But all that has changed. On starting a new game in Alone 3, you can decide how tough Ed will be, how much damage he'll do when he hits and how much the monsters can take. In other words, you can tailor the game according to your combat skills. As well as this, Alone 3 is closer to the first game in the trilogy than to the second in that it is much more puzzle orientated. Sure, you have numerous zombies to despatch, but quite often you can get rid of them by solving a problem rather than using a gun.

Objectionable objects

All this sounds quite promising, doesn't it? There's no doubt that Alone 3 has plenty going for it: it looks good, it has loads of atmosphere (maybe not quite as much as the first game, but certainly more than the second) and it's challenging. But (and you knew there was going to be a "but", didn't you?) I do have one complaint. It's that bloody control system again.





Above: maybe you do only live twice. Ed is brought back from the dead by an Indian shaman, but he's a helluva lot hairier in his new incarnation.

Left: I always knew Ed was a nice guy. When he meets his evil twin, instead of shooting the sucker in the head he decides to shake and make up. How civilised.

Challenging controls

As with the other Alone games, Alone 3 is controlled from the keyboard rather than the mouse. It's not that I have anything against keyboards (I'll use one in preference to a joystick when playing, say, Doom or Elite) but the controls are definitely unwieldy. Moving your character around is easy enough once you get the hang of it, but picking up or operating objects is another matter.

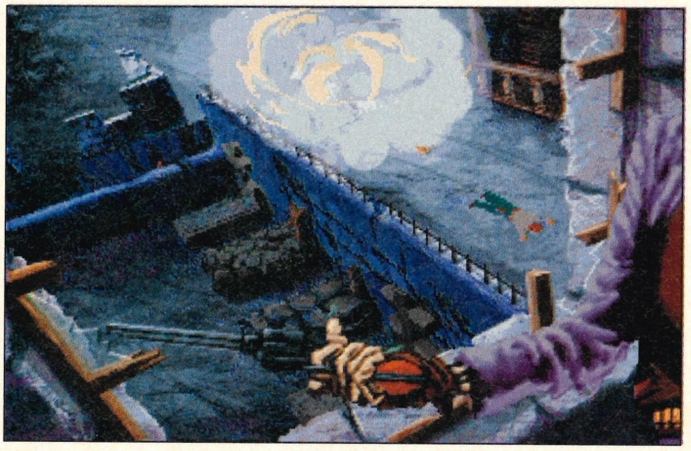
> "Moving your character around is easy enough, but picking up objects is another matter."

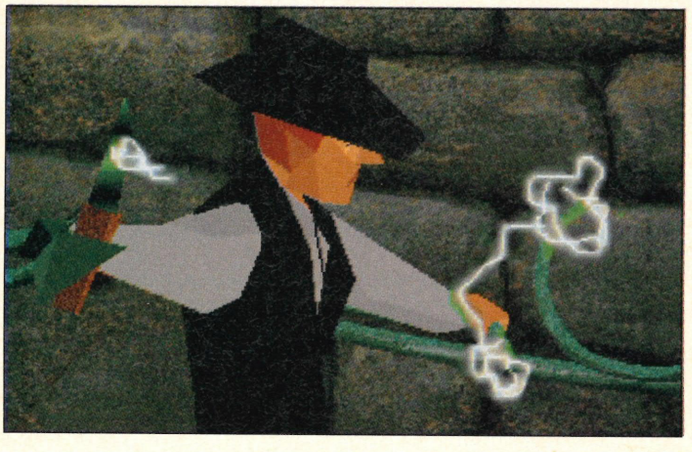
As with Alone 1 and Alone 2, if you move close to an object which can be picked up, a box flashes up containing a picture of said object along with the words "take" or "leave". Simple. Except in practice, it's a lot more difficult than that.

Let's say you've seen an object lying on a table and it's obvious that you're going to need it sooner or later. You walk over to the table and stand directly in front of the object. But does the object box flash up? Like hell it does. You stand there, searching like crazy, but there's no way that you're going to be allowed to take the damned thing from that position. You inch left a bit and try again. Still no joy. Then you inch right a bit. Ditto. This carries on until you

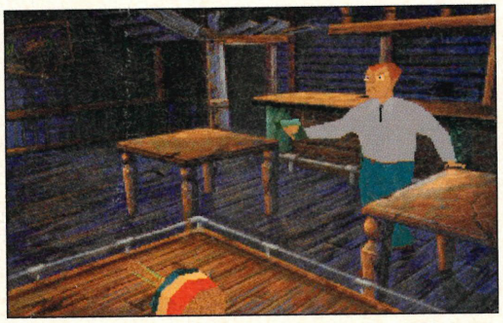
Below: there's no going back for Ed once Jed Stone has blown the bridge over the canyon.

Bottom: Ed plans to give Jed Stone a bit of a shock with the help of a live wire and some water. Electrifying stuff.

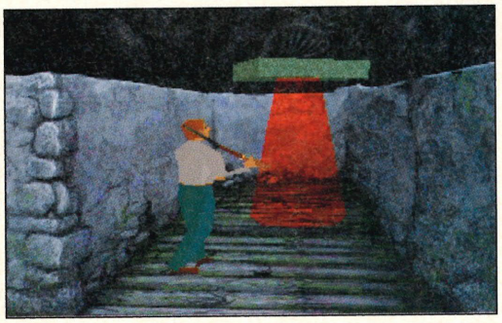




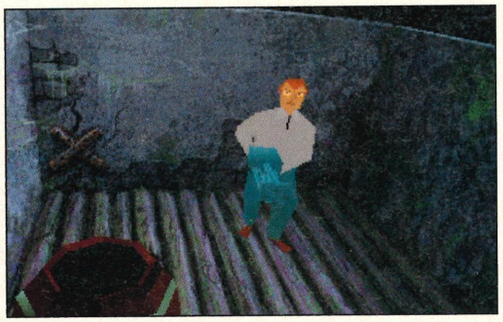
THE ARMOURY SHOW



Your trusty .38 may not be all that powerful, but it'll see you right through the early stages of the game



Even better is the Winchester rifle. It also makes a nice posing accessory slung casually over your shoulder.



Of course, nothing compares to a Gatling gun for sheer destructive power. Who needs Doom anyway?



But when you're out of projectile weapons, you can always make do with whatever's lying around. A pickaxe in this case.

finally manage to stand on the right pixel for the object box to appear. Now add a zombie who's chasing you around the room, and the fact that the object is the very thing you need to defeat it.



Headless zombie

In such a case, you simply don't have the time to mess about positioning Edward in exactly the right place, because a moment's hesitation can cost you an awful lot of health points. This makes the game needlessly hard, and it's through no fault of your own. In one room, a headless zombie tries to beat you to death with his Popeye-sized fists while his stone head observes you from a table. The idea, which I figured out almost straightaway, is to take the head and throw it down a hole in the corner of the room. Not only is the head extremely difficult to pick up, but you've also got to position Ed precisely in order to throw it into the hole instead of onto the floor. This sort of thing is absolutely infuriating. I'm not saying that the whole game is like this, but it's a problem that occurs several times and I certainly don't remember it happening in the other two Alone games.

"Ed has at his disposal a number of weapons including a shotgun, a handgun and a Winchester rifle."

Biting the bullet

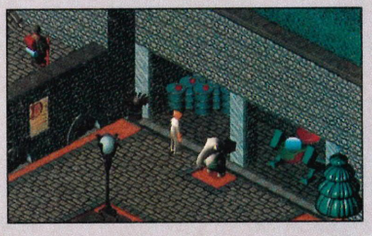
There's another puzzle in the game which is particularly annoying for a different reason. Ed has at his disposal a number of weapons including a shotgun, a handgun and a Winchester rifle. One of the first things I do when finding a weapon is to load it with the relevant ammunition so that I can use it to despatch any nearby zombies. There is, however, one character who can only be killed with a

ALTERNATIVELY

Ecstatica
Psygnosis, £44.99
Rated 8, Issue 39
This tale of witchcraft is set in mediaeval Europe. The graphics are more sophisticated than in Alone 3, using ellipsoid characters rather than blocky polygons.



Little Big Adventure
Electronic Arts, £44.99
Rated 9, Issue 39
This humorous and endearing game comes equipped with stunning graphics, great sound and bags of playability, making it one of the most accessible games of last year.



PIZZA $ TYCOON



Do you want to know what's cooking?

Do you knead to make some dough?

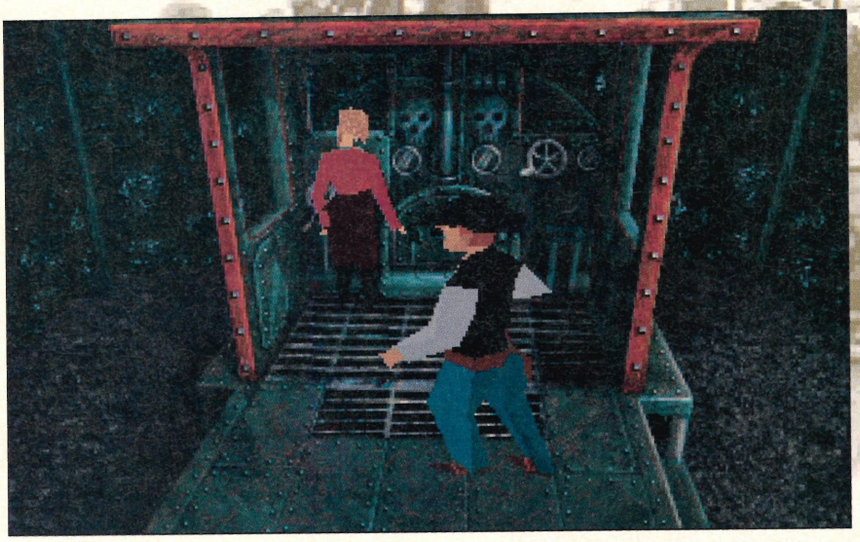
Then get a piece-of-the-action with Pizza Tycoon.

A business simulation to get your teeth into.

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Because at MicroProse, we deliver.

AVAILABLE FOR IBM PC COMPATIBLES MICROPROSE



golden bullet fired from the Winchester, and because you can't unload a weapon, you somehow lose all the Winchester's ammo the moment you insert the golden bullet. I'm not sure where the rest of the bullets went, but go they definitely did. Illogical or what?

This might be a bit inconvenient, but you've got other guns, haven't you? Trouble is, on the same level as the golden bullet man is a door which can only be opened by shooting it with — yes! — the Winchester. So if you do lose the ammo, you can't get the door open and you can't pick up the objects you need to progress further. You're stuffed, and once again it's through no fault of your own.

Whilst you might find the golden bullet before you find the Winchester ammo, there's nothing to tell you that it's a Winchester bullet, and you won't actually find this out until you've loaded it into the weapon (ammo is automatically loaded into the relevant gun).

And how the hell were you supposed to know that the door had to be shot open when other doors are opened by other methods? Stupid.

It's a shame that such annoyances mar what is otherwise a fitting end to the Alone in the Dark trilogy, especially when you realise that the main problem — difficulty with picking up objects and using them — could have been easily rectified.

Even so, Alone in the Dark 3 is a very good game indeed. Infogrames has attempted to make this the best game possible by combining the gameplay of the first Alone with the size of the second, and this makes it all the more unfortunate that the game is let down by its control difficulties. Having said that, it's undoubtedly better than Alone in the Dark 2. It has a better story, more depth, more atmosphere and nicer graphics. So why have I given this game an eight when I gave Alone in the Dark 2 nine? It's because you have to judge a game by what else is around at the time rather than by how it compares to its prequels. Alone 2 had little in the way of opposition, whereas Alone 3 is up against Adeline's superb Little Big Adventure and Psygnosis' excellent Ecstatica. Yes, it's a great game, but then it has to be with opposition like that.

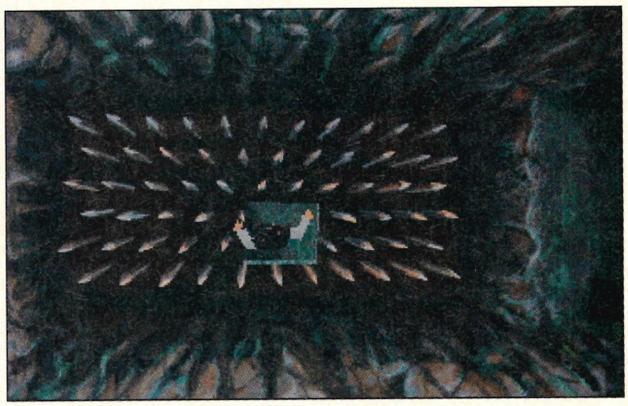
Anyway, the main point is that Alone in the Dark 3 is a very nice game and will definitely appeal to Alone fans. After all, this is probably the last time you'll see Ed Carnby in a game, so you'd better make the most of it.

❍ Cal Jones

Above: he's been to hell and back — literally — but now Ed can ride off into the sunset with the lovely Emily.

Right: Ed had better watch his step or he's going to turn himself into a Carnby kebab.

Below: One of the mean looking critters Ed gets to meet in the game.





TECHSPEC

8

RATING

Atmospheric, let down by tricky interface.

CD ONLY

Publisher:	Infogrames
Price:	£44.99
Contact:	(0171) 738 8199
Minimum PC:	33MHz 486, MS-DOS 5.0, mouse
Minimum memory:	4Mb
Minimum graphics:	VGA
Sound:	Sound Blaster



BREAKING AWAY FROM THE FLEET

HIGH SEAS Trader

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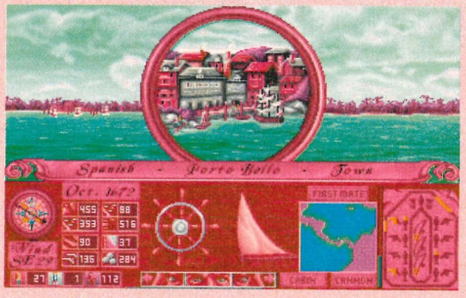
Then let our unique **first-person** perspective and stunning **3-D** graphics put the wind in your sails! **Swashbuckle** away as you **trade** goods, vanquish **enemy ships** and create routes to **riches**. Take time to gossip in local **taverns**, repair **cannonball** damage, and stoke up your **crew's** morale. (A little rum, perhaps?)

Chart your progress with our authentic **navigational** aids, and revel in a world long gone: Where **fortunes** are fiercely defended, and only **skill** stands between you and the deep blue sea!

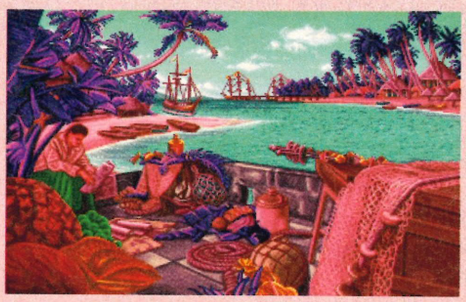


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- Buy and enhance ships from several models.
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Visit exotic ports on many continents



Engage enemy ships in realistic sea combat

Impressions

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IBM PC Screenshots may vary

FOR IBM PC COMPATIBLES

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SET THE WHEELS

TRANSPORT $ TYCOON



Written and designed by

Chris Sawyer

IN MOTION

MICROPROSE

Games are completely harmless — and that's official. Under UK law they are lumped alongside gardening videos and keep-fit tapes as "exempt" from classification. But the climate is changing. Tim Green reports.

CENSORED!

When the cinema release of Oliver Stone's violent thriller Natural Born Killers was indefinitely postponed, its distributors went on to the defensive. They played up the satirical content in the movie, the message that the media makes celebrities of murderers.

When Doom II was released its distributors couldn't have been less defensive. Here's a right shocker, they said. And to ram the message home they sent a press release to the national papers wrapped round a bag of fresh offal.

But while Natural Born Killers languishes in the censor's pending tray, Doom II is out there, available (theoretically) for the five-year-old Compaq 486 owner to enjoy at his leisure.

The simple fact is that after 15 years in existence — and despite periodical outcries in the media — computer games are still legally exempt from classification in the UK.

In the beginning

Ever since computer and video games entered the public consciousness there have been scare stories about the effects of their excesses on young minds. Ten years ago the worry was less about content than physical addiction. The graphics were just too rudimentary to cause concern.

So while the Daily Mail railed at the depravity of video nasties like Zombie Flesh Eaters it wouldn't have occurred to any self-righteous hacks to accuse Pacman of stirring up cannibalistic feelings in teenagers. Now, though, the prevailing mood has changed. Graphics are sophisticated to the point of realism. And games are being 'watched' by the powers-that-be.

However, until new legislation is created, games will continue to escape government regulation. At present the legislation which tackles screen violence is the 1984 Video Recordings Act which was rushed through in response to the video nasty scare. This requires all videos to be given a rating by the British Board Of Film Classification. When the law was being drafted it stated that titles (whether videos or games) require a rating if they show:

- genital organs, urination or excre tion
- mutilation or torture of humans or animals
- human sexual acts

Crucial to the status of electronic games was the clause which distinguished cartoon violence from the 'real' stuff. This was inserted to avoid the need to slap an 18 rating on Tom and Jerry and the like. The reasoning was; cartoon characters aren't "human" or "animal" therefore any violence towards them cannot be treated as harmful.

So cartoons were put into the exempt or "E" category along with sports, music and gardening. Games, with their blocky graphics, were lumped alongside them. They still



The extensive use of video in Voyeur for CD-i and PC CD-ROM, above, brings it under the auspices of the British Board of Film Classification. The racy subject matter and its on-screen treatment led to an 18 rating.

are — which is why anyone can buy Doom II.

But as games have become more realistic the issue has become cloudy. Doom II is just the latest in a series of high profile games to stir the pot. Sega's Night Trap was accused of peddling violence against women, Nintendo's Streetfighter II was viewed by many as brutal thuggery for its own sake and Acclaim's Mortal Kombat made a feature of spurting blood.

The result? Suddenly nobody's quite so certain that the violence in games is of the cartoon variety any more. And the media has raised the stakes by associating games with high-profile child crime cases.

Under the microscope

All this has put games under close scrutiny. The BBFC has already recommended two changes to the Video Recording Act, one which brings cartridges into consideration along with CD and floppy (due to a loophole, cartridges have never been covered by the law at all) and another which makes a series of still pictures subject to the same rules as moving pictures.

But the threat of changing the overall status of games so that they are no longer exempt is still just that, a threat. In the meantime the industry has been given a chance to put its house in order. It's taken the chance gratefully.

Cash is the main reason why. The BBFC charges £10 for every minute of video it classifies. But whereas the average VHS running time is 90 minutes, a CD-ROM can run to hundreds of hours. And if cuts are required, reprogramming computer code is far more complicated than re-editing a VHS master.

Voluntary ratings

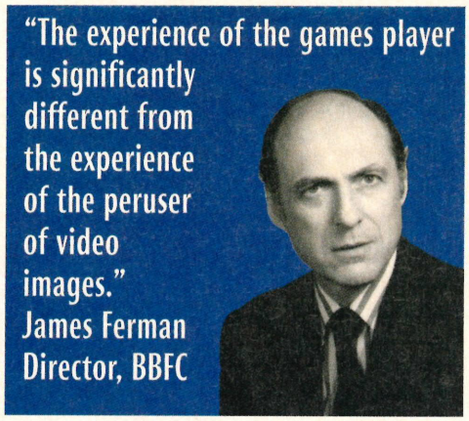
Nobody in the business wants this. Which explains the voluntary ratings system introduced by the games industry body ELSPA on September 1. Under the scheme every new release should display a sticker indicating the age for which it is suitable: 0-10, 11-14, 15-17, 18+.

The ratings are defined by the Video Standards Council, another quango which was originally set up to help the video industry keep its house in order. ELSPA brought in the VSC to draw up an 'assessment' form which it sent to every one of its 79 members. Publishers use these guidelines to set a rating. Once the VSC has approved their decision the game can be released. ELSPA reckons around 85 per cent of games are classified as suitable for all ages. So far only one rating has been rejected by the VSC (it won't say which).

According to Steve Cheese, deputy general secretary of ELSPA, the scheme is proving a success. "The response has been great — from both our membership and the retailers. Nobody wants games to be classified in the way that videos are. And that includes the Home Office which has been in touch to let us know they are monitoring the situation," he says.

Ultimately there is no legal duty for the retailer to stick by these ratings, they are just guidelines. If a kid insists on purchasing an 'unsuitable' title he can. ELSPA insists, though, that retailers are being stringent here.

Whether the scheme is effective or not, at least the business is giving the impression of doing something about the issue. Mark Strachan, chairman of games industry body ELSPA, says: "My own opinion is that if we don't get this right, there are people in authority who understand this market better than we think, who could well act. It wouldn't take much . . . to make games subject to BBFC classification the way videos are. And that would wreak havoc on release dates and push up costs considerably."



It wasn't easy for the trade to get this far. Putting games through ELSPA's voluntary system of rating and stickering might not cost as much as a compulsory BBFC system, but it still costs. And the UK-only scheme threatened to cause administrative headaches for publishers with a global outlook like Acclaim. Despite this, ELSPA claims that its ratings have been almost universally adopted. "Take any top 20 games in any format and 18 or 19 or them — if not all — will carry our ratings," says Cheese.

Of course there can be commercial advantages to classification. Just as film producers of teen films have been known to insert a few swear words to move their certificate out of the naff "PG" category and into the hipper "12", so games publishers are expected to cash in on the kudos of an 18 rating. Carey Budnick, managing director of newly launched Screen Multimedia, says: "There's no doubt a high rating will make a game hot for the younger age group. Who'd be surprised if a publisher played it up a bit?"

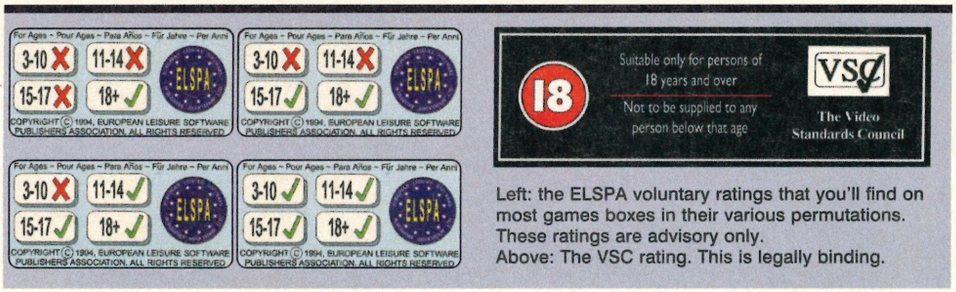
Mark Strachan is unconcerned if they do. "The scheme is there to give parents more information. If a product has an 18 certificate there's no reason why the publisher shouldn't publicise that fact. They've done their duty."

Interactive ignominy

Lately there have been releases which have not been able to bypass the BBFC's exempt clause. These are the so-called "interactive movies" which feature full motion video sequences. Obviously any violence, genitalia, mutilation or urination in these games cannot be explained away as cartoon action. So starting with Sega's Mega CD game Night Trap (which was granted a 15 certificate in March 1993), CD-ROM extravaganzas, including The 7th Guest, Voyeur and Under A Killing Moon have been submitted to, and certificated by, the BBFC.

These titles are subject to the same rules as VHS video. But the process of certificating them is obviously much more tricky. If it's any good a game can take days to finish. And it's designed to be difficult to do so. So although the BBFC has now installed a PC with a CD-ROM drive on the premises and has even recruited staff with games expertise, it's no easy task to rate games appropriately.

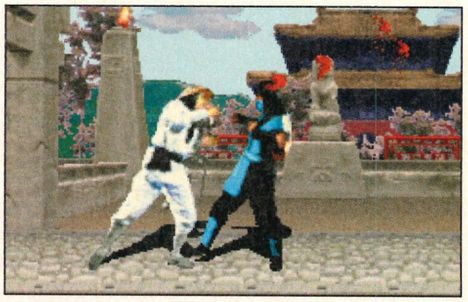
HOW GAMES ARE RATED



Left: the ELSPA voluntary ratings that you'll find on most games boxes in their various permutations. These ratings are advisory only.
Above: The VSC rating. This is legally binding.







From left to right: Mortal Kombat, an infamous spine-tingler.





While the violence in StreetFighter II (left) has given rise to concern, no-one seriously accuses Pacman, above right, of stirring up cannibalistic feelings.

Music marketing specialist ESP has produced an interactive CD for US metal band Nine Inch Nails which conceals horrific S&M footage within its interface. Undoubtedly the footage would be cut by the BBFC. The question is, how will they find it? They'll find it because ESP says it will show it to them. Others may not be so scrupulous.

Sumbission procedures

The BBFC's answer to this is to ask publishers for the VHS tape comprising the motion video sequences, a printout of all text in the game, a flow chart showing the plot pathways, the soundtrack and the packaging. This is not only cheaper for the publisher (because it takes less time to review) it's also easy to access.

Asking for a short VHS of action is fine while computer technology continues to handle modest amounts of film. But who knows how long games can become as compression techniques continue to improve? Hyperbole's forthcoming interactive movie Vortex, for example, will be on five discs. This much full motion video (FMV) could cause new headaches for the BBFC and set costs escalating for publishers.

And neither can a series of VHS clips put the action into context. In many famous cases, most notably Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer, the BBFC demanded more cuts for video than cinema because of the rewind and slow-motion facilities available to video viewers. The question of whether games violence is more 'corrupting' than video violence because the player in a sense perpetrates the harm, is still largely unanswered.

The BBFC is very aware of the issue. In a memo published in October its director James Ferman wrote: "The experience of the games player is significantly different from the peruser of... video images on screen, where an act of imagination is required to experience the illusion of participation."

This distinction may make cuts even more stringent. So far, though, nothing submitted by a games publisher has been deemed nasty enough to require cuts.

Mike Bor, the BBFC's head examiner, says: "At the moment we are applying the same standards as video. But the interactive element will have to be taken on board. It's too early to say how we will do so."

Cutting room floor

When the day comes that the first electronic game is actually cut by the censors there are bound to be companies which circumvent it. Grey imports offer the most probable route. In terms of film and video the UK is generally regarded as operating the strictest censorship regime in Europe. Imported videos from a free-trading EC are already beginning to pose questions here. Imported games may follow. But maybe not from Germany, where the law is more stringent than the UK. Local child protection agencies alert central government to 'questionable' games and, after official inspection, an X certificate can be granted. This means a title can't be advertised, promoted or sold to an under-18. Recent X-rated games include Doom and Cannon Fodder.

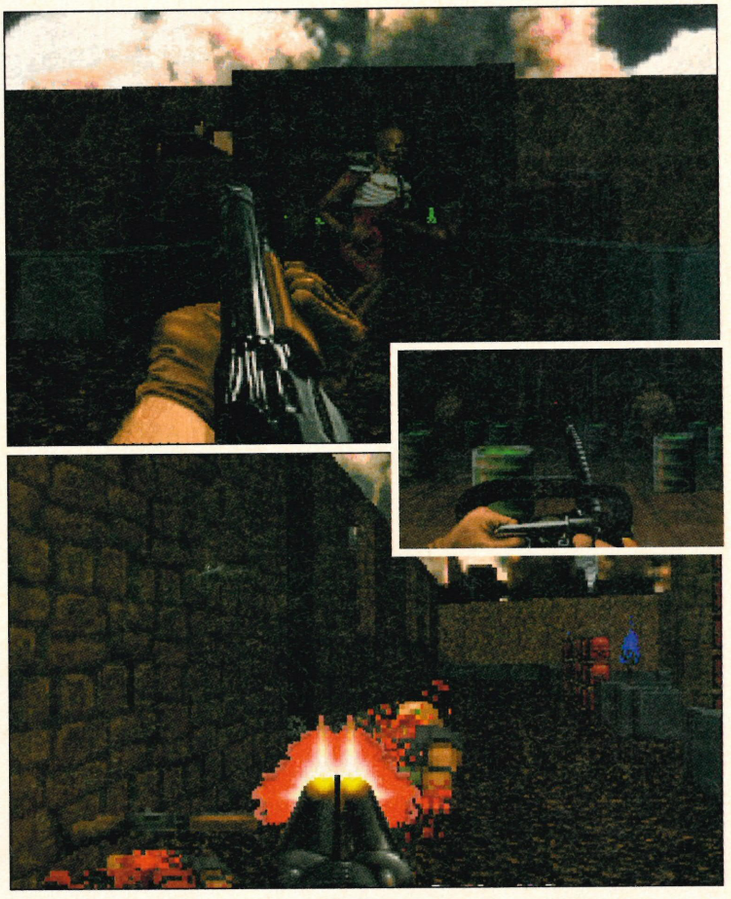
Sometimes the government goes further and ban games altogether. Nazi symbols are still a sensitive area in Germany — Wolfenstein, for example, is completely unavailable thanks to its use of the swastika.

But the government doesn't operate the only restrictions. The German equivalent of ELSPA has launched a system which classifies games 6 plus, 12 plus and 16 plus. Like ELSPA's scheme, it's purely advisory.

Circumventing the system

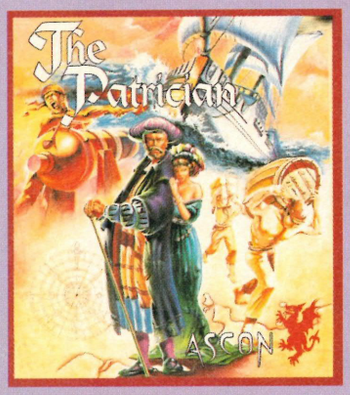
However commonplace imports become they are unlikely to be as difficult to patrol as the games which come in to the UK from a country called cyberspace. Dialling up games is already a reality for those brave frontiersmen with a PC, a modem and lots of spare time. Even if the BBFC, with its CD-ROM and its own technology specialists, can get to grips with disc-based material — how will it patrol electronically delivered games? James Ferman admits it will be difficult. "The ability to regulate the extent to which children will encounter such material is severely limited," he says.

What's more, the programmers exploiting the Internet are far more likely to be renegades with rebellious ideas, than the big corporations flogging CDs at £49.99 in HMV. The BBFC had better make sure that the PC it has installed to monitor games is hooked up to a phone.



No-one's saying Doom isn't violent — indeed the publishers make a virtue of it. From the legal point of view, though, who's to say whether the victims are human or animal — they're just a bunch of pixels.

Get some respect...



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CU Amiga

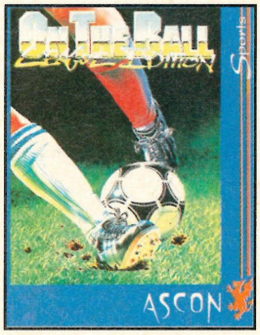




The Patrician Out again at just
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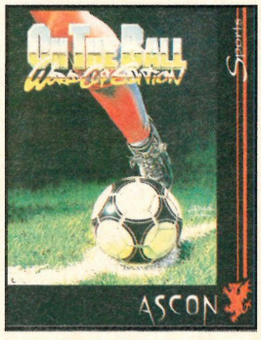


"The best football management game ever" 94% CU Amiga

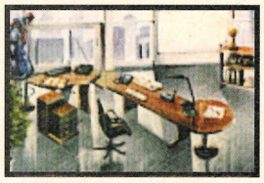
"Footy fans just have to buy the League Edition" 88% Amiga Action

"You'll kick yourself if you miss it" 89% C&VG

"Determines the standards for others to imitate" 8/10 PC Review







ASCON

Stimulating simulations

Games Index

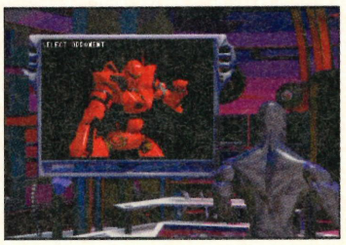
Welcome to PC Review's games section, packed with reviews, previews and tips covering absolutely everything that's happening in the world of PC games. Here's where you'll find reviews of all the latest games released for the PC, extensively illustrated and play-tested in depth to give you the best reviews service you'll find anywhere. We try to cover *all* the games that are released each month, including budget re-releases and CD versions of games already out on disk. You'll find these mainly in the columns of short reviews, starting on page 87.

Our previews section picks out some of the most interesting games currently in development and also includes our perennially popular Coming Soon games-at-a-glance column. In QED, we give you playing guides to the latest games and also — uniquely — we'll answer your games questions on the spot.

Finally, we round everything off with the PC Review Recommended competition, in which you can win a copy of any 9-rated game this month.







The rating system explained

PC Review gives a single mark out of 10 to rate games. The score takes into account all the game's elements, with particular regard to playability, graphics and sound. We aim to play games to completion — where the game has a distinct beginning, middle and end, anyway. We can be pretty tough on games too — since 'five' is the halfway mark between 0 and 10, you can assume we consider any game rated more than five to be above average in quality.

0: A game with absolutely nothing to recommend it to anyone.
1-2: Poorly implemented game, badly programmed, very disappointing.
3-4: A game with some good ideas, but serious drawbacks.
5: A solidly average game. Competent without being anything special, probably enjoyable in the short term.
6: Won't disappoint any fans of the genre; an above average title, but probably one which doesn't break any new ground.
7: Good, imaginatively programmed game which should appeal to the majority of game players.
8: Very good indeed — a game will need something special in the way of gameplay, innovation, graphics or sound to make it worth an eight.
9: Outstanding as an all-rounder. Few, if any, failings in graphics, sound, atmosphere, playability, ease of use, etc.
10: The ultimate score. Sheer perfection.

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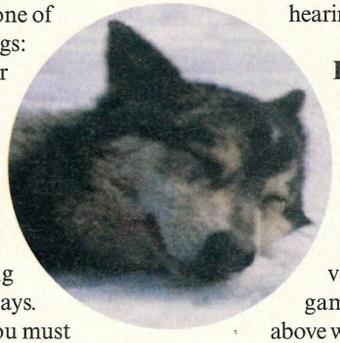
Sim Ant was the last game that gave PC gamers the chance to control an animal. Now Wolf let's you join the pack and howl at the moon.



Above: you and your pack of wolves have just spotted your food for the day and are ready to take off in hot pursuit of the moose — one of the game's slower prey.

Sim Wolf is a pretty good way to describe this game, which is obviously intended to be part entertainment, part educational.

You have to take control of a wolf, or wolf pack, in one of three different surroundings: the arctic, timber lands, or the plains, then take part in various scenarios — missions, if you like — which range from simple tasks such as finding drinking water, to more difficult objectives such as keeping your cubs alive for seven days. In all of these scenarios, you must also make sure that your wolf gets enough sleep, enough to eat and drink and you must also avoid getting shot by hunters, at the same time as completing the tasks that were set, in some cases within a time limit.



Alternatively, you can create your own simulation, varying the amount of people that are after you, how much the hunters' bounty is for wolves, how large your litter is and how easy or difficult your mini-quests are. Luckily, if this all sounds a little complicated, there is a reference section giving lots of general information on wolves — from how good their hearing is to their mating habits.

Digitised animations

On the technical side of the game there are some great digitised animations of wolves in the introduction and also in scenes before and after the various scenarios. The game itself is viewed from above with good animation of the actual wolf in its environment, and also some impressive cut-scenes when the wolf attacks another animal, or challenges another wolf to become leader of the pack.

On the CD version there is also a soundtrack, which varies according to your location or situation. This is useful when you are being pursued, as the music changes when you are close to a hunter. There are some great sound effects, with some of them necessary to help you survive in the game. For example, at certain points either a plane or helicopter will fly over and shoot at you — without being able to hear the noise of the plane, it's hard to avoid getting hit and killed by the time you see the shadow of the helicopter on the screen.

Original idea

Unfortunately, there are only three different worlds to play in and although there are 42 scenarios they all involve much the same sort of tactics — albeit with a different degree of difficulty — meaning that after a while it becomes repetitive.

Wolf is an original idea for a game and on the whole, it works well. It's just let down really by the lack of variety and the fact that some of the graphics require a massive suspension of disbelief if you are really to immerse yourself in the lonely world of the wolf. Aside from that however, it's a pleasant enough romp.

❍ Andrew Downie



Left: using your wolf's sense of smell, you are able to find food and also avoid hunters who are trying to make a quick bit of cash.

Below: don't get caught out by the airborne hunters.





TECHSPEC 6 RATING

Original, but let down by lack of variety.

Publisher:	US Gold
Price:	£34.00 disk, £40.00 CD
Contact:	(0121) 606 1800
Minimum PC:	25MHz 386SX
Minimum memory:	640K
Minimum graphics:	VGA
Sound:	Sound Blaster

Wing Commander 3

Behind the scenes

The making of one of the best games to appear on the PC, ever, involved utilising film as well as PC games production techniques. Christina Erskine takes a closer look.





Above left: Jason Bernard (Captain Eisen) and Mark Hamill (our hero Blair) act out a scene on set. Above: the Kilrathi heads were designed to be fully movable, if somewhat hot and heavy for the actors.

There are possibly a good number of wannabe film directors currently making computer games for a day job. Probably only one has been called a "young Steven Spielberg". Admittedly, actor John Rhys-Davies was at a press conference to mark the launch of Wing Commander 3 when he said this, and he was referring to its creator Chris Roberts, so he probably felt he should say something complimentary. However, Rhys-Davies has worked with Steven Spielberg himself, on two Indiana Jones films, so he should know what he's talking about.

What Roberts has effectively done is to write, produce and direct Wing Commander, the movie, alongside Wing Commander 3, the game. The game has been developed with both VGA and SVGA graphics and follows the traditional look of Wing Commander combat scenarios. The movie was filmed using live actors and the resulting video was digitised over Silicon Graphics-generated backgrounds and acts as the introduction and links between combat sequences. Sure, the video bits, which take up around 85-90 per cent of the space on the four CDs spanned by the game, are basically cut-scenes, but they do more than just prettify the game. Apart from the intro, they're all interactive, and your decisions genuinely affect the way the story develops — and in this Wing Commander, the story is very important. There is a real narrative drive in the many-branched script to Wing Commander 3, and it makes the video scenes and the SVGA computer-produced missions truly co-dependent.

The techniques used in Wing Commander 3 involve real-life actors, armed with a script, acting out their roles before the camera and in front of a blank screen. Their images are cut out and 'placed' against computer-designed backgrounds to create each scene. Wing Commander's backgrounds were all produced by the designers at Origin Systems using Silicon Graphics workstations and Origin is actually calling them 'virtual sets'.



Left: isn't that the guy from Star Wars? Tom Wilson corpses the scene with Jennifer McDonald (Flint). See The Cutting Room Floor in Behind the Screens on this month's cover CD.

Acting talent

The acting talent employed for Wing Commander is creditable, compared to many casting decisions in early games of this type. Mark Hamill, fresh from his voice-over work in Sierra's Gabriel Knight, plays the central character, Christopher Blair. He is backed up by Tom Wilson, who appeared in Back to the Future, Ginger Lynn Allen, who appears to be making that 'difficult' transition into mainstream films, and Jason Bernard, who will be recognised by late-night TV watchers from Herman's Head.

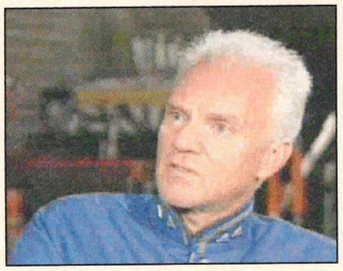
There is also considerable British interest in Malcolm McDowell, once of A Clockwork Orange fame and If... and the afore-mentioned Rhys-Davies.

All the actors said that they experienced difficulties working with a completely blank 'virtual set', especially when scenes had to be re-shot because, say, the computer monitors showed that instead of resting their hand lightly on a pillar, they were an inch out and putting their hand straight through it. Allen, particularly, claimed that it was sometimes difficult to 'get into character' when filming the alternative sequences for the player's choices: "One minute I really love

CAST LIST



Colonel Christopher Blair (you)
Mark Hamill



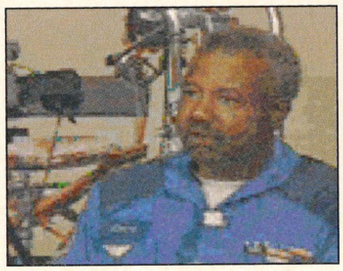
Admiral Tolwyn
Malcolm McDowell



Rachel Cariolus
Ginger Lynn Allen



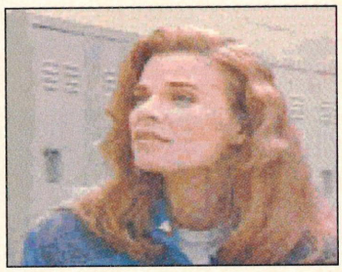
Maniac
Tom Wilson



Captain Eisen
Jason Bernard



James Taggart (Paladin)
John Rhys-Davies



Flint
Jennifer McDonald

this guy, then I have to go back and do the scene like I don't care".

However enjoyable the filming sessions were, one is still left with the impression that the actors were a bit hazy about how their roles fitted in with the computer game side of things.

"I'd heard predictions ten years ago that you'd be able to save money by building enormous sets, and shooting actors next door on a blue screen," says Mark Hamill. "I had it all explained to me, and I didn't doubt it of course, but I thought, well, it won't happen in my lifetime."

John Rhys-Davies had his own take on the story. He summed up the whole thing to Ginger Lynn Allen rather nicely: "There is one fundamental flaw with this game: it takes you 30 missions before Blair even gets to kiss you. And I've flown *every one of them*."

Father figure

One reason why the acting in Wing Commander 3 works well could be that the actors weren't exactly cast against type. John Rhys-Davies plays the grizzled old bear of a father figure; Ginger Lynn Allen plays a pert, sassy young flight mechanic; Tom Wilson evidently relished the role of Maniac both on and off camera. "Tom Wilson," commented Origin's Galen Svanas, "was probably the greatest single threat to our shooting schedule out in LA".

Even Malcolm McDowell, old and statesmanlike in his role as the Confederation's Admiral Tolwyn, eventually gets to display a hint of the subversive tendencies he waged so manically in Clockwork Orange and If . . . Perhaps the only big surprise is Mark Hamill himself, who is light years away from the blue-eyed boy of Star Wars. As the combat-hardened Colonel who has spent nearly all his adult life fighting the Kilrathi, he's affected a distinctly world-weary air.



Anyway, these are actors who are paid extremely well to pretend to be other people and make it believable. The biggest triumph in Wing Commander 3 surely belongs to the, er, "young Steven Spielberg". After all, Chris Roberts started his career with Wizardore for the BBC micro, before moving to Origin in the US and developing the Wing Commander series.

This was a first attempt at film directing — which, make no mistake, is what the work for the Wing Commander cine-scenes involved — and in the Star Wars style apocalyptic scenario, he didn't exactly choose an easy topic.

"Well, it was a challenge. Luckily there was a lot of stuff to do so I never really thought about it, because I'd probably then have gone, 'Oh my God, what am I doing?'" says Chris himself of his directorial debut.

And coping with all those Hollywood egos?

"After we could fit the ten trailers into the parking lot, we were doing OK. But the cappucino machine was just too much to ask for. No, actually, I guess when we went to go film around Hollywood, I thought oh God, I've read all these stories, I'm going to have about 8,000 people pitching fits, and it wasn't at all like that. Everyone, I think, had a lot of fun, everyone joined in."

It surely can't be long before Roberts is directing movies for real. Malcolm McDowell himself is on record as saying, "I think he's going to be a big-time film director one day", and Roberts is currently holding discussions regarding the new Wing Commander series in Los Angeles.

So the movie side of Wing Commander 3 is impressive. Now see over the page for our review of Wing Commander 3, the full game.

ON THIS MONTH'S CD

If this is the CD version of PC Review that you are currently reading, you can check out the background work on Wing Commander 3 for yourself, with our massive Behind the Screens program.

The program takes you through interviews with the members of the cast, and Chris Roberts and the designers, musicians and developers at Origin. It shows examples of the virtual sets, some of the out-take scenes and offers a preview of the 11-minute long intro and scene-setter. Admittedly, it doesn't run particularly fast, even on a 486, but it's well worth it for an inside view of what goes into the making of a game on this scale.

If you haven't yet played the game, I'd recommend that you *don't* read the Master Script option — it will give away the plot. If you don't care about knowing what happens, then read it, if for no other reason that it really does demonstrate just how rich Wing Commander 3 is as a story.

Wing Commander 3
Heart of the Tiger



Above: as you wander around the TCS Victory, you're free to chat to any fellow crew members you meet.

So, is it really worth buying a Pentium? After playing Wing 3, your only answer can be an emphatic, drooling "Yes!"

If you needed an indicator that the days were over when a lone programmer, working from the comfort of his stale-smelling bedroom, could bash out a chart-topping smash in a couple of weeks, then surely Wing Commander 3: Heart Of The Tiger is it. According to the publisher Origin, Wing 3 took nearly two years to create and required the services of a legion of programmers, graphic artists, musicians, actors, cameramen and technicians — which goes some way to explaining the game's budget of around $4 million.

Yes, you read it right — *$4 million!* Even by a lottery winner's reckoning, that's a lot of cash — but, as they say in Hollywood, the money's all up there on the screen. Without a doubt, Wing 3 is *the* most visually impressive PC game ever created. A super-slick combination of movie-like cut-scenes and incredible SVGA-rendered space combat, Wing 3 doesn't just make love to your eyeballs, it takes them out for a romantic meal first, invites them back for coffee, puts on smoochy music and then carries them breathlessly to the brink of ecstasy and beyond. It really *does* look that good.



Below: the Emperor, perched upon the throne in his palace on Kilrah.



Of course, the reviewer's typical corollary to this sort of embarrassingly sycophantic, over-the-top praise is "Shame the gameplay sucks" but, in Wing 3's case, that simply isn't so. True, at the end of the day, Wing 3 amounts to little more than a relatively simplistic 3D shoot 'em up, but it's one of the most exciting, exhilarating, addictive and intensely atmospheric 3D shoot 'em ups I've ever played.

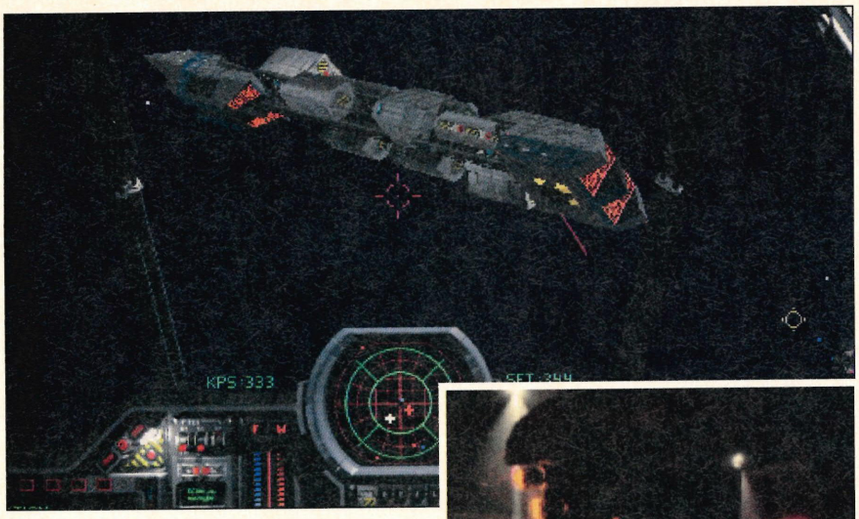
The story so far . . .

Wing 3's plot picks up pretty much where Wing 2's ended, with the brave Terran Confederation still locked in an epic struggle with the Kilrathi Empire, a race of vicious feline warriors to whom the concept of 'peace' is totally meaningless. Unfortunately, it seems your victories in Wings 1 and 2 have counted for little, as the Confed forces are now beginning to crumble in the face of a renewed Kilrathi onslaught.

The TCS Concordia, your carrier in Wing 2, is just one of the ongoing battle's many casualties and is now no better than scrap metal, so you're assigned to a new ship, the TCS Victory. However, the TCS Victory isn't like the gleaming, state-of-the-art vessels that you're used to. In fact, it's a bit of a mess, a battered old warhouse first brought into service at the start of the conflict which now cruises the quieter regions of the warzone — hardly a fitting home for a big hero like you. However, Confed command never do something without a reason, and soon enough you find out their plans for you . . .

Thus, after a stunning movie-style intro, the game proper begins with you newly arrived on the Victory, hungry for action. While on board the Victory between missions you're free to wander around and explore its living quarters, bridge, flight deck and so on at leisure. And you can even talk to any fellow crew members you meet — which is where the majority of the movie stuff comes into play.

You see, whenever you chat to someone the game cuts to video footage pulled off CD, and very good it is too. For once, the movie-like sequences really *are* movie-like. OK, so it looks a bit grainy (it's as if you're peering through a coarse sieve, to be honest) but it's still far and away superior to anything that's gone before, even Under A Killing Moon. Special mention should go to the acting too, which is much better than we've come to expect from previous





Above: you can toggle your cockpit on or off, to give yourself a better view of the combat zone. Right: the Imperial Palace on Kilrah. If you look hard, you might be able to spot the litter tray in the background.

interactive movies — but then, with talents such as Mark Hamill (who plays Colonel Christopher Blair, your alter ego), John Rhys-Davies and Malcolm MacDowell onboard, you'd expect it to be.

Although these cut-scenes are typically passive, sit-back-and-watch affairs, at key points you do occasionally get the chance to direct the flow of the conversation by picking between two dialogue options. What you say on these occasions is actually quite important, because if you select the wrong option and you could seriously damage morale, which in turn affects the way your co-pilots perform in combat.

Mission control

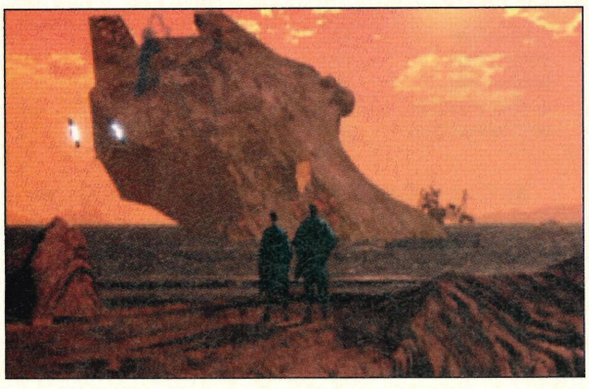
However, while this talky-talky stuff is all very nice, it's the missions which make up the real 'meat' of the game. Once you've sat through the mission briefing, picked a co-pilot and selected a ship to fly, it's off out into the wide, blue yonder. And in Wing 3, space *is* actually blue. Quite why this is so I don't know, but I'm sure Origin has its reasons. However, this tends not to bother you too much, as you're too busy ogling the wonderful SVGA graphics. Let's make no bones about this — they are *fantastic*. Chasing an ultra-realistic texture-mapped Kilrathi fighter as it dodges and weaves in front of your laser cannon's sight has to be experienced to believed.

However, while the combat is very exciting, it suffers greatly from a lack of depth. The ship controls are very basic and the missions are generally not that complicated. Usually they boil down to 'kill anything furry you meet before it kills you', although in others you might do slightly more exotic stuff like protect a transport as it makes its way to a Hyperspace jump-point. Even so, in comparison to something like LucasArts' TIE Fighter, it's shallow stuff indeed.

However, it's never boring, and the urge to complete a mission so that you can see what happens next in the plot is incredibly strong, especially as your success or failure in combat actually affects how the story-line develops. It is, for example, possible to do so badly that the Kilrathi end up winning the war — and you losing the game.

Soooo slooooow . . .

By now this is probably all sounding a little too good to be true — and, in a way, it is. You see, Wing 3 comes firmly 'Pentium Recommended' — indeed, its minimum spec is stated as a 50MHz 486/DX2. And on a Pentium (even our, er, 'feeble' 60MHz office Pentium) the game ran like a dream — fluid, smooth and totally seamless, even in full SVGA mode throughout. However, out of interest (and in a vain hope that I might be able to play the game at home), I tried running Wing 3 on the office 33MHz



Left: Blair and Paladin survey the wreckage of the downed TCS Concordia. Although this shot is from Wing 3's spectacular intro, similarly high-quality sequences are littered throughout the rest of the game.

WELCOME TO THE TCS VICTORY...



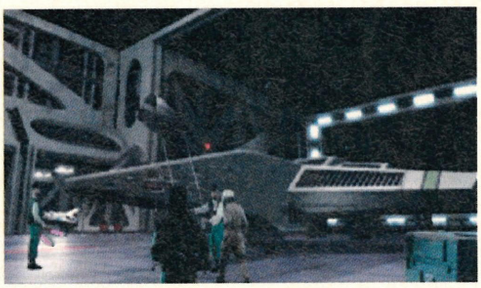
Every mission has the same basic structure. First your boss, Commander Eisen, summons you to the briefing room and explains the task ahead to you . . .



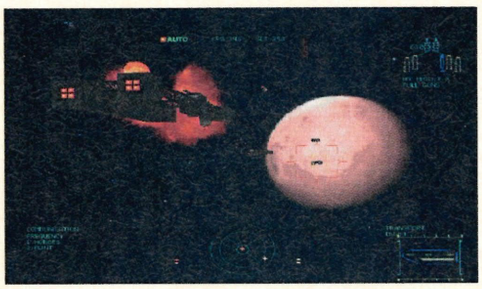
Then you fill in your fellow pilots on the mission specifics and select a wingman (or wingwoman) to accompany you . . .



Next, you choose which ship you want to fly. All have different pros and cons, such as strong armour/slow speed, etc . . .



The preliminaries over, you can sit back and enjoy some saucy cut-scenes showing Blair clambering into his cockpit and blasting out into space...



Finally, the battle begins as you encounter your first wave of Kilrathi ships. Do well, Colonel the fate of the human race rests in your hands . . .





Above top: a Kilrathi fighter's shields glow as it takes another hit from your lasers. Above: blimey! It's Luke Skywalker!



Pure brilliance, but you need a Pentium.

TECHSPEC 9 RATING

Publisher:	Origin Systems
Price:	£54.99
Contact:	(01753) 549442
Minimum PC:	50 MHz 486, CD-ROM drive
Minimum memory:	8Mb
Minimum graphics:	VGA
Sound:	All major sound cards

CD ONLY

get blown out of the sky within seconds of taking off, you can appreciate what such patience-sapping delays do to your enjoyment.

That caveat aside, there's very little to fault with Wing 3. Agreed, it would've been nice if there was more to do in the missions than just fly around and shoot everything without getting shot yourself. And yes, the whingers will moan that as a 'true' interactive movie, it doesn't really comes up to scratch. But so what? Wing 3 looks and sounds like a movie, it's engrossing, it's great fun to play and how you perform affects the game's plot — what more could you want?

Others may complain that, strip away all Wing 3's fancy graphics and full-motion video sequences, and you're left with a game that, in many ways, is identical in structure to the previous Wing Commander games. Certainly, fans of the series will feel at home as soon as the game loads up; in combat, for example, nearly all the keyboard controls are the same as before.

But is that such a bad thing? Being realistic, there aren't that many original ideas floating around and, in the games industry, success is often not down to *what* you do, but *how* you do it — and it's how Wing 3 is done that makes it so excellent. The same holds true in many other realms of mass entertainment, particularly the movie business: Speed, for example, can be described as Die Hard on a bus, but it doesn't make it a bad film.

One suspects that Wing 3 is the game that Chris Roberts, the architect of the Wing Commander series, originally intended to create when he wrote the original Wing Commander, only to find himself held back by lack of technological and financial muscle. That he's managed to maintain, develop and finally realise that original vision is all credit to him, and has resulted in an unmissable treat for Pentium-owning gamesplayers everywhere. Sigh.

❍ **Andrew Downie**

HAVE YOU GOT THE POWER?

A monster game like Wing 3 needs a monster PC to run it. Here, for your perusal, are some relative frame rates (ie the number of times the screen updates per second) which illustrate the game's performance on different machines. And if you have a 33MHz 486 and still want to buy Wing 3, remember: you have been warned . . .

Processor	VGA	SVGA	SVGA Local Bus
33MHz 486	12	4	10
50MHz 486	17	10	15
66MHz 486	20	13	18
60MHz Pentium	24	15	20
90MHz Pentium	24	15	24

Bear in mind that the loading times are pretty important too — on a 33MHz 486 it takes seven minutes to load in a mission, while on a 60MHz Pentium it takes just a minute and a half. However, if you have more than 8Mb of RAM and a faster than double-speed CD-ROM drive, these times are reduced.

ALTERNATIVELY

TIE Fighter
LucasArts, £49.99 disk
Rated 8, Issue 35
Although perhaps a little too similar to X-Wing, TIE Fighter's strengths are its rich, authentic Star Wars atmosphere and its complex, superbly-structured missions.



Wing Commander 2
Origin Systems, £39.99
Rated 7, Issue 1
While Wing 2 may lack the impressive multimedia bells 'n' whistles of Wing 3, its gameplay is practically identical. And it's still a great game.



THE CRYSTAL MAZE

CHANNEL FOUR TELEVISION

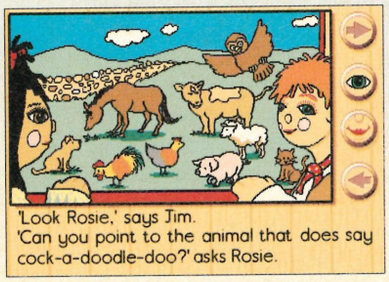


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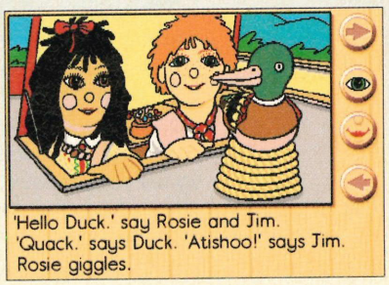
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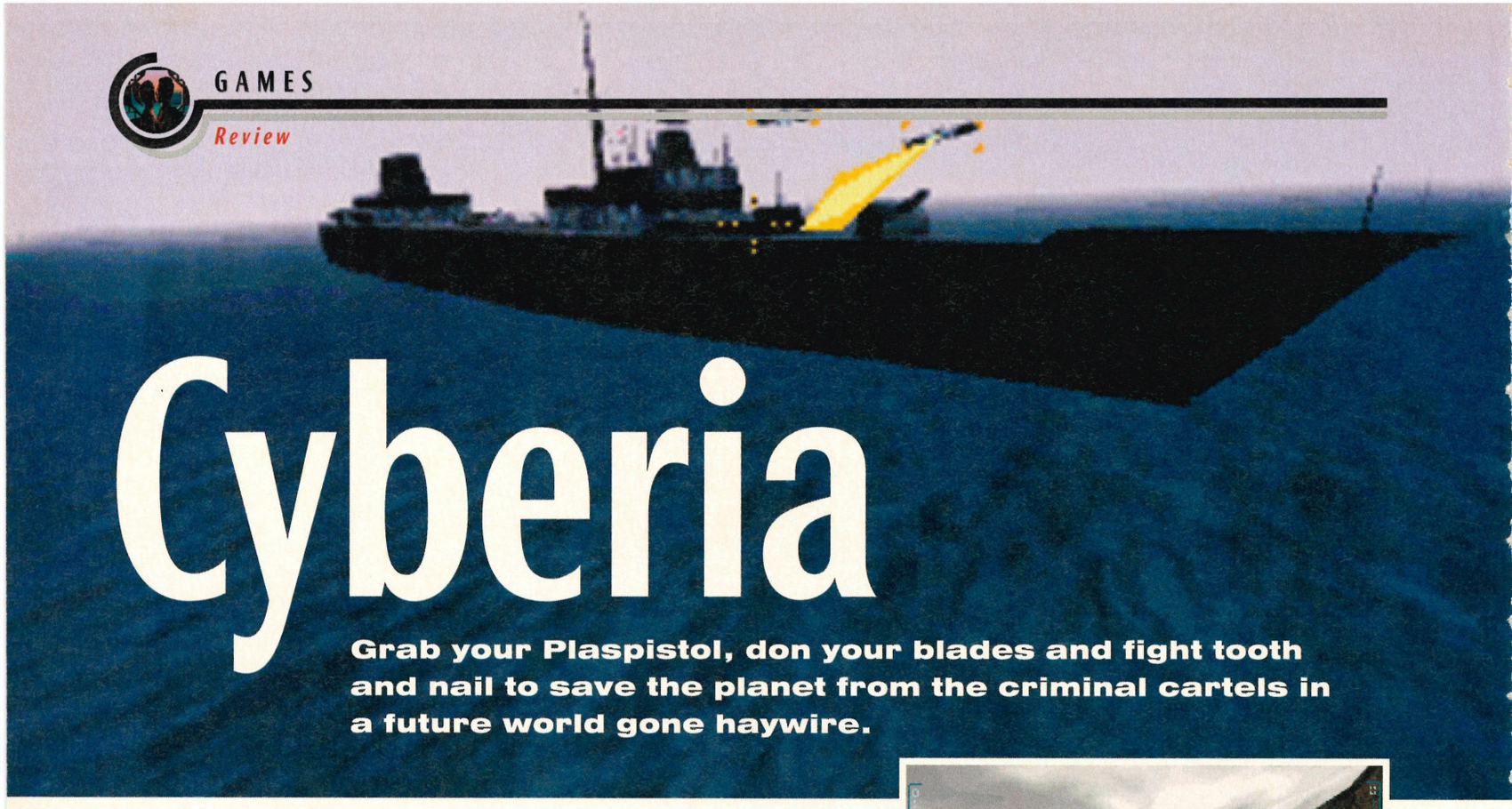
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Cyberia

Grab your Plaspistol, don your blades and fight tooth and nail to save the planet from the criminal cartels in a future world gone haywire.



The year is 2027, and following a global economic collapse, the good guys, the Free World Alliance (FWA), and the bad guys, a conglomerate of criminals, are fighting it out for political power.

A top secret installation in deepest Siberia is in the process of creating the ultimate superweapon. Naturally whoever can get hold of it first will gain the upper hand in the struggle for power.

The cartels are fully aware of the device and are probably winging their way to Siberia to collect it already. So what should the FWA do? How about capturing a low-life outlaw computer hacker and threatening him with a lethal injection until he agrees to undertake the suicide mission of scouting the base for a full FWA attack? Yes, that's you, taking on the role of the low-life Zebulon Pike Kingston, known as Zak to his friends. Your job is to chase across the North Atlantic Ocean, mainland Europe and the ice canyons of Siberia to the project Cyberia installation.



In brief

Getting your initial briefing from FWA General Devlin, your first mission is to meet up with a group of mercenaries aboard an isolated oil rig off the Norwegian coast, where you are to pick up your transport to Russia. Sounds simple enough, but as soon as you arrive on-board, things start hotting up pretty swiftly. The cartels are attacking and your first task is to man the photon guns and take out as many enemy aircraft and magnetic mines as you can. First time around this is no easy task, but mastering the gun controls comes fairly swiftly and the rendered armaments rushing towards you are pretty impressive. Succeed at your first taste of gratuitous blasting and you're rewarded by a kiss from the voluptuous mercenary Gia Scarlatti.

Mad gadgetry

This first stage pretty much sets the scene for the rest of the game, giving you a chance to try out the gadgets you have been outfitted with for your mission. Probably the most important item in your inventory is your set of Blades — Bioptic Low Amplitude Displayed Energy Systems. These look like cool Ray-Bans, but actually allow you to scan in infra-red, send fax and modem messages, detect any living organisms in your vicinity and, most importantly of all, analyse the set-up of mechanical devices. One word of warning, don't use the Bio-scan option for too long, as it heats up the substance under scrutiny. Now you wouldn't want to go heating up a thermonuclear device by accident, would you?

After working out that the mercenaries aren't exactly the most friendly of partners, you soon discover that the rig is, in fact, one huge booby trap and, if you don't start solving a few minor puzzles, you're not even going to get airborne, let alone reach the frozen wastes.

The blend of blasting and and at times mind-bending puzzle-solving contributes a major part of Cyberia, and the difficulty settings at the start of the game enable you to adjust the arcade and puzzle levels to suit your preferences.

Into combat

Once you've manoeuvred your TF-22 fighter into open airspace, the next section of the game pits you against seven different flight combat missions, the first of which sees you attempting to take out an enemy hovercarrier, with plenty of flak to put you off your target in a Tie-Fighteresque laser battle. Although your on-board systems are all fully automated, one of those all-too-customary computer glitches means you still have to locate and take out plenty of bad guys without assistance. Crack that



little episode and your on-board com-system gives you your next briefing, along with tactical hints and objectives. This time, you're up against a chain of heavily-guarded munitions dumps. Take out as many as you can to progress to the Norwegian fjords.

The following five missions continue in pretty much the same style. As you receive each set of objectives, watch out for information regarding the different targets. Hostile emplacements, tanks, hovercraft, ships and fighters are outlined by a yellow spotter, though many levels highlight blue targets as well. Avoid shooting these down at all costs, as they may be friendly FWA fighters or, as in the case of the freight tunnel run, they may be fuel tankers which will rip your craft apart in spectacular style along with their cargo if they go up.

"Cyberia looks stunning, but as with many CD-ROM games, the linear gameplay means you only want to play once."

On location

Each of the different locations for these cross-continent missions is smoothly and superbly rendered and you get a real impression of speed as you zip through the ice canyons and inlets. Unfortunately, this don't counter the fact that the gameplay on these levels is just too linear — the targets always appear in the same place, allowing you to memorise each of the locations and finish them off next time around. Because of this, those mid-game sequences soon become a little tiresome as you attempt to move on .

All in all, there are 11 action sequences along these lines, but of course, the crux of the game lies in the Project Cyberia installation itself.

You set down within walking distance of the plant, with just your Blades and a handy Plaspistol for protection.

A quick tour of the installation site soon shows there are two entrances, but don't be tempted to use the tradesman's entrance, just because the front door is heavily guarded. Make the leap through the air vent and you soon discover that things aren't as easy as they seem around here. Blast your way past the guard on gate duty and you're straight back in puzzle territory, guessing number configurations to enter sealed chambers and disable booby traps. Use your blades wherever possible,otherwise you could be fruitlessly tackling one puzzle all night.

On line

As with the airborne zones, much of the action within the installation is fairly linear. To get past the various sections, corridors and control rooms, you need to solve certain puzzles and discover passwords to gain more information from the Cyberia computer systems. If at first you can't proceed through a section, then you need to retrace your tracks to find the missing factor in your investigations. Every time you reach an intersection, you have to make sure you experiment by turning in every available direction, to make sure that you don't miss vital clues or chambers. Find the right apparatus to allow you into the laboratories, creep past vigilant guards and take them out from behind, and work your way through the labyrinth of rooms to find out the exact location of the Cyberia device for your FWA colleagues.

Above: the developer Xatrix claims it used "everything from a Silicon Graphics Wallstation down to Deluxe Paint on the PC" to create the background graphics. But it seems Cyberia's graphics both in interior and exterior scenes can hardly be faulted.

All of the locations within the plant itself are a graphic treat, thanks to the beautifully rendered backgrounds and the use of motion capture for the characters (see last month's preview) and the music and sound effects, created by Thomas Dolby's Headspace, are suitably eerie and atmospheric.

All in all, you certainly can't fault Cyberia for the techniques employed in putting the game together. It looks stunning and sounds good but, as with many CD-ROM games, the linear style of gameplay means that you only want to play through each sequence once.

Although these deficiencies can be annoying, they are not restricted solely to the domain of Cyberia which, like many other CD-ROM games, is more of a sumptuous interactive story, rather than an out-and-out game. Bearing that in mind, Cyberia is certainly worth a look, especially for arcade and puzzle fans who don't mind a little repetition mixed in with their action.

❍ Lucy Hickman

ALTERNATIVELY

Rebel Assault
LucasArts/US Gold, £49.99
Rated 9, Issue 27
Cyberia has a similar look and feel to this. Criticised in some areas for the limited gameplay, it's undoubtedly one of the most atmospheric games ever produced.



Retribution
Gremlin Interactive, £39.99
Rated 6, Issue 39
A mission-based flight and driving game, Retribution has stunning graphics, but is basically a pretty straightforward shoot 'em up in practice.





TECHSPEC RATING 6

Let down by lack of flowing gameplay.

Publisher:	Interplay
Price:	£49.99
Contact:	(01235) 821666

CD ONLY

Minimum PC:	386/33, mouse/joystick CD-ROM drive
Minimum memory:	4Mb
Minimum graphics:	VGA
Sound:	Sound Blaster or 100% compatible

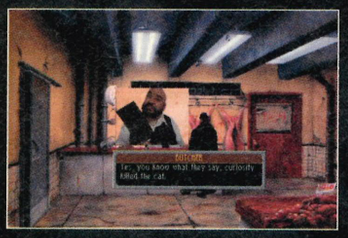
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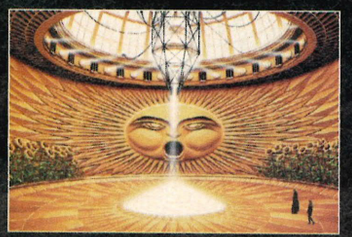
TAKE A WALK ON THE DARK SIDE







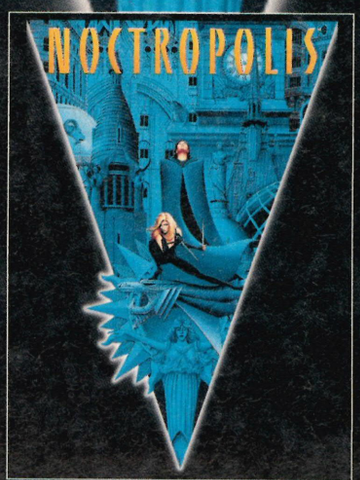












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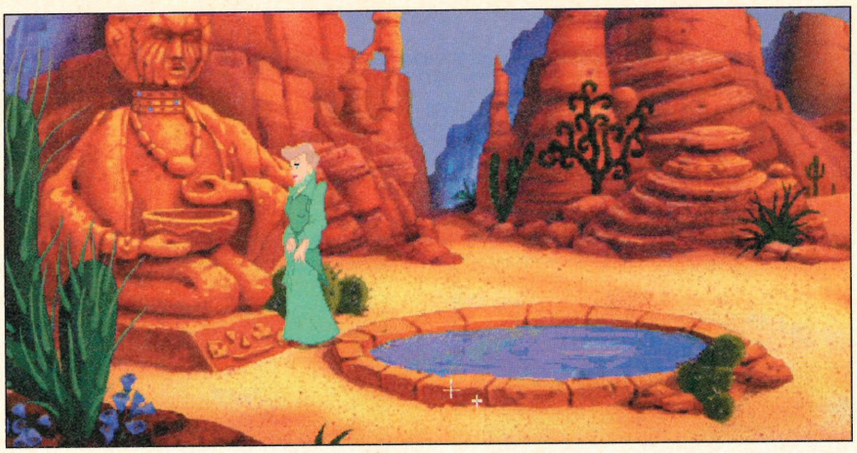
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King's Quest VII: The Princeless Bride

A game that boasts a budget of over two million dollars and lists Disney employees among its credits must be special. It is, but . . .



Once upon a time — 1984, actually — there was a game called King's Quest. Set in the kingdom of Daventry (*isn't that halfway up the M1 — Ed*), it challenged its hero with the task of retrieving three great treasures. Since then the King's Quest games, created by Roberta Williams, have become the best-selling adventure series of all time, attracting two and a half million fans. The success of the series, and its subject matter, have been the stuff of fairy-tale.

The original King's Quest featured EGA graphics and a text-input parser — hardly sophisticated by today's standards, but par for the course in 1984.

All successive instalments have combined the latest technological advances with an increasingly simplified control system. King's Quest VII: The Princeless Bride is no exception: the quality of animation and speech are second-to-none, but the entire game is driven from a single screen with a minimal interface.

The sound of music

It all begins with an excruciatingly twee song sung by the heroine, Princess Rosella, followed by a short, beautifully animated introduction. Rosella's mother, Queen Valanice, wants to marry her young daughter off, but none of the available talent fits the bill: one prince is too clumsy, another is reliable but boring. It seems unlikely that Rosella's dreams of being courted by a handsome suitor will be fulfilled — until suddenly she is whisked off into the fantasy realm of Eldritch . . .

This sets the scene for a story divided into six chapters, each one set in a different region of Eldritch (see the panel over the page). One of the game's many friendly features is that you can play these episodes in any order, so if you get stuck in one episode you can save the game and try another one.

King's Quest VII is typical graphic adventure fare. You explore, you collect and examine objects, you interact with characters, you solve puzzles. There's nothing radically new in the game design.



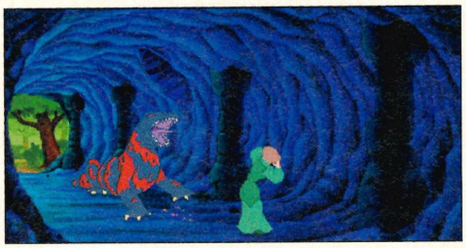
Fair Rosella is turned into a troll (below) while mum Valanice is lost in the desert (top left). Will they manage to sort it all out?

CHAPTER AND HEARSE

King's Quest is divided into six chapters which can be played in any order. Each episode features many exotic, bizarre and downright frustrating ways to die. These are just a sample.



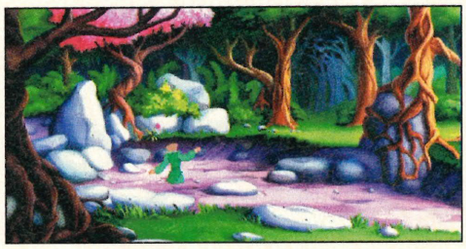
In Chapter Two, Rosella has been transformed into a troll and needs to escape from a subterranean kingdom. Leaping over a chasm in delicate footwear is not the way to do it.



Chapter Three begins with a dilemma for the elder royal. She needs to find a way past this overgrown salamander — but if she makes one false move, the amphibian has lunch.



Rosella's escape from the underground finds her in a grave situation in Chapter Four. A nightmarish landscape of fiends and hags contains death from all angles — including above her head.



Having returned the moon to the sky in Chapter Five, Queen Valanice wanders off into the woods. In the woods there is mud, and the mud is no good. Death by drowning.



Brilliantly designed, but just too twee.

TECHSPEC 8 RATING

Publisher:	Sierra On Line
Price:	£44.99
Contact:	(01734) 303322

CD ONLY

Minimum PC:	386, MS-DOS 5.0, mouse
Minimum memory:	4Mb
Minimum graphics:	SVGA
Sound:	All Windows compatible sound cards

Is it a book? Is it a cartoon?

What is new about King's Quest VII is the quality of the graphics. Only Sam & Max (see Alternatively...) approaches such a consistently high quality of animation, and from the opening scene to the two alternative endings, King's Quest VII is visually stunning. Apart from the backgrounds and the wide cast of bizarre characters which inhabit them, there are a host of cut-scenes and special effects which create the impression of an interactive cartoon. The sound is almost as impressive. You get speech throughout and over a hundred melodies, but the conversations can sometimes be overpowered by the background orchestra.

So it's got nice graphics and sound — but how does it play? The answer is, perfectly well. The interface is simple almost to a fault — scroll the wand-shaped cursor around the screen, and when it flashes there is something you can interact with.

Pick up objects and you can examine them; use them in the viewing window, or combine them with other items to make something new. And that's it — no panel of icons, no need for any other screens, no need to make complicated decisions. Experienced players will miss the complexity that this system denies them, but anyone who prefers a minimal and intuitive interface will be well satisfied.

The puzzles are challenging enough to suit most people. They won't seriously tax anyone who is accustomed to the surreal combinations of objects found in many adventure games, but they are tough enough to keep everyone else occupied.

Adults beware

King's Quest VII has too many points in its favour to list in full here. The graphics and sound speak for themselves, but there are lots of minor touches, too, which make playing a pleasure. For example, if you die, you begin again where you met your unfortunate demise with your inventory still intact. This is just one of the great number of understated features which makes King's Quest VII the friendliest of adventures.

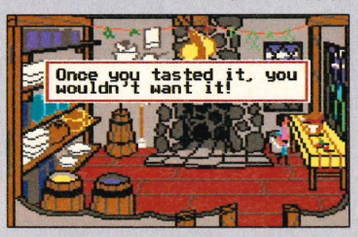
However, hardened players will pine for the things the game lacks: difficulty levels, for example, or a more sophisticated interface, or a more complex inventory, or some control over conversations. My own particular problem with the game — the only major one I could find — was the excessively twee and sentimental tone throughout. This, ultimately, makes the game particularly suitable for families and younger children, but if you're in any way cynical you might find that its sugary plot turns your stomach.

❍ Gordon Houghton

ALTERNATIVELY

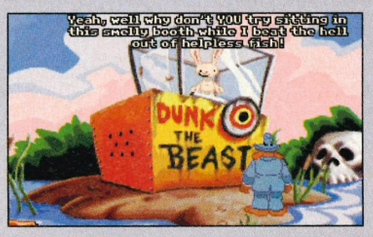
King's Quest VI,
Sierra On Line, £49.99
Rated 7, Issue 24

Prince Alexander is shipwrecked on his way to help a princess in peril. A lot of island-hopping and puzzle-solving, leads to the inevitable conclusion. Plenty to occupy you.



Sam and Max Hit The Road
LucasArts, £45.99
Rated 8, Issue 27

A canine detective and his psychotic rabbit sidekick are on the trail of an escaped Bigfoot,which leads them through a sequence of bizarre events. A must.



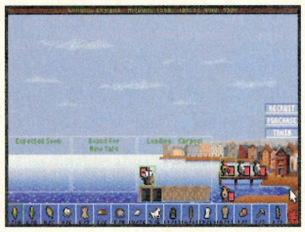
BE THERE AT THE BIRTH OF A NATION

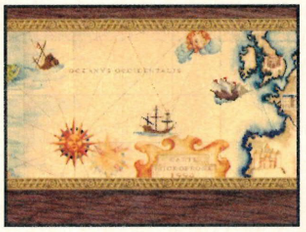
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FOR IBM PC COMPATIBLES

Panzer General



Is Panzer General only for die-hard military fanatics? March into battle to find out for yourself.

Panzer General is a war game from SSI. This means, on past form, that it ought to be dense with detail, massively earnest, and of no interest whatsoever to any but the hardest of hardcore military fanatics. Well, you can forget all that.

Panzer General is fun, exciting, addictive, and so user-friendly that you can pick it up in minutes. Add in superb graphics and excellent sound, and you could be forgiven for pinching yourself and staring extra hard at the logo on the box. Yes, it really *is* by SSI, and although it is a war game it deserves a much wider audience than the usual niche market.

Breath of fresh air

The game it most closely resembles is Bluebyte's HistoryLine, itself a development from the Battle Isle engine. The point about this family of games is that playability comes first, accuracy and realism a distant second and third. Thus, although Panzer General invites you to play a wide range of scenarios from the invasion of Poland in 1939 to the final battle for Berlin, the details are skimmed over lightly. Some serious war gamers may be appalled, but I think Panzer General is a breath of fresh air.

The controls are simple, the tactical permutations surprisingly subtle. There are 18 classes of air, sea and land unit, and a large if not quite comprehensive order of battle dealing with all major and minor belligerents. The 35 scenarios are excellent and wide-ranging, but the core of the game is the campaign module, and you'll want to get on to this as soon as possible. You start with a small command, but depending on your success you can expand to take in different troop and hardware types, as well as upgrade your existing equipment. It's particularly important to nurture experienced units, because veteran status is carried over from one battle to the next.

Excellent value for money

Unfortunately the campaign can only be played from the German side (Allied and two-player options are available in the scenarios), but there's so much gameplay available that I shan't quibble.

This is a game that has really grown on me. At first I thought it was only a HistoryLine clone, but it's far more than that and, indeed, it's a much, much better game. Although the AI occasionally does some pretty daft things, on the whole it's quite impressive. Panzer General is engrossing, deep and very challenging.

In fact, it's one of the best war games yet to have appeared on the PC, and it's almost certainly the most playable.

❍ Simon Shaw



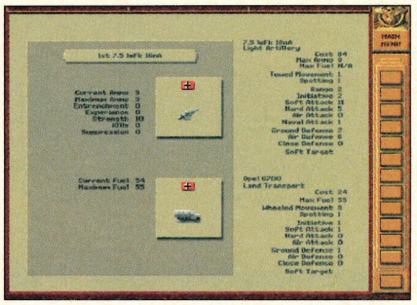
Left and below: the strategic map gives you an overview of the whole battle area. It's useful for checking up on which units have yet to move. Your objectives are highlighted in green, and getting to them will be a race against the clock.



Deep, playable and very, very addictive.

TECHSPEC 9 RATING

Publisher:	SSI/Mindscape
Price:	£44.99
Contact:	(01444) 246333
Minimum PC:	33MHz 386, MS-DOS 5.0
Minimum memory:	4Mb
Minimum graphics:	SVGA
Sound:	Sound Blaster (except AWE32)



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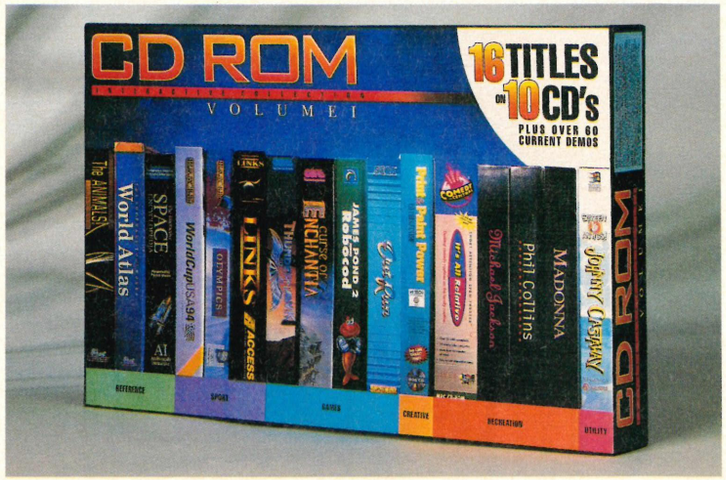
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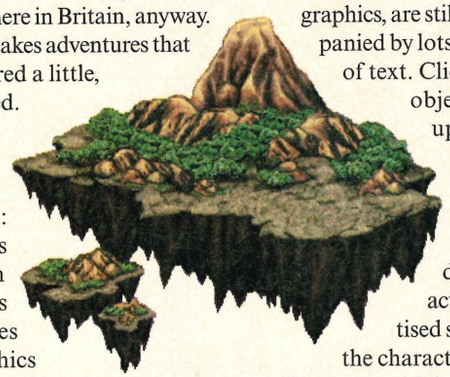
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Death Gate

Better graphics, better sound . . . is the latest Legend game mutton dressed as lamb, or is it actually quite good?

Legend, the publisher of Deathgate, specialises in adventures including such gems as Eric the Unready, Gateway, Companions of Xanth and Superhero League of Hoboken. If you're still scratching your head, then I'll venture that it's because Legend's games are not exactly, well, legendary. Not over here in Britain, anyway. You see, Legend makes adventures that might be considered a little, well, old-fashioned.

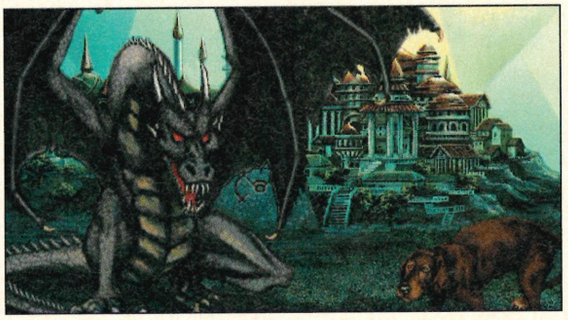


Text heavy

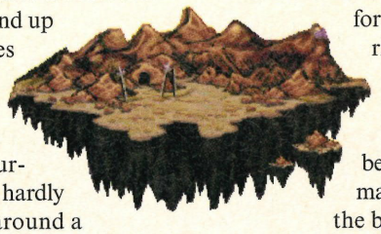
The simple reason is this: Legend's games are not so much graphic adventures as text adventures with some graphics tacked-on. There are static screens representing the games' locations, but when you interact with them, you don't get a nice animation, but a whole load of, yes, text, which you then have to read, to find out what you've just achieved. Now I'm not saying that Legend's games are bad — they're all enjoyable enough. It's just that they're not what you'd call groundbreaking.

So there I was with Death Gate ready to load and go, when suddenly I spied the words "super VGA" and "voice" on the box. What, high-res graphics and digitised speech? Could it be that Legend had finally seen the light and created an all-singing, all-dancing LucasArts-style graphic adventure? Quivering in anticipation, I popped the CD in my drive and was promptly greeted by a rendered intro. With speech! And animations! But then the game started.

Death Gate, it turns out, is like every other Legend game, in that the inventory and interface take up almost half the screen, and the graphics, albeit SVGA graphics, are still accompanied by lots and lots of text. Click on an object and up pops some text to describe it. Do something with it and up pops more text to describe what you've done. Talk to a character and, yes, there's digitised speech, and even better, the character's lips move. But you still get text with it. You even have to read books! Ah well, better the devil you know.



Having resigned myself to the fact that my eyes were going to end up like withered old prunes from so much reading, I sat down to actually play the game.



I was pleasantly surprised. The story itself is hardly original, being based around a series of books (the seven volume Death Gate cycle) written by Margaret Weis and Tracey Hickman who also co-authored the Dragonlance series.

It's standard fantasy fare, meaning it's chock-full of elves, dwarves, dragons and the like. In fact, there's even a wizard thrown in for good measure. But having said that, it's still very engrossing.

Realms of fantasy

Death Gate is set in a world inhabited by two major races, the Sartans (who have white hair with black tips) and the Patryns (who have black hair with white tips). Unfortunately, there wasn't quite enough Grecian 2000 to go around — the Sartans having rather more white to cover than the Patryns — so the two races entered into a long and bloody war which ended with the Sartans splitting the world into five realms, one of which was designed as a prison for the defeated Patryns. All right, so I made up the bit about the Grecian 2000, but you get the picture. Anyway, after being trapped in the nightmarish Labyrinth realm for the best part of 2,000 years, the angry Patryns began to plot their revenge. Of the few Patryns who managed to escape, one, Lord Xar, began to research ways of sticking the world back together. He discovered that the other four realms were based on the elements (earth, air, fire and water) and each served as a home for the three lesser races; the elves, the humans and the dwarves. Each realm also con-



ALTERNATIVELY

Superhero League of Hoboken
Legend/Accolade, £44.95
Rated 6, Issue 32
In this RPG/adventure you must complete a series of wacky missions with your useless superheroes, including Captain Excitement and RoboMop. Silly, but quite engaging.



Dragonsphere
MicroProse, £39.99
Rated 7, Issue 31
This playable fantasy adventure pits you, king of Callahach, against an evil wizard who threatens your nation. It contains plenty of tricky puzzles and is nicely polished.



tained a magical seal piece, and if he managed to collect the full set he would be able to reunite the world and free his people. Oh, and destroy the hated Sartans, of course.

So when you stumble out of the Labyrinth one fine day (you being a fine young Patryn called Haplo), Lord Xar decides you're just the man for the job. After teaching you a couple of spells and lending you his magical flying ship, he dispatches you on a quest which will hopefully see your race freed from centuries of torment. But, like all good stories, Death Gate has a twist. As you journey from realm to realm, you soon discover that Lord Xar is actually a bit of a bastard, and that the Sartans are benevolent folk who are trying to promote racial harmony amongst the bickering lesser races. Trouble is, their plans seem to have gone horribly wrong and many of the Sartans have died off, leaving the five realms to go to rack and ruin.

But enough of the game plot. Despite my earlier reservations regarding the game engine, this is actually a thoroughly enjoyable game.

> **"Despite my earlier reservations regarding the game engine, this is actually a thoroughly enjoyable game."**

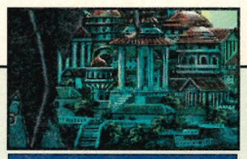
For starters, it's very large, and the many sub-quests you have to complete will keep you entertained all the way through. More importantly, the puzzles are both logical and challenging. If you solve a puzzle after being stuck for some time, you're more likely to say "why didn't I think of that earlier?" rather than "how the Hell was I supposed to figure that out?" So whilst Death Gate may not be the height of sophistication, it's still fun. If you like fantasy adventures, you can't go far wrong.

Below: the SVGA graphics are attractive without being spectacular, but you'll notice that the interface takes up a sizeable portion of the screen.









TECHSPEC RATING 8

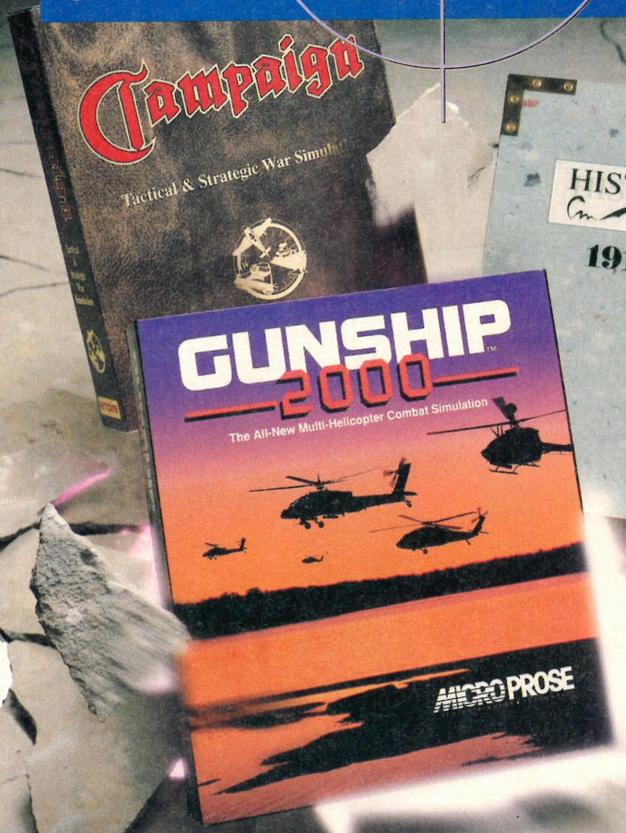
Big and challenging, if a little basic.

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Minimum PC:	33 MHz386, DOS 5.0, mouse
Minimum memory:	4Mb
Minimum graphics:	VGA or VESA SVGA
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❍ **Cal Jones**

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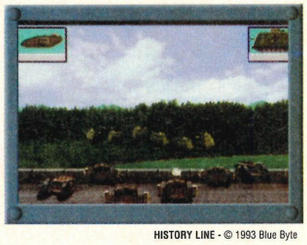


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Minimum memory:	4Mb
Minimum graphics:	VGA
Sound:	Sound Blaster, Gravis, Pro Audio Spectrum





Left: Simba's roar is just one of his abilities. Above: rolling, pouncing, slashing and mauling all help him overcome his foes and obstacles.

Disney's feline fable makes a successful leap on to the PC, even if the cat is sometimes too cute for words . . .

The Lion King

Few film licences turn out to be great games in their own right. Apart from the excellent Indiana Jones graphic adventures, there are a large number of mediocre platformers and shoot 'em ups which rely on the name to sell the game. The Lion King, another platform-based arcade game to add to the list, is good enough to stand out from the herd but offers little to prove that it could survive among the giants of the genre.

Survival special

For those of you who haven't seen the film, it's the tale of Simba, a lion cub who believes he is responsible for the death of his father. The game, like the film, is mostly a matter of learning how to survive as Simba progresses from cub to full-grown lion, and like the film it ends with Simba's final showdown with his evil uncle, Scar.

There are 10 stages in all, each offering a unique graphic style and set of challenges. The first level, for example, lets you practice pouncing, rolling and roaring and gives you the first taste of combat; the second stage tests your dexterity with a series of tricky platform manoeuvres; the third combines the skills of the previous two to create a fresh challenge — and so on. Each stage also has unique spot effects, such as an ostrich ride in level two and a geyser in level three, which add to the variety.



Maul and slash

Simba's survival initially relies on your ability to keep him out of harm's way. However, after level six when he develops into a full-grown lion, he can also maul and slash his enemies. These opponents include hyenas, vultures, bats and cheetahs, all of whom can kill Simba with a couple of blows. This isn't a problem if you are playing the Easy level with nine lives, but the Difficult game gives you only one. There are plenty of bonuses to make each stage more interesting ,and there are two secret bonus stages too.

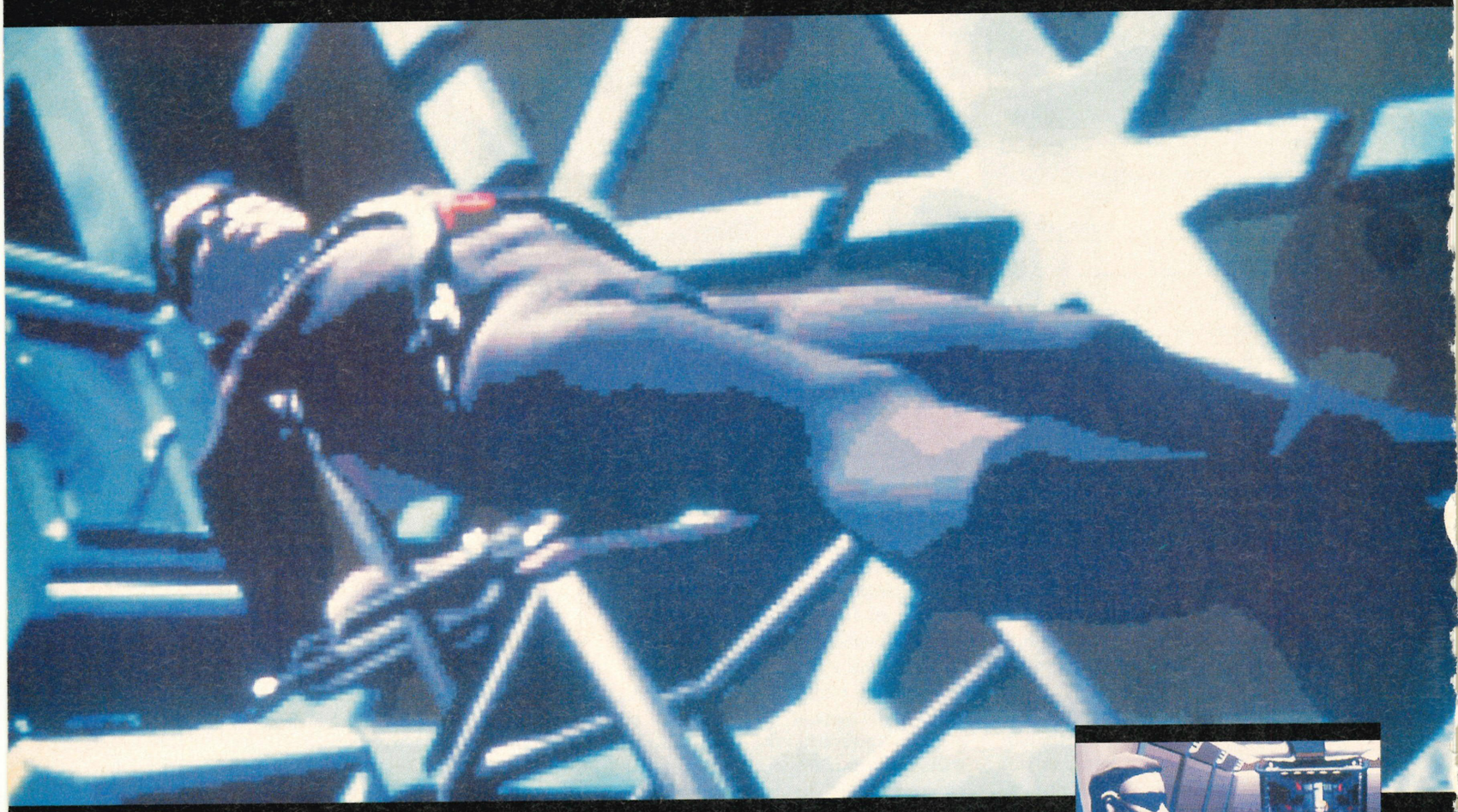
The Lion King is an imaginative and (mostly) interesting translation of the film. The sound is good and the graphics are colourful and varied. The animation throughout is excellent.

The main problem with the game is its brevity. Once you've sussed a level there is little incentive to return, and even though the later stages offer a fair challenge, experienced players won't find much in the way of serious obstacles. For everyone else, this is a more than competent effort. It's cheap, colourful, easy to play and very good fun.

❍ **Gordon Houghton**



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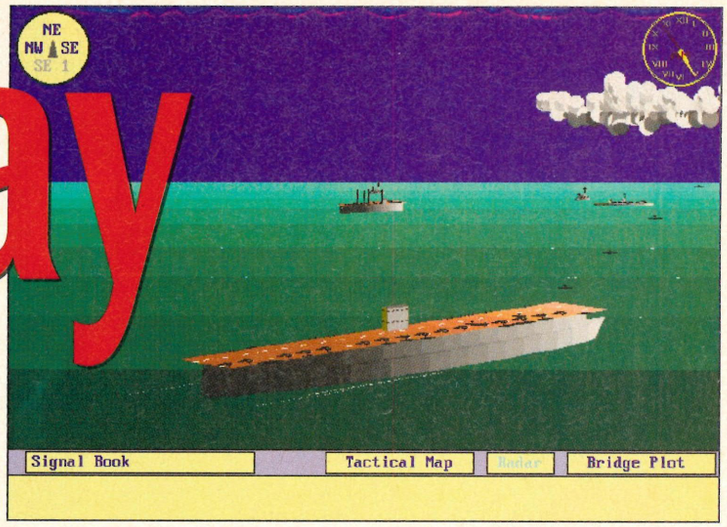
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Midway

Peter Turcan's latest war simulation takes you to the far reaches of the Pacific Ocean. Military strategists and sim freaks should take note.



This is the first in a planned series of games that will eventually cover all the major naval engagements of the Pacific War. The idea, as with Peter Turcan's Napoleonics, is that if you learn one you'll be able to play them all. The only question is, will the series be strong enough to sustain your interest all the way from the Coral Sea to Leyte Gulf, or will the essential sameness of it all prove too repetitive?

Unfortunately I suspect the latter. There's no doubt that Midway is a well researched and impressively detailed simulation, but the game system has been developed little since its last outing in Dreadnoughts. Of course, there are new features (aircraft carriers and radar weren't around in World War I), but the game mechanics — a turn-based system in cycles, orders constructed like building blocks from a signal book etc — are essentially the same.

> "Midway does become more and more absorbing as you get into it, but you will need a lot of patience."

Fog of war

The turn-based system now looks clumsy and old-fashioned. It worked satisfactorily in the Napoleonic battles because the battlefields were small and all the slow-moving units were more or less visible the whole time. But a characteristic of Midway was the blindness of the opposing forces, especially the radar-less Japanese. This means that there are long periods of inaction as you wait for reconnaissance reports, and while this simulates the fog of war extremely well, it's also downright frustrating. To speed things up you might be tempted to increase the cycle time from six minutes to half an hour, but if the enemy should happen to find you in that time you could be sunk, literally. SSI's Great Naval Battles II, which re-creates Guadalcanal, is played in real-time with a compression option. This is infinitely better and much more flexible.

Take a good look

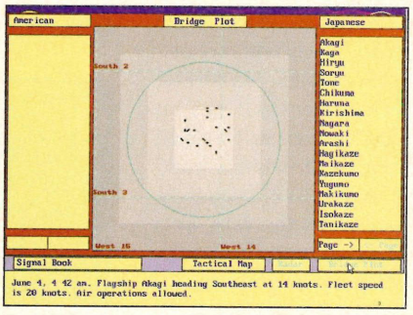
Some features have remained more or less unchanged since the days of Waterloo and Austerlitz.

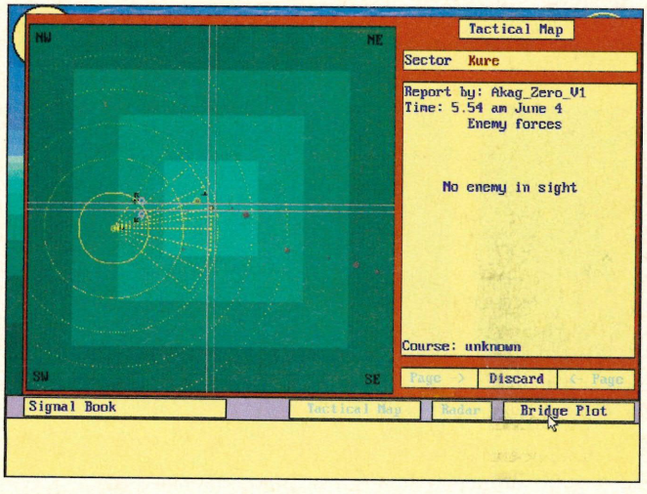
Thankfully you no longer have to type in the commands, but the options to 'look north' or 'look south at...' are still there. Why? Surely if you want to look about in this day and age you should just be able to scroll, but there's little to see anyway, apart from some poor and needlessly time-consuming animations of aircraft taking off and landing.

This is a map-based strategy game, and not about close quarter action. Decision-making takes place on top-down 2D maps, and I would question the necessity of returning the player to a laboriously redrawn 3D view at the end of every cycle.

On the positive side, Midway does become more and more absorbing as you get into it, but you will need a lot of patience. Overall, even long-time fans of the Turcan system may find themselves a little disappointed.

❍ **Simon Shaw**





Top right: this is the main screen, to which you are automatically returned at the start of every move. Squadrons of planes are assembled on the deck of the aircraft carrier ready to be launched. Escort destroyers loom behind.

Left: the tactical map. The yellow circles are range bands emanating from our own task force. Purples and green circles represent reconnaissance reports. Midway is the large black dot in the central square.



TECHSPEC

5

RATING

For hard-core Turcan fans only.

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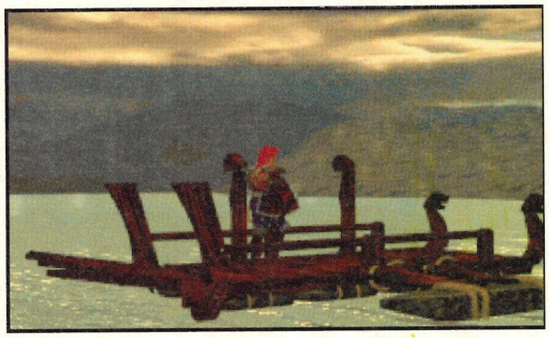
Publisher:	Turcan Research
Price:	£39.95
Contact:	(0171) 625 8455
Minimum PC:	33 MHz 386, MS-DOS 5.0
Minimum memory:	2Mb
Minimum graphics:	VGA
Sound:	Sound Blaster

Dragon Lore: The Legend Begins

Cryo's splendid looking adventure has been eagerly awaited. Now it's here though, is it Dragon Cor! or Dragon Bore?

Have you ever noticed how nearly all adventure games have the same storyline? It's the classic underdog theme: the unwitting hero versus the evil tyrant. In most cases the main protagonist is (or thinks he is) an orphan, and when the game begins he's completely unaware that his real father was actually a noble, wizard, deity, alien or whatever. Or if not an orphan, perhaps he's somehow managed to get himself transported to another world where his earthly skills just happen to fit the bill. Either way, if you throw in some extra elements such as a damsel in distress, a magical artefact or a spot of vengeance you'd come up with a plot which could be applied to practically every adventure.

Dragon Lore's storyline is a little bit different. True enough, the hero is an orphan who discovers that he's really the heir to a castle, and there's also a rather unsavoury villain whose past crimes include the murder of said hero's dad. However, if you were to assume that the aim of the game is vengeance, you'd be wrong. Whilst it's perfectly possible to kill the bad guy, you certainly wouldn't be doing yourself any favours if you did — he's worth far more to you alive than dead. Let me explain.



Get with the plot

Dragon Lore is set in a mythical valley which is populated by all sorts of funny monsters. In the past, the valley was invaded by orcs who went about killing and eating anything that moved, and so a council was formed to combat the threat. Originally, the council consisted of 16 Dragon Knights; men and women who

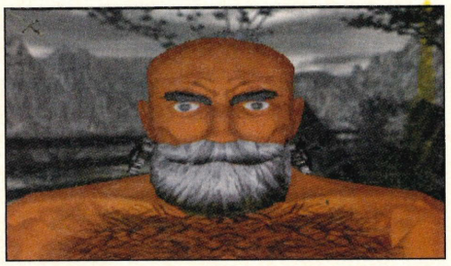
LOCAL HEROES



With a face like that, Haagen von Diakonov just has to be the baddie. He killed your father and is your main opponent.



Axel von Wallenrod, your father, might be dead, but he'll appear to you in a vision. Natty dreads, eh?



Because your father was killed when you were a baby, this farmer agreed to foster you until your 18th birthday. Nice chest wig.

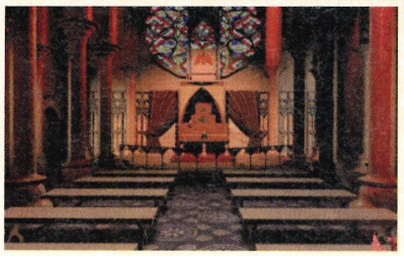
were chosen by dragons to be their riders. If one of the Dragon Knights died or retired, the surviving dragon would choose another partner from the same family in order to keep the council intact.

Although the Dragon Knights defeated the orcs, they became fiercely competitive and rivalries developed. One such feud arose between Axel von Wallenrod (an all-round good bloke) and Haagen von Diakonov (a nasty piece of work) and when Axel died in suspicious circumstances, many suspected that Diakonov had something to do with it. However, nothing was ever proven and he remained a member of the council.

One of Axel's last acts was to ensure the continuance of the von Wallenrod line by placing his infant son in the capable hands of a friendly local farmer. Axel stipulated that his heir must remain ignorant of his heritage until he came of age, whereupon he would be able to claim Wallenrod Castle for his own. And just by coincidence, the game starts with young Werner von Wallenrod's 18th birthday. However, he can't just march into Castle Wallenrod and take over from where his father left off. To succeed Axel as Dragon Knight, Werner must first be voted in by the council. This is no simple task, since it means he'll have to find the family dragon (missing since his father's death), persuade it to accept him as its new rider, recover Axel's dragon armour and secure enough votes to get him a place on the council.

The Dragon Knights come from many different races and their temperaments vary tremendously. Some may offer to vote for Werner if he completes a particular quest for them; others will take his side if he acts with honour and mercy; and the rest will only give him their support if he shares their taste for violence. Dragon Lore has two possible endings: getting voted in and not getting voted in, and the result is dependent upon how Werner acts during the game. I'm not going to tell you which approach is best in case it spoils your enjoyment, but I will say that it's inadvisable to kill off any of the Dragon Knights — Diakonov included — because they can't vote for you if they're dead.





Above: Addlepate the mage will go out of his way to help you in your quest to become a Dragon Knight.

Left: the rendered scenery looks amazing, particularly once you get inside Castle Wallenrod.

So that, in a nutshell, is the plot. The game takes the form of a series of linked quests and puzzles and, depending on which approach you favour, you can opt to use either your brain or your muscle to get you through. However, if you choose to use brute force you will still have to solve the occasional puzzle, and conversely, if you favour leniency you can't avoid getting into a fight every now and again.

Look sharp

Like Cryo's other games (Dune, MegaRace and the forthcoming Lost Eden), Dragon Lore is very good-looking. The scenery is all rendered (which is probably why the game wouldn't fit on to a single CD) and looks like an overcast version of Myst (see Alternatively panel). Some of the locations are stunning, and the action is interspersed by numerous pretty cut-scenes. But there is a downside to all this. Dragon Lore is a first-person perspective game, but it isn't a smooth-scroller like Doom or Ultima Underworld — instead it's a flick-scrolling game like Eye of the Beholder.

This means movement is limited by the constraints of the game engine, and so gameplay can be annoying at times. One puzzle involves travelling down a road which is blocked by a huge spider web. The web is too thick to be cut by a sword, so you have to find another way to destroy it. This means performing a dangerous quest for the owners of an inn, after which they'll reward you by giving you a fireball spell which will enable you to burn the web. Now this puzzle sounds fine on paper, but when you play the game you'll notice that to either side of the offending web lies acre upon acre of flat green fields. So why not walk round the blessed thing? Because the scrolling is limited to the path and you just don't have the option to wander off it.

Mushroom for improvement

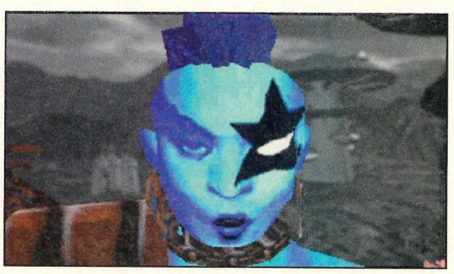
In another section of the game you wander into a mushroom village inhabited by small green pixies (er, no, I haven't been at the ale again). You have to enter two of the mushroom houses, which means trekking around the village until you find the right ones. The dragon-shaped cursor indicates



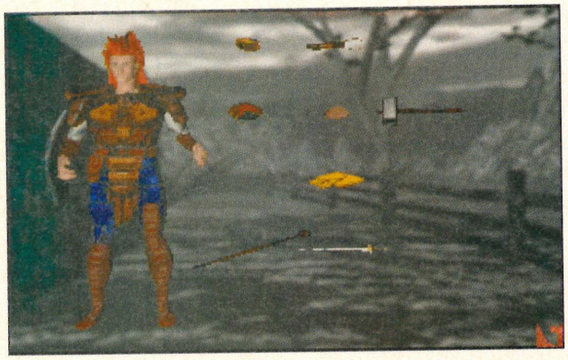
Characters such as the good fairy will help or hinder you on your quest. Her wicked sister might offer an alternative solution.



Dragon Knights come from all sorts of different races and thus vary in temperament. Klaus von Straupzig is a bloodthirsty sort.



Cheldrya Serpentina is another knight, but unlike Klaus prefers a merciful approach. Use brains rather than brawn to get her vote.



Above: the inventory screen. Although Werner appears to be right-handed in the game, you need to place weapons in his left hand before he can wield them.

where you can and can't go, but sometimes you're not allowed to go in a particular direction even though there's absolutely nothing blocking your path. This is both illogical and frustrating.

I've mentioned that the backgrounds look gorgeous, and indeed they do. However, some of the other graphics don't reach such a high standard. Most of the characters and monsters look all right, but they've obviously been superimposed over the backgrounds and fit in with the scenery as well as they should. In addition, the animation doesn't look quite right — the characters move like those old stop-motion monsters from an old Ray Harryhausen movie. Creature Shock it's not.

If a character doesn't take an immediate dislike to you, you can talk to them by clicking on them with the right mouse button. You then get to see their face in close-up, but there seems to be a bit of inconsistency regarding how the characters look. Some faces appear rendered; others look painted and several appear to have been digitised and then coloured. The lip synching is also non-existent — the characters' mouths continue to work long after they've finished saying what they've got to say.



TECHSPEC 7 RATING

Like a curate's egg: good in parts.

Publisher:	Cryo/Mindscape
Price:	£44.99
Contact:	(01444) 246333
Minimum PC:	33 MHz 486, MS-DOS 5.0, mouse
Minimum memory:	4Mb, 8Mb on hard disk
Minimum graphics:	VGA
Sound:	Sound Blaster

CD ONLY

ALTERNATIVELY

Myst
Electronic Arts, £44.95
Rated 9, Issue 32
If lovely rendered scenery floats your boat, try this beautiful and atmospheric adventure. The puzzles are logic-based and very tough, and there are five surreal worlds to explore.



Elder Scrolls: Arena
US Gold, £45.99
Rated 8, Issue 31
This huge role-playing game may not have Dragon Lore's graphics, but its completely non-linear approach gives you the freedom to explore. It will keep you going for ages.



Sound advice

And then there's the sound. Cryo has gone way overboard on the sound effects. As Werner travels through the countryside his footsteps sound like those of a giant striding through a gravel pit rather than a normal-sized bloke walking along a paved road. This is accompanied by obscenely loud bird song, and if you venture near a river or fountain, you'll hear enough gushing water to send anyone running for the toilet.

> "The characters move like those old stop-motion monsters from an old Ray Harryhausen movie."

The result is that you end up turning the sound down until you have to talk to someone, whereupon you have to turn it up again. And that's another problem. With no text option, you have to strain your ears to listen to the dialogue.

Finger clicking good

On the whole, though, the control system isn't too bad. Actions such as manipulating objects, talking to people and fighting were easy to perform. The dragon cursor changes when placed over an important object to show that you can pick it up, operate it or examine it. Likewise, you can interact with a person or creature by right-clicking on them with the mouse.

On the whole, Dragon Lore isn't too bad. I enjoyed the game more than I expected, for although it has its fair share of problems, it's both original and atmospheric. It's also very large, coming as it does on two CD-ROMs, and so you aren't going to be able to breeze through it an a matter of hours — even though the puzzles start off by being quite easy, they become more and more difficult as you progress. I can't say that it's the best adventure I've ever played, but then it's still a lot better than average and once you get into it you'll find it quite compelling. Cryo has plans to release a sequel at the end of 1995, so if the Paris-based company manages to tighten up the game engine and take out the mistakes it should be well worth waiting for.

❍ **Cal Jones**





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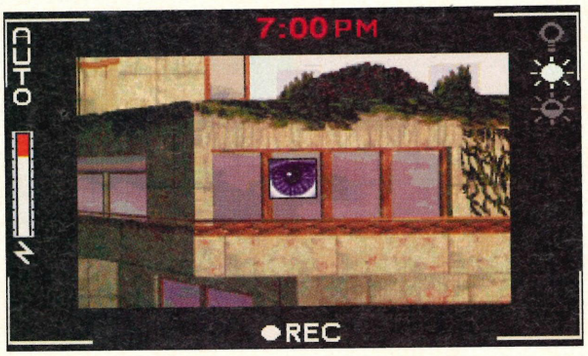
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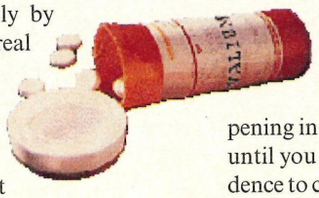


Voyeur

With, sex, violence, drug abuse, incest, Hitchcockian overtones and a plot straight out of Dynasty, no-one is going to accuse Voyeur of subtlety. Not ever.

Above: Des res. All mod cons. Own balcony. Own peeping Tom.
Right: Reed and his sister Margaret in, er, plans for his presidential inauguration.

Voyeur has a lot going for it. It has been a best seller on the Philips CD-i system. It's a detective adventure aimed at adults, with sex, corruption, drug abuse, dashes of lesbianism and incest. It's a 'homage' to the Alfred Hitchcock classic Rear Window, in that much of the action involves you as a peeping tom with a camcorder recording the events taking place over a weekend at Hawke Manor. It is portrayed almost entirely by video sequences with real actors for added cinematic appeal. It has a plot straight out of Dallas, albeit with acting that wouldn't have looked out of place in Eldorado. In short, it's glamorous, looks good, and it has those sleazy plotlines to give it a hard edge.



Peeping Tom

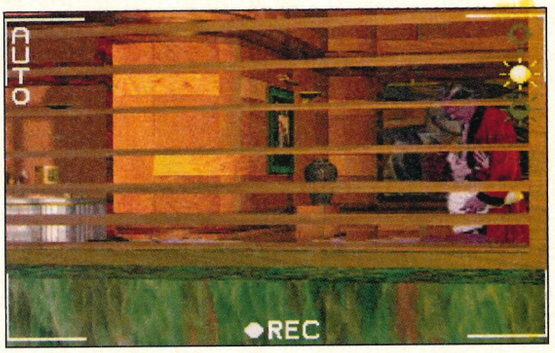
The scenario runs like this: Reed Hawke, a very wealthy, middle-aged American tycoon has decided to run for president. He has a suitably dysfunctional family, made up of femme fatales, ne'er-do-wells and spivs, each of whom appear to have a specific grudge against him and strong motives for wanting him out of the presidential race.

Below: daughter Jessica and dad Reed talking eco-politics.



They are all invited to Hawke Manor for the weekend, ostensibly to help Reed consider his future as a president-in-waiting, but in fact to get them all under one roof so that you can see what a bad lot they all are.

You are placed in a building opposite with your camcorder primed and ready to roll. In the course of this weekend, you must train your camera on events happening in Hawke Manor and record them until you have built up enough video evidence to convict Hawke as a murderer or a would-be murderer.



Herein lies Voyeur's main problem. If you let your tape run through until the end of Sunday evening, you'll see Hawke finally organising the murder of one of the family members. You do a spot of filming, the tape goes off to the police and Reed Hawke is arrested. This is one way to 'win', but it's an unsatisfactory outcome simply because it's inevitable — you haven't deduced or detected anything as such. In order to win properly, you should really try to identify the intended murder victim *before* they get bumped off. Send them the videotape and they'll stop Hawke in his tracks. However, if you send the tape to the wrong person, it'll all go horribly wrong — though in a rather entertaining fashion. But you can complete Voyeur very quickly without really doing anything.

Arresting gameplay

Although the plot changes each time you play, so that you could start all over again and see at least some new scenes from the Hawke family's frenetic weekend, once you've realised what sort of clues to look out for, you'll find it easy to win, and of course it's still inevitable that you can complete the game and have Hawke arrested.

In truth, Voyeur is about watching various members of the Hawke family do mildly rude things to each other — it has little to do with solving a puzzle.

❍ Christina Erskine



All tease, all flirting and no action.

TECHSPEC 5 RATING

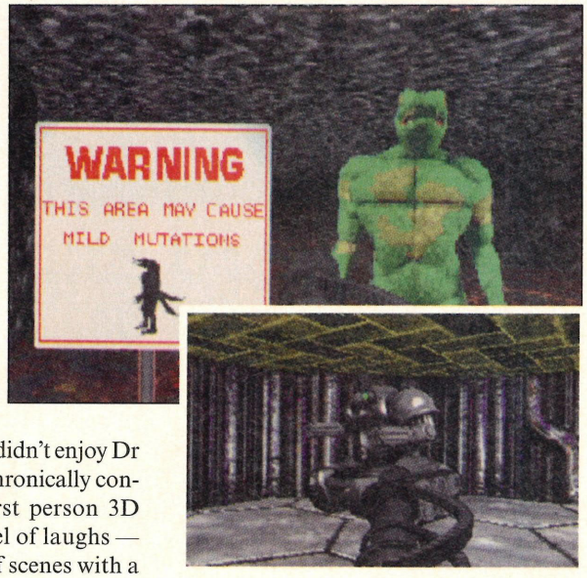
Publisher:	Interplay
Price:	£39.99
Contact:	(01235) 821666

CD ONLY

Minimum PC:	386, 486 reco,CD-ROM drive, mouse
Minimum memory:	8Mb
Minimum graphics:	256 colour VGA
Sound:	GUS, Sound Blaster, Pro Audio

The Fortress of Dr Radiaki

Is B-movie humour enough to save the world from the evil Dr Radiaki?



The year is 1963, and special agent Matt Banner (no, seriously) is on the case of would-be global dictator Dr Radiaki. According to the pompous tones of the newsreader at the start of the game, "The words Radiaki and radiation start with the same letters. US Intelligence is suspicious." I think that about sets the tone for the day.

But I'd be lying if I said I didn't enjoy Dr Radiaki. Despite being a chronically conventional approach to first person 3D shoot 'em ups, it is a barrel of laughs — combining hilariously naff scenes with a truly appalling plot.

So bad, it's good

Dr Radiaki almost makes the 'so bad it's good' class. The bad guys can best be described as, er, uniquely animated, you pick up syringes for health points and the whole game oozes delightfully OTT gore.

There's only one catch. I'm not sure I'd find Dr Radiaki anywhere near so funny if I'd had to pay for it. The joke wears very thin after you've belted your twenty-fifth cigar-smoking Cuban mercenary ('Madre de Dios, Senor!'), sneaky ninja or oversized rendered rat over the bonce with a baseball bat. It does get very repetitive.

And the 3D implementation is also pretty rancid. The character moves badly, it's impossible to aim accurately, and (bar the odd unusual scene) the settings are bog standard rectangular 3D mazes with the obligatory pixellation problems.

Dr Radiaki is funny enough, and bad enough, to keep me playing far longer than I expected. Given the the way these things go, it'll probably be hailed as a minor classic of 'game noir' in 50 years time.

Right now, it's good for a giggle if you've got money to burn — but don't waste your time if you're really after a gripping, high-tech all-action 3D adventure. As unfortunately, Doctor Radiaki isn't it.

❍ **John Bennett**





A very sick puppy indeed.

TECHSPEC RATING **6**

Publisher:	Merit
Price:	£34.95 (floppy) £39.995 (CD)
Contact:	(0191) 385 7755
Minimum PC:	386/33
Minimum memory:	4Mb
Minimum graphics:	VGA
Sound:	Sound Blaster, Roland

CD ONLY

Sim City 2000 (CD)



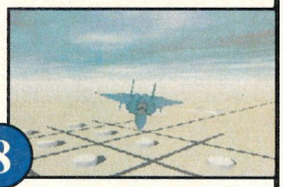
Maxis
£49.99, (0171) 490 2333
Technical Info:
486, 4Mb RAM, SVGA, mouse
First reviewed:
Issue 29, Rated 9

9

The CD version of the classic city builder game is almost identical to the disk version, but comes with an additional set of scenarios which were originally sold separately. You can't go far wrong with this addictive game, but you might want to wait for version 2 (next spring) which includes the Urban Renewal Kit.

CD ONLY

F-15 Strike Eagle III (budget)



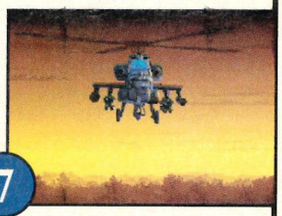
Powerplus
£16.99, (01276) 684959
Technical Info:
286, 640K RAM, VGA, mouse
First reviewed:
Issue 16, Rated 8

8

Released in 1992, F-15 III hasn't aged too badly and remains a good, solid flight sim with plenty of emphasis on combat. Not quite as good as its contemporary, Falcon 3.0, F-15 is nevertheless a competent game and includes a head-to-head option. Good value.

CD ONLY

Gunship 2000



Powerplus
£16.99, (01276) 684959
Technical Info:
286, 640K RAM, CGA, mouse or joystick
First reviewed:
This Issue.

7

Until Virgin releases KA-50 Hokum, Gunship 2000 remains the only decent helicopter sim on the PC. This is remarkable considering the game was released in 1991. It's a heavyweight sim which still manages to be accessible, and includes an excellent mission builder.

DISK ONLY

Dune II (budget)

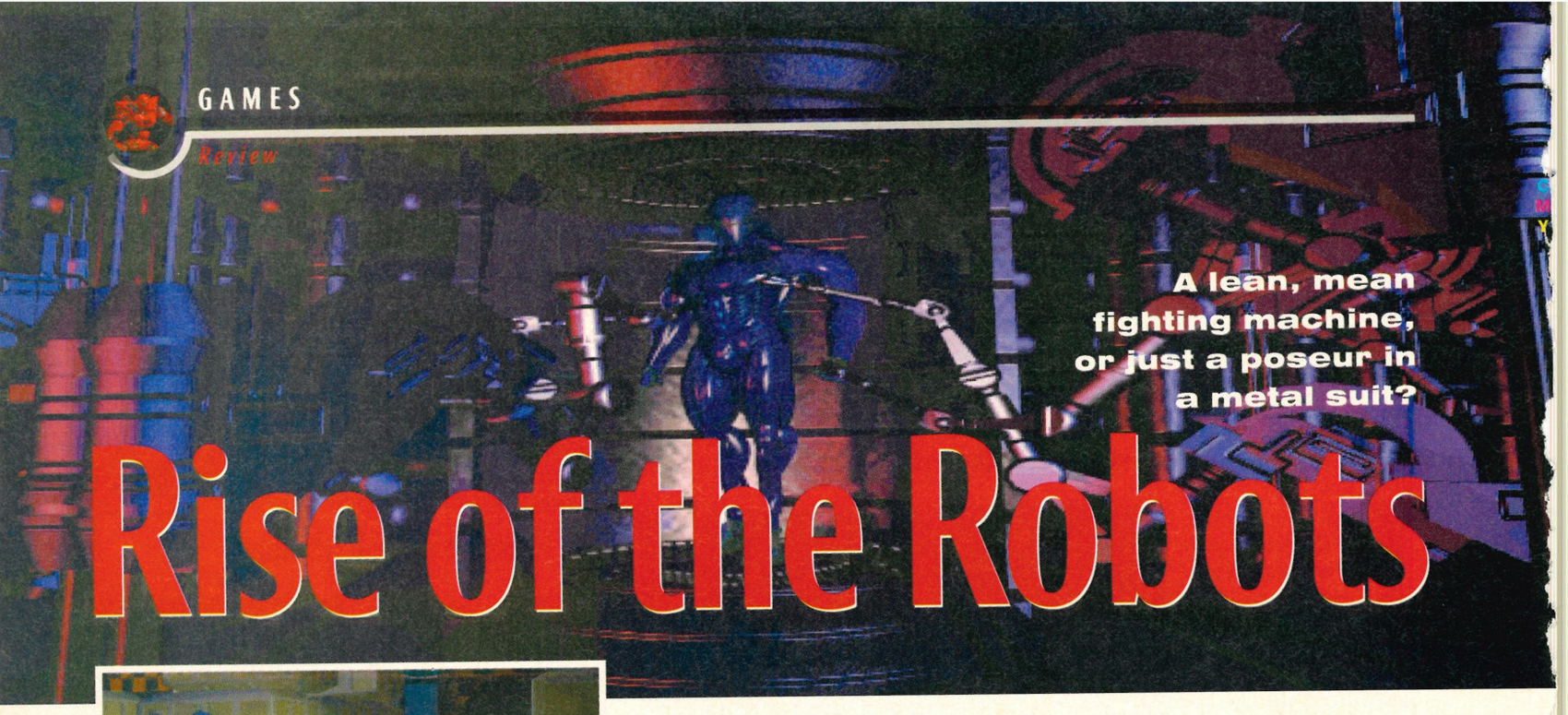


Hit Squad
£14.99, (0161) 832 6633
Technical Info:
286,640K RAM, VGA, mouse
First reviewed:
Issue 16, Rated 7

7

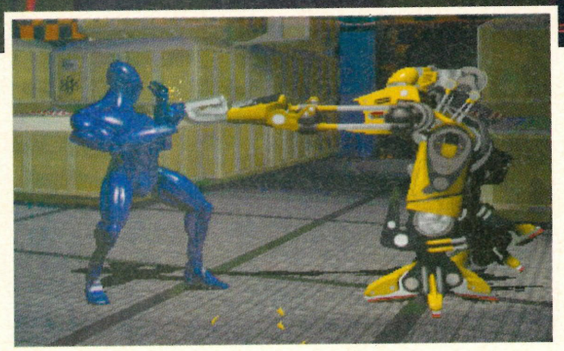
A Civilization-style strategy game, Dune II is set in Frank Herbert's desert world of Arrakis, and you can command either the Harkonnen or the Atreides of the books, or a new family, the Ordos. The aim is to mine spice, but it involves lots of strategic combat with your rivals. Engrossing stuff.

CD ONLY



A lean, mean fighting machine, or just a poseur in a metal suit?

Rise of the Robots



Above: Clang! Thunk! Sorry, but knocking flakes of paint off an oversized and heavily-armed shopping trolley is just not my idea of massive excitement.

If looks were all that made a great fighting game, Rise of the Robots would be king of the heap for many a year to come. Quite simply you won't find a better looking beat 'em up in any department. From the animation and detailing of the rendered fighters themselves, to the backdrops, the cut-scenes and the extended introduction, there's nothing that comes close to it.

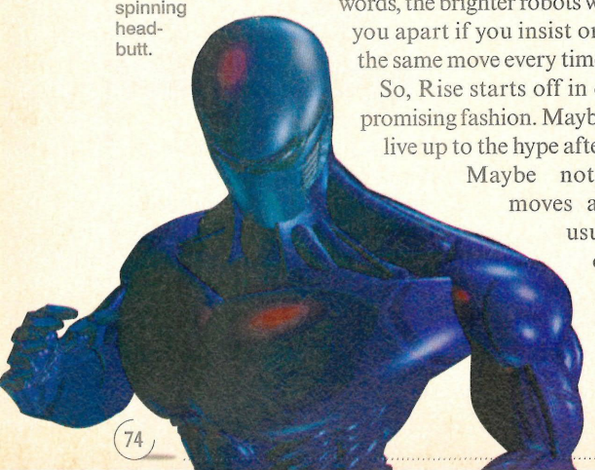
And to give it its due, Rise of the Robots moves just as well as it looks — even with all that heavy-duty rendering. In action, the response time is sufficiently quick to give a decent cut 'n' thrust feel to the fighting as you work your way through the six metal opponents.

What's more, the game's AI means that the computer-controlled opponents not only have different attributes, but they also get to learn from your moves. In other words, the brighter robots will take you apart if you insist on using the same move every time.

So, Rise starts off in quite a promising fashion. Maybe it will live up to the hype after all?

Maybe not. The moves are the usual set of high kicks, low punches, flying kicks and so on, plus a rather sparse choice of special moves for each character. These, it has to be said, are not startlingly original: the Supervisor's melt and insect moves are the high point of the day. But even though 'melt' is supposedly the first time morphing (all very Terminator 2, this) has been used in an action sequence of a game, it's just not that big a deal after you've seen it the first time round.

Far right: Honest, I'd have no problems taking out the sentry robot ... if I had any better moves than a naff shoulder charge and a spinning head-butt.



Punch drunk

From there, things go from bad to worse. If this were a boxing match, Rise of the Robots would end up counted out in round three. Round one, you discover that not only are the special moves uninspiring, but you can't jump over your opponent — as you can in, say, Street Fighter 2, Mortal Kombat, Body Blows or any other beat 'em up worthy of the name.

Round two, you start to realise that Rise lacks real beat 'em up atmosphere. The press release reports "non-violent gameplay". But in a beat 'em up? Surely the whole point is to flatten your opponents one after another.

You see, the problem with Rise is that since it's about robots, there's no blood (just metal shavings). It's just not the same. Whether it's right or wrong, people want, and expect spine-ripping, Mortal Kombat-style cartoon nastiness from a beat 'em up. Rise of the Robots is just tame.

And the KO in round three? The painful control system. A PC keyboard is a lousy way to have to play a reflex-based game — especially two-player games, which are well-nigh impossible without triple jointed fingers or an extra long keyboard.

That's not Rise's fault, of course, but the joystick support (or lack of it) is. I tried an assortment of sticks with no response whatsoever, then tried a Gravis Gamepad (if anything was going to work on a beat 'em up, this would). It worked OK, apart from the minor inconvenience that the special moves were impossible to conjure up . . . not good.

Oh yes, and to add insult to injury, the sound keeps dying out mid-fight. Apparently, there's going to be a patch disk made available for the early copies with this problem. Thanks.

Out for the count

What can I say? Rise of the Robots is certainly the prettiest beat 'em up on the PC street. It also does a fair impression of a competent combat game. So if you're one of those people who has to have the latest big-name beat 'em up, then go buy it.

Personally however, I'm not impressed. I'd bet my last beer token that a fair chunk of the time and money that went into Rise was spent creating the intro sequence and the cut-scenes. The thing is, who needs them? That same time and effort could have been spent elsewhere in the game, making it play better for instance, rather than just look rather good.

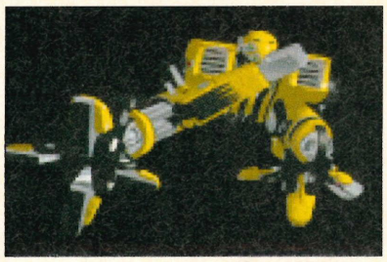
All in all, Rise of the Robots really doesn't justify the hype that has been



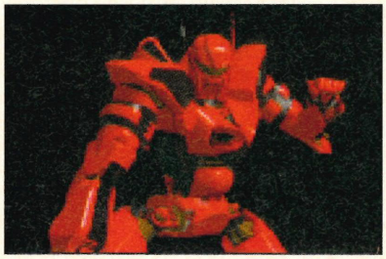
MUGGERS ANONYMOUS . . .



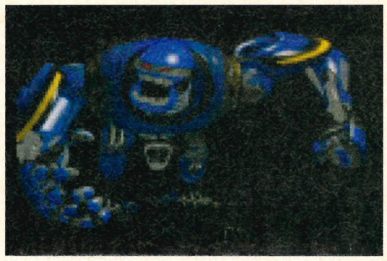
Cyborg
See that Cyborg? That's you, that is. He's an assassin, he's very fast on his feet, oh, and he's blue.



Loader
Er, why am I fighting an overgrown fork-lift truck? The loader is slow and lumbering, but very strong.



Sentry
Big, fast and not short in the brains department, the sentry tries to turn your tactics back on you.



Builder
Called Prime-8 (ho, ho), this ape-like robot is very dumb, but middlin' fast and hugely powerful.



Crusher
The one with the extensible arms (another original idea . . .) the Crusher learns very quickly and its sole aim in life is to trash other robots.



Military
Looks mean as hell (what with all the spikes and polished chrome stuff) and moves like greased lightning, but the military droid is actually not half as hard as he thinks he is. Get the first power punch in and you can finish him off with a couple of low blows.



Supervisor
Like the T1000 in Terminator 2, only with womens' bits. The Supervisor morphs into a puddle if you ask her really nicely, or does an impression of a bug if she gets angry.

attached to it. Especially as it has glaring problems that directly affect the gameplay.

I'd feel distinctly shortchanged if I'd gone out and spent hard cash on what I feel amounts to little more than an average beat 'em up with pretensions.

❍ **John Bennett**



Looks good, fights like a sponge.

TECHSPEC RATING **6**

DISK & CD

Publisher:	Time Warner
Price:	£45.99 disk, £49.99 CD
Contact:	(01604) 602800
Minimum PC:	486SX/25
Minimum memory:	4Mb
Minimum graphics:	VGA, SVGA
Sound:	Sound Blaster

Fantasy Fest (CD compilation)

Mindscape
£44.99, (01444) 246333
Technical Info:
386, 2Mb RAM, VGA, mouse
First reviewed:
Issue 40



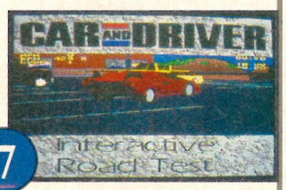
6

None of the SSI titles which fill this CD are particularly inspiring (with the possible exception of Stronghold, a kingdom builder game), but you do get four games for the price of one: Fantasy Empires, Dungeon Hack, Stronghold and Unlimited Adventures.

CD ONLY

Car and Driver

Hit Squad
£14.99, (0161) 832 6633
Technical Info:
386, 640K RAM, VGA,
First reviewed:
Issue 16, Rated 8



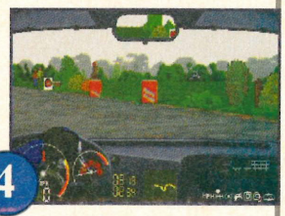
7

Car and Driver allows you to test drive 10 dream cars including the Lamborghini Countach and Ferrari F40. You can take them for a spin on anything from a drag track to a shopping mall car park (yes, really), and while it isn't a racing game, you can race against the clock. A good serious sim for real car enthusiasts.

CD ONLY

Rally (budget CD-ROM)

Europress Software
£19.99, (01625) 859444
Technical Info:
386, 4Mb RAM, VGA
or joystick
First reviewed:
Issue 28, Rated 4



4

This 35-stage Rally falls halfway between a serious sim and an arcade racer. It's certainly ambitious, but the jerky animation, poor graphics and crude sound let it down. It is at least challenging, but progress can be frustratingly slow. Could have been so much better.

DISK ONLY

Ultimate Body Blows

Team 17
£29.99, (01924) 385903
Technical Info:
8086,512K RAM, CGA
First reviewed:
This issue.



6

Not much different from the original Body Blows (Rated 5, Issue 25) except that there are several new characters and a new turbo mode which speeds up the game. Both gameplay and graphics are decidedly average and the keyboard controls are awkward so you really need a joystick. Best in two-player mode.

CD ONLY



Menzoberranzan

Crazy name, crazy game? No. It's just SSI venturing once more into well-trodden role-playing territory.



How many more dungeons do you want to explore? How many more times do you want to swing a sword or send a lightning bolt through hordes of evil demons? How many more weapons, suits of armour, outfits, scrolls potions and magical artifacts can you bear to collect?

If these questions have been bothering you recently, Menzoberranzan is unlikely to alleviate the problem. The fact that it's as beautifully crafted and brilliantly complex as any comparable role-playing game on the market is almost irrelevant — it's still just another game in which you wander around, collect objects, wield magic and chop some poor fiend to pieces. It contains nothing particularly innovative (why don't we ever get to play the demons guarding the labyrinth?), but it makes reasonable use of the available technology to create an atmospheric role-playing yarn.

> **"The game's diversity isn't limited to its monsters, objects and magic."**

Menzoberranzan who?

Enough of this moaning. You probably want to know who — or what — Menzoberranzan is. Menzoberranzan is a subterranean city which lies in the Underdark. The Underdark is home to the evil Drow Elves (elves with ink-black skin and white hair), and is normally a place where sensible cardigan-wearing folk wouldn't venture for a million quid. Unfortunately, the Elves have captured some of your friends and dragged them below. Your task is to rescue them, a journey which inevitably takes you to down to Menzoberranzan itself.

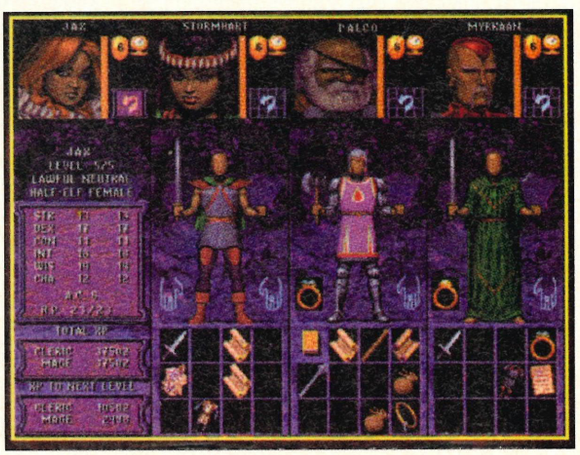
Fired up and ready to go

The action begins in standard fashion, albeit with smart rendered graphics in the intro and character generation sections. Once you've created a party (or selected the predefined alternative), you start the game with a simple mission above ground, to put out a fire.

This gets you accustomed to some basic combat and object manipulation techniques, and shows off the concise, intuitive control system. This is similar to the innovative interface designed for the Ultima Underworld games, because it allows you to move around by clicking with the mouse in the viewing window. For keyboard diehards, plenty of keyboard shortcuts are also catered for.

The fun starts here

The real fun begins once you've satisfied the simple requirements for entering the Underdark itself. The exploration area is huge, combat with over 30 kinds of opponent is fierce and sometimes genuinely frightening, and there are enough traps and tricks to make you careful with every step



you take. Your answer to these obstacles is a standard array of weapons (the usual swords, axes, maces, spears, bows, and so on) and an outstanding selection of over 90 spells.

The game's diversity isn't limited to its monsters, objects and magic. You begin with two characters, but can quickly increase your party to four, dropping and adding people at intervals thereafter. Some characters are really useful only for specific tasks; others can stay and grow with you until the end, assuming you haven't let them die along the way.

Tough challenge

Menzoberranzan has too many good features to list in detail here. However, in addition to those already mentioned, you also get an automap (with personal annotations which you can also print out to keep as a hard copy reference), digitised voices and sounds, a scalable viewing window, a well-structured control and object manipulation system, a strong and varied bestiary, a thorough and interesting manual, and even the ability to levitate and fly. Everything contributes to what is apparently a tough and lasting challenge.

So why have I only awarded it a six, instead of the higher mark it so far sounds as though it deserves? Because, essentially, it's just another tired old dungeon hack.

There are plenty of frills, sure enough, but you know exactly what kind of action you're going to get right from the very beginning. Wave after wave of good and bad characters; lots of gruelling hand-to-hand combat and magic against increasingly tough enemies; flashy special effects; nasty surprises and maps, maps, and even more maps . . .



Indeed, the component parts are impressively done, but they all add up to a pretty stale experience. Playing Menzoberranzan is almost like reviewing a list of elements you've seen time and again in other games, but with the occasional novel twist.

If, like me, you're growing heartily sick of mapping yet another smelly old dungeon, or rather tired and bored of formulaic combat and encountering seemingly endless hordes of the same old AD&D characters, and of conversations conducted in hackneyed RPG-speak (which uses 30 irritating words where ten ordinary ones will do), Menzoberranzan is bound to disappoint you.

If, on the other hand, you're new to the genre or you're perfectly happy to play yet another RPG the like of which has been seen countless times before, go out and buy it. What it does, it does well.

❍ **Gordon Houghton**





A competent role-playing slog.

TECHSPEC 6 RATING

Publisher:	SSI/Mindscape
Price:	£44.99
Contact:	(01444) 246333
Minimum PC:	386, Double speed CD-ROM
Minimum memory:	4Mb
Minimum graphics:	VGA
Sound:	All major sound cards

CD ONLY

LucasArts Classic Collection (compilation)

LucasArts
£29.99, (0121) 606 1800
Technical Info:
286, DOS 3.1, VGA, mouse
First reviewed:
This issue



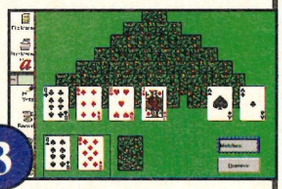
8

This collection of golden oldies includes the Secret of Monkey Island, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, Loom, Zak McKracken and the original Maniac Mansion. They may no longer be the most sophisticated adventures around, but they'll all run on a 286 and it's a good opportunity to buy yourself a piece of gaming history.

DISK ONLY

Premier Collection: Windows Card Games

VCI
£9.99, (01923) 255558
Technical Info:
386, Windows 3.1, mouse
First reviewed:
This issue



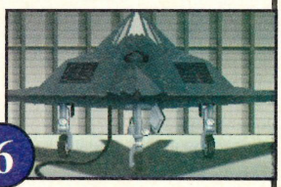
3

Ultimate Blackjack, Golf and Pyramid are the three card games in this package. Both Golf and Pyramid are a different form of games like solitaire. This is a rather poor effort and for what you're getting, even at this low price, it just isn't worth wasting your money on.

DISK ONLY

F-117A Nighthawk (budget)

Powerplus
£16.99, (01276) 684959
Technical Info:
286, 640K RAM, VGA, joystick
First reviewed:
This issue



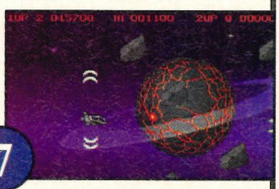
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The follow-up to the popular F-19 Stealth Fighter (released before anyone knew what the plane was to be called), F-117A is almost five years old. It's a good solid sim, but due to the nature of the plane it's far from exciting — you spend most of the game sneaking around in the dark rather than dogfighting. Fine for what it is.

DISK ONLY

Project-X

Team 17
£19.99, (01924) 201846
Technical Info:
25MHz 386, 2Mb RAM, VGA
First reviewed:
This issue



7

This horizontal scrolling shoot 'em up may look a bit old fashioned now (it was released on the Amiga over a year ago), but its tremendous playability more than makes up for this. Good sound effects add to the excitement, and there's a wide variety of weapons to use.

DISK ONLY

NASCAR Racing



After success with IndyCar, Papyrus unveils a mean machine from the stock car world.

What makes Nascar different from just about every other PC racing car bar its own predecessor, IndyCar Racing, and the venerable MicroProse F1GP? Racing detail, pure and simple.

I don't mean in terms of the graphics so much, but the car set-ups, handling patterns and so forth — and the planning required to get the best out of the game.

This may not appeal to you if you're after a quick burn, a few shunts and the ego-boost of thrashing the living daylights out of your chosen car. You can treat Nascar like this if you want, but it's a waste. And you'll never win a race, I guarantee it.

Nascar takes quite time to get into, but then you're likely to be playing it far longer than your average arcade racer. Sure, there are preset car configurations. But, you need to tweak everything — from gear ratios to tyre pressures — honing both your skills and the car set-up to perfection to be even vaguely competitive in the nine track championship. This is what a racing sim should be about.



Far right: eat wall, sucker! God, I love this sort of game. If only it had a chainsaw . . . Below: stock car racing with in-car and external views, plus action replays even the Nascar custom Paint Kit is thrown in.





Black flagged

The funny thing is, though, when I first loaded Nascar in standard VGA, texture-mapping and all, it was rather a disappointment. Off-hand, I can't think of a better looking driving game, but it still feels rather dated. Why, I'm not exactly sure. Maybe the latest flight sims and space games are spoiling us — whatever the reason, I'd almost forgotten how grubby and jagged standard VGA can be in a sim.

But never fear, Super VGA is here! Nascar runs in SVGA. Nascar looks *glorious* in SVGA. Unfortunately, Nascar plays like a total lemon in SVGA.

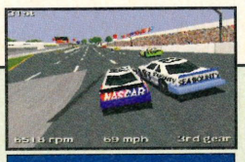
To be fair, Papyrus makes no bones about the game's system requirements for full SVGA, but even so this is asking a bit much: I dredge up a Pentium 90 with 8Mb of RAM and a quad speed CD, and I still need to turn off game options to avoid jerk-o-vision. . . surely not?

The moral of this story is that normal mortals like you and me can kiss the SVGA option goodbye. Unless you happen to be very rich indeed, don't expect Nascar to look any different from IndyCar Racing.

Personally, I don't have a problem with that. IndyCar Racing was an excellent game in its day. Nascar is a good game today. I'm disappointed that it doesn't offer a great deal more than its predecessor, and Daytona USA it's not.

But Nascar is tough, looks and drives realistically, and it has a working multiplayer option. It also has one other hugely attractive feature: in these days of overpriced, thin on gameplay CDs, Nascar is cheap. The price of £39 for this sort of long-term gameplay is hard to argue with.

❍ John Bennett

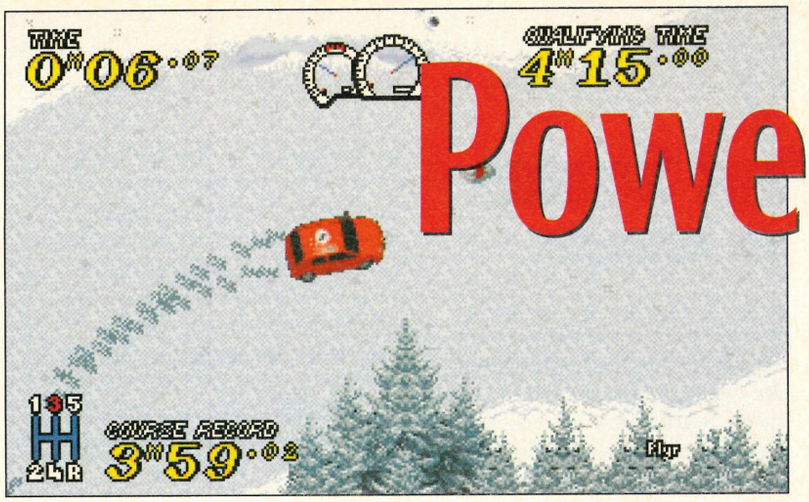


TECHSPEC RATING 7

Slow off the grid, but good value.

CD ONLY

Publisher:	Virgin
Price:	£39.99
Contact:	(0181) 960 2255
Minimum PC:	486/25
Minimum memory:	4Mb
Minimum graphics:	VGA, SVGA
Sound:	Sound Blaster



Power Drive

Fancy yourself as the next Louise Aitken-Walker? Drive yourself to distraction with US Gold's arcade rally game.

I hate driving, me. I used to enjoy it when, many years ago, I owned a Morris Marina so battered and rusty that it didn't really matter if I hit anything. But then I had a bad experience with a souped-up Sierra, a dodgy throttle and a densely fogged, pot-hole ridden Oxfordshire B-road and my enthusiasm dived out of the passenger door, never to return.

So Power Drive was a bit of therapy for me. The mud, the tension, the unpronounceable Finnish drivers and the spectator accidents — just the thing to get me back in the driving seat, I thought. But no. Power Drive doesn't quite manage to capture the spirit of rally driving. It succeeds admirably at catching the spirit of your dye-cast Matchbox toy collection, but real cars? Absolutely not.

This is largely due to the top-down view, since being so far removed from the action means you're equally far removed from the atmosphere. It's a bit like playing with your big brother's Scalextrix, only it's not so much fun.

Bum steer

And as for steering, don't ask. Now I might be a tad 'challenged' in the co-ordination department, but trying to manoeuvre an inch-long jalopy around a series of hairpin bends is not the easiest thing in the world. Suffice to say that I spent much of the game with my bonnet wedged firmly in the hedge.

Of course, if you do get the hang of it, Power Drive isn't so bad. In single player mode you race against a computer controlled opponent, which is pretty tough because the computer car isn't being driven by someone who can't tell left from right, whereas yours is. Two player mode is, therefore, much more satisfactory all round.

Mind you, I forgot to mention that you're also racing against the clock. If you fail to meet the qualifying time (probably because of that aforementioned bonnet-tree interface problem) you do not pass go, you do not collect £200 and you don't get to move on to the next stage. Luckily there's a save game feature with Power Drive.

In addition, there are also bonuses to collect, should you be skilful (or lucky) enough to steer your car over them. Bonuses include extra time (a goody) and cash. Cash allows you to repair all the damage you've inflicted upon your unfortunate motor, and if, by some miracle, you survive unscathed, you might even be able to afford an upgrade to a faster, shinier car eventually.

At the end of the day, Power Drive is competent without being inspiring. It's all right for idling away the odd 10 minutes or so, but I doubt it'll keep you occupied for much longer than that. Try before you buy, if possible. And no, I haven't got over my driving phobia. Not yet, anyway.

Cal Jones









Average arcade racer.

TECHSPEC 5 RATING

Publisher:	US Gold
Price:	£29.99
Contact:	(0121) 606 1800

DISK & CD

Minimum PC:	386SX, MS-DOS 5.0
Minimum memory:	1Mb
Minimum graphics:	VGA
Sound:	Roland, Sound Blaster, Gravis

ADVERTISEMENT

AVAILABLE FOR
IBM PC AND
PC CD-ROM
NOVEMBER 1994

COMMAND ADVENTURES: STARSHIP

SELECT A PATH TO UNIVERSAL CONQUEST.



PUBLISHER: MERIT SOFTWARE
DESIGNER: TOM LIMA
SYSTEM: MS-DOS
THEME: STRATEGY
HD REQ.: 26 MB
PLAYERS: 1
COMPLEXITY: AVERAGE

Space conquest games are frequent releases in the software market. Until technology permits humans to actually fly in outer space and trade or fight with other civilizations, game companies will continue to look to the future for source material. Elite was one of the first games of this nature many years ago. It combined the mystery of space flight simulation with the strategy and tactics of trading and world building.

Most recently, Origin's Privateer combined Wing Commander flight simulator technology with commerce and conquest themes. Merit's new game takes a fresh approach to space conquest. It uses detailed graphics and impressive sound effects and music to emphasize the exciting action both in outer space and on planets. With continuing advances is computer game technology, gamers can hope to see additional releases of titles like this one, each more impressive as time goes by.

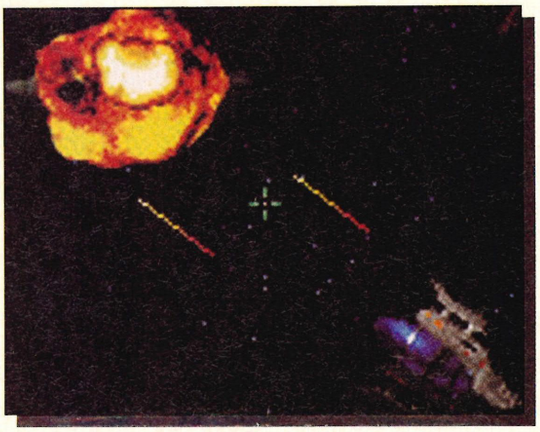
Command Adventures: Starship is infinitely replayable because players design and outfit their ships and choose their course through the game's universe. There are 50 planets and a number of starbases in the main map, all of which the player must uncover in the course of the game. At the outset, only the initial starbase and its surrounding space are visible.

The player takes the role of a starship commander who must conquer all 50 planets and make the universe safe for space travel. This is a massive effort that will take many trials before success.

Game play shifts between two major arenas — ground combat and space combat. The interfaces for these screens and the setup screens are intuitive, but **Starship** has a steep learning curve. Many players may get frustrated in their first space battle because they run out of weapons and can't return to the bridge of their vessels. Perseverance, multiple weapons and easier combat choices make a big difference in advancement in the game. It will take a few games to understand exactly how to outfit a starship with a shield, engine and weapons in order to succeed in combat and keep costs low.

The designers really should have supplied more than 2 million credits for initial purchases. This amount buys just enough equipment and crew members to survive a couple battles and conquer a planet. The weapons and revenues generated from these first few conquests will be enough to upgrade the starship and start off the pattern of combat-upgrade-combat. **Starship** is like other strategy games (notably **Syndicate**) in which players get stronger gradually, but at a reasonable pace.

The game begins on a starbase. There the fledgling commander must choose a vessel, add a shield and engine, arm it with weapons and hire and outfit six crew members. From the bridge of the starship, the commander selects a planet, starbase or open area of space as a destination. The action then switches to an overhead combat view.



Both surface and space combat have a similar feel. The object of space combat is to cycle through ship weapons to destroy alien vessels while maintaining a decent speed and shield strength. Action is smooth and fast, so players must have full command of the interface. Some experimentation is necessary.



Surface combat is different because an away team must take over all areas of the map and also set up an isolation grid that fully establishes ownership of the planet. It is easy to scroll around the maps of the planets' surfaces and find all of the enemies. The player must dispatch his away team members to different parts of the surface to pick up additional weapons for survival and dispatch the aliens. The ground combat is more interesting than space combat or boarding alien ships because the surface graphics reflect the environment of the planet, from arid to frozen.

Indeed, the graphics, sound effects and music contribute a great deal to the enjoyment of **Starship**. Various animations interrupt the action to represent navigation, planet landings, etc. The interface screens and combat screens are highly detailed and reflect the expanse of the game—which might explain the 26 MB **Starship** requires on a hard drive.

The music is especially noteworthy. Hamilton Altstatt, who dubs himself "The Thin Man," contributed a sometimes ethereal, always entertaining score that enhances game play more than it intrudes.

Starship is an enormous game the type of which gamers have never seen before from Merit Software. The variety of elements (12 civilizations, 36 starship weapons, etc.) offers a lot of diversity and personalization from the start. **Starship** is completely open-ended so that the player might choose any commander, crew and weapons and have a good chance to succeed.

The copy protection uses that hard-to-read brown no-copy paper, but that and the steep learning curve are the only real drawbacks. **Starship** has a lot of depth and enjoyment to entertain fans and newcomers to the genre. Are you ready to take command?

— Russ Ceccola

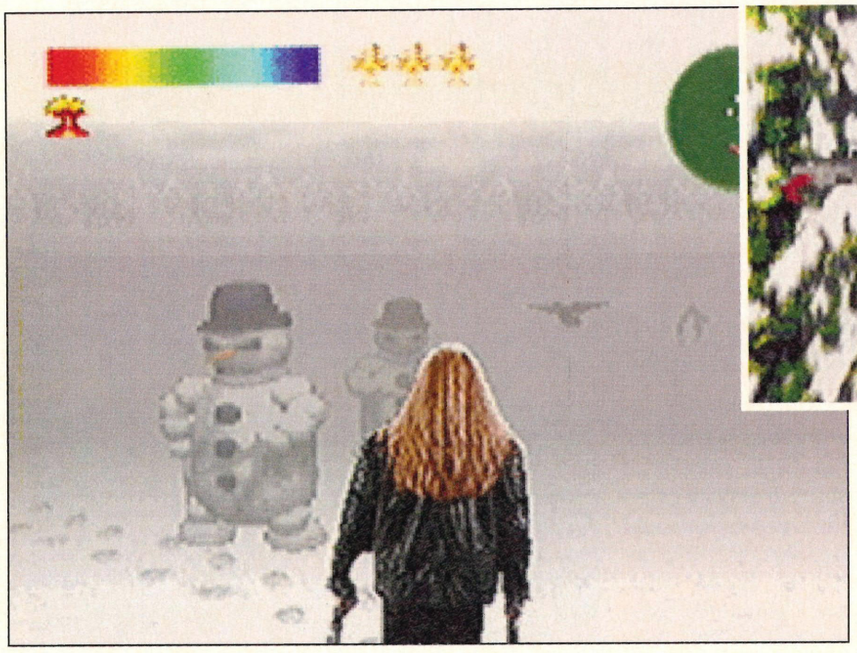
GRAPHICS	SOUND	PLAYABILITY	REPLAY VALUE	OVERALL
85%	85%	80%	90%	85%

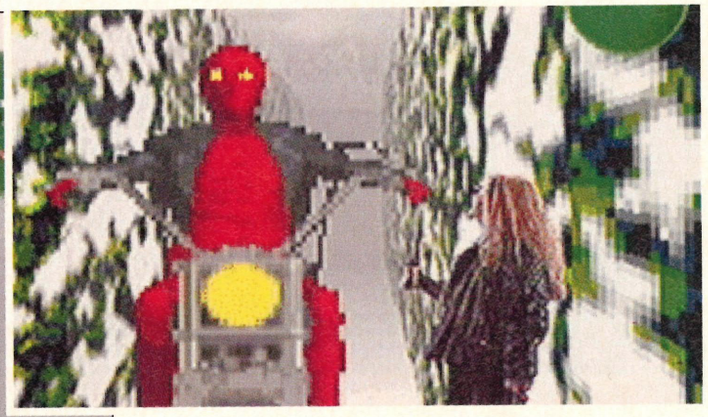
Electronic Games

Reproduced with permission from Electronic Games, USA.

With a gun in each hand and a mean pair of shades, Virtuoso does its best to put big hair on to the PC games map.

Virtuoso





Above: there I was, minding my own business, and I nearly get run down by some big red biker geezers from Mars.

Above left: I'm dreaming. This is not happening to me. Oh, the indignity of being chased by a *snowman.*

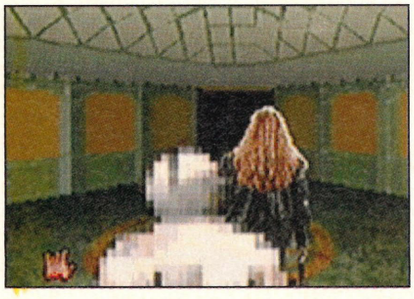
Doom clones are ten a penny these days: Quarantine (Doom in a taxi), Heretic (Doom with crossbows), Corridor 7 (Doom without the fun), and Dark Forces (Doom with stormtroopers). Virtuoso is a sort of sub-Doom, with long hair.

The gameplay is simple in the extreme. For your money, you get three scenarios (Haunted House, Marine and Mars), each with eight levels of mind-blowing tedium.

Old as the hills

Move the character around this 3D(ish) world, find the exit to the next level, shoot the monsters who crawl, fly or lumber towards you, pick up the power-ups, consult the map and so on. Meet bigger monsters. Throw a few smart bombs . . . on and on, ad nauseam. Years of planning went into the gameplay — I don't think.

Below: lookout ! He's behind you. The tension mounts to unbearable levels . . .



Still, you can get away with simple, old-as-the-hills gameplay if the implementation is any good. Unfortunately, Virtuoso can't even manage that.

Moving the main character around is a trial. It's difficult to work out which position he's going to swap to next, and, no, you can't see much ahead of you when he's standing mid-screen. You can't move and shoot, you can only crouch and spray bullets in a clumsy, random arc, which slows the game down enormously. If you want reflex-damaging arcade action, you won't find it here. Visually it's a mess. Our hero's variable positions are crude and unhelpful: if you can imagine a 'flick-character' in the same way we used to have 'flick-scrolling' then you'll get my drift. A good sprite would have been a better start than this crudely digitised character — with or without the mean pair of shades.

Thai dyed suicide ...

There are some nicely designed settings, I'll give it that. But I'd have thought most people would have got the general idea that flat, single level 3D games were old hat, in the post-Doom 1990s. Up close the whole thing pixellates like a mathematician's acid trip, and the animation of the monsters (the birds in particular) reminds me of some third-grade shareware.

Even the sound is a let-down. Whether you like the various tracks by 'Thai Dyed Suicide' is up to you. If it was up to me . . . Anyway, it would help if the sound effects worked properly. I had no luck whatsoever with anything other than a true Sound Blaster — so watch out if you happen to have a clone card.

I've tried hard. I've sat up nights sweating to find one good thing to say about Virtuoso. I can't. The best thing I could say about it is some of the later levels do get to be quite tough, bringing the game to life a little. But, oh boy, the fun you have to go through to get there . . .

This is just one of those games that starts off disappointing and never gets any better. Come back Dr Radiaki, (see page 73) all is forgiven. Even Gametek's Corridor 7 is starting to look entertaining. Well, bearable, at least.

John Bennett



Sub-standard in almost every respect.

TECHSPEC 3 RATING

Publisher:	Elite
Price:	£39.99
Contact:	(01952) 55852

CD ONLY

Minimum PC:	486/25
Minimum memory:	4Mb
Minimum graphics:	VGA
Sound:	Sound Blaster

Commander Blood

Is the sequel to Captain Blood a psychedelic journey across the dark reaches of space, or just a clot on the landscape?

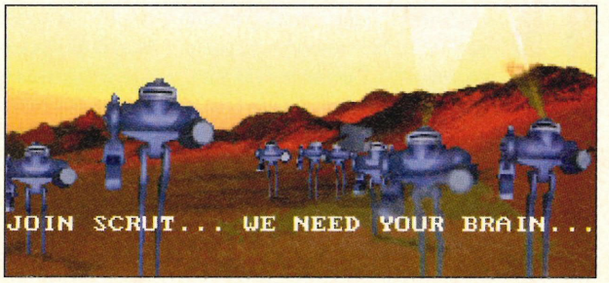
We've all heard the saying "one step forward, two steps back". Well, this is my perception of the CD-ROM based games market at the moment. I believe that the excitement the programmers are feeling at being able to include full-motion video and masses of stereophonic sounds in their games, sometimes suppresses their primary objective; that of creating a game worth playing. Sure, there are exceptions like Magic Carpet and Ecstatica, but until things settle down you are going to find games such as Commander Blood on the shelves — a game packed with pretty pictures but totally devoid of substance.

Step back in time

The story itself is for once not about world domination or money as these things have already been achieved by one Bob Morlock, founder of the Kanary Corporation on the planet Corpo. It turns out that Bob Morlock is dying, but before he shuffles off this mortal coil he wants you, Commander Blood, the most perfect cyborg ever created, to journey back through time and experience on his behalf the sensations of the Big Bang — the creation of life itself.

So much for the story. What about the game? Well, there's nothing new on the gameplay front. Man, or should I say cyborg, flies around a starmap visiting alien planets and solving puzzles. That, though, is where all similarity with other games ends and the uniqueness of Commander Blood takes over. Unique in the sense that this is the only game I have ever come across in which you don't really do anything, apart from occasionally flicking a marble to interact with one of four control consoles in your spaceship.





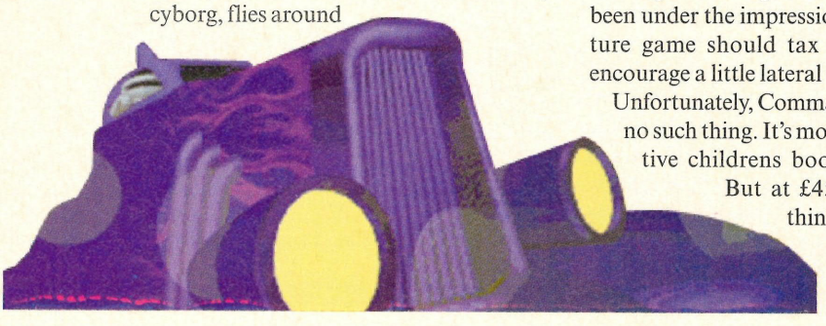
Above: weird and wonderful aliens can be found on their equally weird and wonderful planets.

Automatic

Everything else in the game is automatically done for you. Fly to another planet? No problem! Flick a switch, autopilot engaged, watch some nice spiralling lights and, hey presto, you arrive at your destination. Missed a clue in the game? Don't worry, Honk, your on-board computer kicks in with some advice and some humerous hints. If it wasn't for the outrageously weird alien species you meet on your travels and the excellent texture-mapped graphics, numbness would set in a lot sooner than it does.

I might be misguided, but I've always been under the impression that an adventure game should tax your brain and encourage a little lateral thinking.

Unfortunately, Commander Blood does no such thing. It's more like an interactive childrens book than a game. But at £45? I don't really think so.



Mike Wigley



Looks nice, but where's the game?

TECHSPEC RATING 4

Publisher:	Mindscape
Price:	£44.99
Contact:	(01444) 246333
Minimum PC:	33MHz 486, single speed drive
Minimum memory:	4Mb
Minimum graphics:	VGA
Sound:	Ad Lib, Sound Blaster, Roland

CD ONLY

PC Review Recommended

We don't give PC Review Recommended awards to many games, but you can be assured that those that do get this accolade will be, in our opinion, outstanding in all areas. A PC Review Recommended award is a guarantee of excellence.

The Recommended scheme

Not only do you have the advantage of knowing that Recommended games are currently the best in their class, but we give you the chance to win a copy of each PC Review Recommended title. We have five copies of each newly Recommended game to give away to the winners of this competition.

How to enter

If you'd like to win a copy of Wing Commander 3 or Panzer General, this month's Recommended games, simply answer the questions printed on the entry coupons and send your entry on the back of a postcard or sealed envelope to PC Review Recommended, Priory Court, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU.

The closing date is February 10, 1995, and any entries received after this date won't be eligible for the draw. The winners will be the first five correct entries drawn at random after the closing date.

All normal competition rules apply — particularly the one about not sending in multiple entries.

THE BEST OF THE LAST THREE MONTHS

Little Big Adventure
Electronic Arts, £44.99
Hopelessly cute, horribly addictive isometric adventure from Adeline Software, the company formed from programmers and artists who worked on Alone in the Dark 1. Gorgeous SVGA graphics, arcade action, puzzles and atmosphere — LBA's got the lot.

Magic Carpet
Electronic Arts, £44.99
Bullfrog's spectacular action game is set in an Arabian Nights-style world where wizards battle for supremacy from the relative precariousness of their flying carpets. The 3D world is breath-taking and the action fast-paced as you kill monsters and dogfight with your rivals.

Transport Tycoon
MicroProse, £44.99
Best described as a cross between Sim City and Railroad Tycoon, this elegant and detailed sim puts you in charge of a transport company. The aim, beat your business rivals and provide the best bus, train, lorry and plane service in the area.

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE

Disk-based games		Rating
The Lion King	Virgin	7
Midway	Turcan Research	5
Power Drive	US Gold	5

CD-based games		Rating
Panzer General	Mindscape	9
Wing Commander 3	Electronic Arts	9
King's Quest VII	Sierra	8
Alone in the Dark 3	Infogrames	8
Death Gate	Accolade	8
Dragon Lore	Mindscape	7
NASCAR Racing	Virgin	7
Cyberia	Interplay	6
Wolf	US Gold	6
Fortress of Dr Radiaki	Merit	6
Menzoberranzan	Mindscape	6
Rise of the Robots	Time Warner	6
Voyeur	Interplay	5
Commander Blood	Mindscape	4
Virtuoso	Elite	3

PC REVIEW PLAYLIST

Christina Erskine



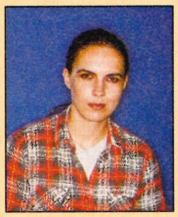
Oh, she's at it again. Our very own SimCity fanatic has been very anti-social of late, thanks to the arrival of SimCity 2000 for Windows, SimCity 2000 CD and, worst of all, the Urban Renewal Kit (previewed page 96). It's a miracle Christina managed to write anything, eh?

John Bennett



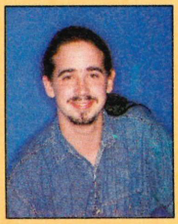
John loves nothing better than a game of Doom, so to keep him happy we let him review Doom-alikes Dr Radiaki and Virtuoso. But being the miserable old git that he is, he decided that neither came up to scratch. Typical. He quite liked NASCAR (page 78) though.

Cal Jones



It's been an up-and-down month for our resident sociopath, what with the exciting Alone in the Dark 3 (page 32), the rather good Death Gate (page 62), the not bad Dragon Lore (page 68) and the, er, not quite so good Power Drive (page 79). You win some, you lose some.

Tony Dillon



Once again, Tony of the lustrous locks has been sweating away over the monstrous, semi-sentient colossus that is our cover disk editing machine. But as always, he has come up with a fine set of demos including Psycho Pinball, Cannon Fodder 2 and Wing Commander III.

— WIN —
Wing Commander 3

(CD only, Pentium recommended)

Answer the question below and send this form (or a photocopy if you don't want to spoil the magazine) to PC Review Recommended, Priory Court, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU, to reach us by February 10, 1995, and your entry will be placed in the prize draw.

Q: Mark Hamill is the star of Wing Commander 3, but what other PC game did he lend his vocal talents to?

A: TIE Fighter ❒
B: Leisure Suit Larry 6 ❒
C: Gabriel Knight ❒

Name .....
Address .....
.....
.....

❒ Data protection: tick this box if you do not wish to receive further information from companies associated with this competition.

❒ I am under 18 ❒ I am 18 or over

— WIN —
Panzer General

Answer the question below and send this form (or a photocopy if you don't want to spoil the magazine) to PC Review Recommended, Priory Court, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU, to reach us by February 10, 1995, and your entry will be placed in the prize draw.

Q: Panzer General was developed by SSI. SSI stands for:

A: Strategic Simulations Inc. ❒
B: Strategy Software Inc. ❒
C: Several Sad Idiots ❒

Name .....
Address .....
.....
.....

❒ Data protection: tick this box if you do not wish to receive further information from companies associated with this competition.

❒ I am under 18 ❒ I am 18 or over

CD-Roms & Shareware from

UTILITIES/GRAPHICS/CAD

●10309 **Magic Desk**,superb menu front end
●10530 **Automenu**, super menu maker
●10517 **Powermenu Plus**, menuing & more! (2)
●10518 **Quik Menu III**, graphical menu maker
10127 **Screen Thief**, grabs any screen
9568 **Explosive!** outstanding screen blanker
9750 **Disk Duplicator**, any format fast!
12259 **Easy Format**, for easy formatting
9854 **LQ**, famous dot matrix print enhancer
12272 **Integrity Master**, anti-virus tool
9412 McFee's anti-virus toolkit (2)
● 9932 **PKLite**,great .exe file compressor
9438 **PKMenu**, front end menu for PKZip etc
●10023 **PKZip\PKUnzip**, file compression utils
9880 **Maxiform**, more disk space formatter
2295 **Envision**, outstanding graphics DTP (2)
●11219 **Neopaint**, great painting\drawing program
●11210 **Neobook**, presentation package & more!
11181 **Circuit Designer** & PC Schematic
10920 **Fractinct**, famous fractal viewer
10751 **Postmaster**, the poster maker
●10764 **PrintPartner**, for banners, signs and calenders
●10634 **Draft Choice**, easy to use CAD system
10647 **EEDRAW**, ideal for electronic schematics
●10699 **PC Draft Cad**, full powerful CAD program
10829 **Dancad 3D**, wire frame graphics
10673 **Flodraw**, produce flow charts\org charts
10673 **Home Plan**, for the DIY guy!
10712 **PC Graphit**, for easy graph production
10608 **Alchemy**, image file format convertor
11232 **Graphics Workshop**,image manipulator etc
CLIPART and Gifs: Numerous PCX image collections and thousands of Gif images - please ring!

DESKTOP ACCESSORIES

9516 **Ample Notice**, appointments manager
11908 **BlacqueBook**, for addresses\tele nos
11921 **Business Calculator**, for the finance man
11934 **Calendar Mate**, calender\scheduler\tickler
8047 **Calendar Keeper**, calendar database
11947 **Dr Memory**, for appointments & events
12207 **Early Bird**, UK calendar\tickler etc
7280 **Time Lord**, UK personal organiser
12077 **Friday**, TSR calendar\organiser
11986 **Organise**, memos, events, appointments

ASTRONOMY\RADIO/COMMS

14508 **ACE**, mapper, ephemeris & database
14534 **Deep Space**, star maps, planets etc
13737 **Night Sky**, star mapper & plotter (2)
13740 **Skyglobe**,high resolution star gazer!
8801 **Amateur Radio Log**
8013 **SuperMorse**, morse tutorial collection
15314 **Telemate** **15301 Eazilink**
●15431 **Odyssey (2)** **15379 QModem (2)**
●15353 **EasyDial**, directory \telephone dialler
15457 **Eazihost BBS** **15483 Sapphire BBS**
15470 **Wildcat BBS (2)** **15496 RBBS (2)**

SPREADSHEETS & STATISTICS

● 1014 **As Easy As V5.5** **1027 Expresscalc (2)**
1131 **Pivot 1092 Onside**, printing utils
1196 **Promatheus**, mathematician's calculator
● 1066 **KwikStat**, comprehensive stats package
3588 **Arcus-Pro II**,top UK stats program (3)
1118 **PC-Stat**, statistical reports program
3601 **Microstats**, fast statistical analysis
3614 **Survey**, for questionnaire analysis
3637 **Easistat\plot**,analysis & graphing (2)
3630 **Mathsplot**, define/plots functions
3633 **Zgraf**, create/print maths graphs
3634 **Simstat**, menued stats analysis
3636 **Confusion & Light**, fractal generator
3639 **Recursive Realm**, fractal system
3642 **Mandelbrot Magic**, generator

DATABASES

● 1820 **DTSearch**, for powerful text retrieval
● 4381 **PC-File V5**, powerful best seller (2)
● 3042 **PC-File V7**,new graphical interface(2)
● 4264 **File Express**, powerful menu-driven (2)
3029 **Fastfile**, fast, small & easy
4251 **DLite**, pop-up desk top database!
4303 **Information Please!** freeform text etc
4368 **Wampum**, dBase 3 compatible database
● 4433 **Zephyr**, Fox-pro compatible database(3)
4212 **Cardex Rotary File**,simple to use
4225 **Data Pal**, ideal list\label manager
4290 **Freeform**, easy data entry\retrieval
4238 **PickDB**, easy beginners database
4563 **Scraps**, super random info manager
4576 **JEPRS**, bibliographic database system
4589 **BIBL**, bibliographic database system
4537 **Research**, evidence\research database

PERSONAL FINANCE

● 5941 **Home Finance Companion UK**, superb!
6058 **Loan Payment Calculator**
6253 **Page Cheque Manager**, home\business
6097 **PC-Budget**, home\business accounts
6279 **Trinity**, UK home accounts
6305 **Personal Portfolio Manager**
5928 **Capital Gainz**, portfolio manager
6292 **Share Genius**, UK share tracker
5668 **Noyes Investment Ledger**
7816 **Wall Street**,investment tracker

GENEALOGY

● 8034 **Brothers Keeper**, V5.1 latest version (3)
● 8645 **Trees II**, proven UK package
8710 **Family History** **8684 Genie Genie**
8216 **Rootsmaster** **8647 Family Ties**
8243 **Family Scrapbook 9256 Cumberland Tree**
8671 **Pedigree**, for pet owners\breeders

HOME & HOBBY

9204 **Knitwear Sweater Designer**, hand\machine
8021 **BABY!** 12,000 names list
● 8723 **Organise!** your book collection
● 8765 **Organise!** your record collection
● 9009 **Organise!** yor classical records
● 9282 **Organise!** your photographs
● 9283 **Organise!** any collection (Windows)
● 8827 **Video Collector** ● **8996 Stamp Collector**
4307 **Club Membership** **8554 Home Contents**
9074 **Birdbase**, for birdwatching enthusiasts
9022 **Matchmaker**, sports league\match maker
9033 **Blazon**, Heraldic design & drawing
8918 **Football Forecaster**, UK pools program
8840 **Punters Pal**, UK racing form analysis
8879 **Golf Performance analyser**
8658 **Cricket Master**, cricket scorer\database
8567 **Meal Master**, recipe database
8151 **Personal Nutritionalist**, diet analyser
8268 **The Better Diet Analyser**
9035 **Foodease**, UK nutrition\food\diet\ recipe database, great new arrival!
8931 **Edna's Cookbook**, cookery database
8932 **Ednas Recipe Collection**, for above(4)
8606 **Book Librarian** **8203 Resume Master**
9217 **Astromart**, astrological chart maker
9230 **Astro**, astrological analysis program
9807 **Book of Changes, I Ching**
9178 **By the Numbers**, numerology
9139 **Personal Tarot** **9126 Mayan Calendar**
8060 **CD-Master**, CD\tape indexer etc
8073 **Coinbase 2.3**, collectors database
8036 **Collector**, collectibles database
8177 **Postbase**, stamp collection manager
8619 **Photo Equipment Database**
8281 **VC Library**, video cataloguer
8138 **Household Register**, home inventory
8853 **Vino:File**, for the wine cellar
8944 **Bible Student**, King James version(4)
8003 **Omnimeal**, meal planning\cooking
8006 **CompuChef**, recipe\meal managemwnt
8007 **UK Lottery Predicter**, for winners!

WORD PROCESSING ETC

2716 **Eagleword**, superfast WP!
2715 **Fred**, Full WP for children
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2717 **BREEZE**, powerful\easy new WP
● 1911 **Galaxy-Lite**, best selling WP
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2080 **KwikWrite**, executive WP
2119 **EDT**, scientific word processor
2808 **Intext**, multi-lingual WP
2821 **RGB-TechWriter**, technical WP
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2418 **Screenplay Formatter**
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2054 **Jorj Dictionary**, (3.5" disk only)
2253 **Readability Plus**, style analyser
2548 **Thesaur Plus**, for elusive words

BUSINESS-ACCOUNTING & GENERAL

● 7241 **MS-Property Letting System**, new
7579 **ProQuote**, UK estimates\quotes (2)
6812 **ZIPO**, UK superb contact manager
● 7618 **ESP**, UK powerful contact mgr (3)
7524 **AIM**, delegated tasks tracker
6617 **AppTRAK**, applicant\jobs tracker
7631 **Perbase**, UK personnel database
7644 **SBase**, UK staff attendance system
6630 **AttendX**, attendance\leave monitor
6656 **Contact Plus**, contact\client manager
6669 **Costbiz**, job cost program
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6890 **Optima**, project management tool
6734 **MT-Tracker**, client\project tracker
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6773 **PC-Mechanic**, workshop repairs manager
6747 **Pay-UP!** invoicing\customer DBMS
6786 **PC-Shift**, job shift scheduler
7007 **Personnel Supervisor**, database
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7033 **Reservation Assistant**, resource manager
6825 **Sales-Biz**, sales tracker
7059 **Service Call Manager**
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7567 **Hotel & Public House inventory**
7683 **Price Tracker**,suppliers\prices\clients(2)
7696 **Plant Maintenance**, equipment & plant (2)
7696 **FAR**, (UK) fixed assets register
6903 **Taskman**, task & project tracker
6916 **Taskmaster**, project manager
6838 **TBS Vehicle Maintenance** system
7111 **Work Queue**, task\project\staff scheduler
7772 **Courier**, outstanding UK mailing database
7748 **Label Magic**, graphic label generator
6643 **Catalogue**, make electronic catalogue
● 5239 **MS-Cashflow** Calculator (UK)
● 4904 **MS-Point of Sale Invoicing** (UK)
● 4305 **MS-Inventory Manager**, & invoicing too!
● 4306 **MS-Hiring Manager**, equipment rental\hire
● 4307 **MS-Club Manager**, Membership & invoicing
● 4308 **Car Sales Manager**, for the car showroom
● 4309 **MS-Vehicle Maint** reminder\mailer\database
● 5005 **Freeway Ledgermaster**, latest version(3)
● 5018 **Freeway Cashbook**, easy to use (3)
● 5031 **Freeway PAYE-Master**,UK flexible (2)
● 5057 **Page Financial Controller**, powerful (2)
● 7891 **Profitability**, accounting & job costing
● 5642 **Invoicemaster**, accounting & inventory

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Smart Accounts, UK for home & business
TopDrawer, superb new drawing program
SmartCat Plus, superb disk cataloguer
MoneySmith, home\ business accounts
Above & Beyond, task scheduler etc
Parity, stock charting\tech analysis
Hi-Finance, menu driven finance tools
PC-Project, critical path mangmnt tool
Wynfields,powerful relational database
Windows Reminder, graphical time mngmnt
Address Manager, addresses\auto-dialler
WinCheck, cheque account manager
Astral Windows, popular astrology prog
Chartist, create org\flow charts etc
Chemical, molecular modelling program
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Mahjongg for Windows
My Diary, combo diary & scrapbook
Winspell, spell checker
Pools Plan, be a winner
Winfract, Windows version of Fractinct
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The Driller, arithmetic drill for youngsters
Snakes, fun sumes for Kids
Tell the Time **Kid Games**

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Maths Castle, arithmetic skills game
● **Word Rescue** **Spellbound**
● **Maths Rescue** **Adventure Maths**
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Flags, of the world plus a quiz
Googol Review, math games compendium
Googol Maths Games, plus test & tutorial
Animal Quest, food chain ecology game
Childrens graphics, drawing & colouring
Mighty Maths, table tutor & test mode

Metric Measurement Tutor
Punctuate, interactive grammar turor
Balloon Speller, three spelling games
Spelling Bee, vocabulary builder
Weekly Speller, spelling tutor,

SENIOR:
Chronos, historical dates\relationships
Calfacts GCSE Physics V4.0
Calfacts GCSE Mathematics (self tutors)
Calfacts Computer Studies
Caltest GCSE Integrated Science
DC1, introduction to DC electronics
DC Circuit Analysis, incl computer circuits
Senior Physics Facts, hypertext tutorial
Algebrax, interactive algebra tutorial
Calculus Tutor **Electronics Tutor**
German GCSE **French GCSE**

MISCELLANEOUS:
PC-AI, tutorial & instruction composer
PREP, question authoring system
Q & A Study, testing\quiz compiler
Quizmaster, create & play quizzes
Testwriter, test writing program
Capworld, geography trivia game
Trivia Quiz, complete your own quiz
DOS Users Guide, great on-line aid
PC-Glossary, computer terms explained
Pc Musician, PC music writer
Pianoman, compile & edit tunes
Noteworthy, write & print music

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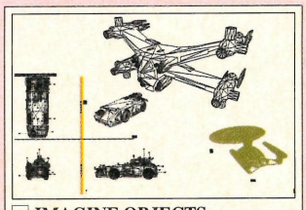
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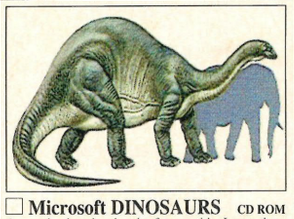
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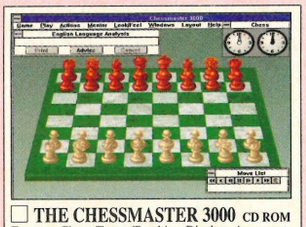
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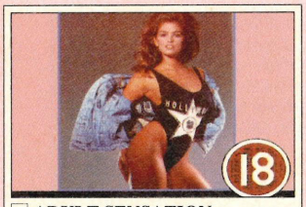
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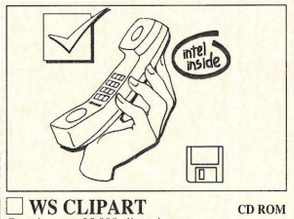
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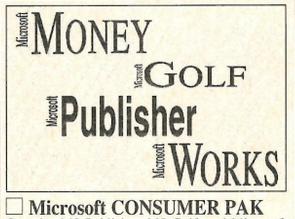
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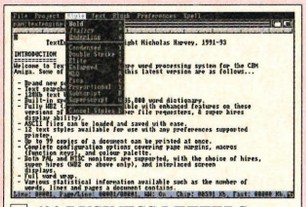
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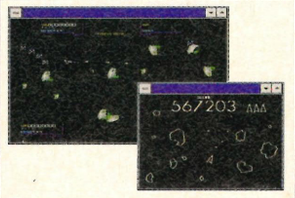
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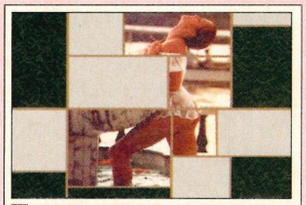
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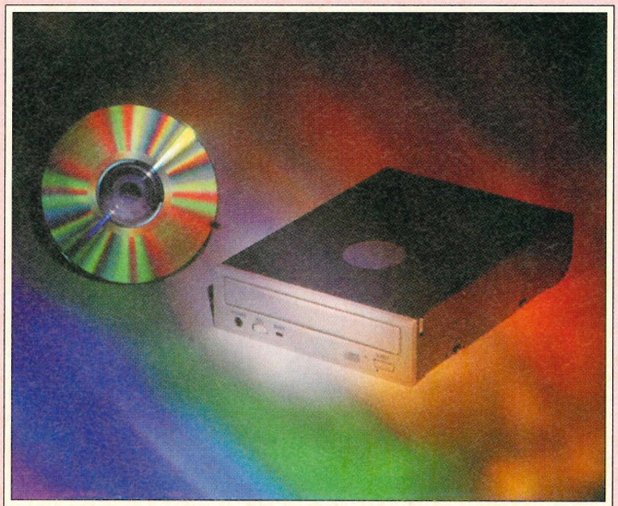
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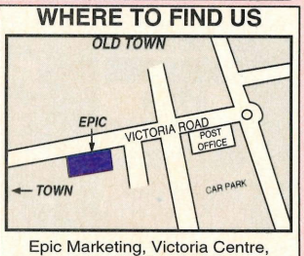
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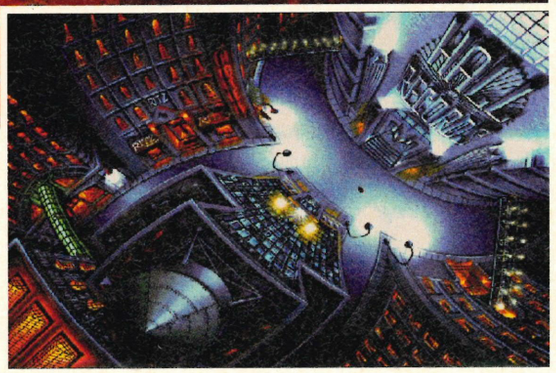
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Noctropolis

It's dark. It's dingy. It's dangerous. Cal Jones grabs her torch to bring you the full walk-through guide to the mean streets of Noctropolis.



Start
To begin with, open door and go through. Get ticket stub (on table). Get notices. Get comic. Go back to shop. Go to porch. Say you have the ticket. Get package. Read comic. Use silver token.

Main Street
Talk to newspaper vendor. Question him on all topics. Offer him the comic in exchange for the paper. Select 'travel' and go to the cathedral.

Outside cathedral
Move fence to get spike. Get wire. Open the access panel on the right statue. Use wire and fence spike. Go inside.

Inside cathedral
Go into the confessional booth and talk to Father Desmond until he gives you the jawbone. Return to Main Street.

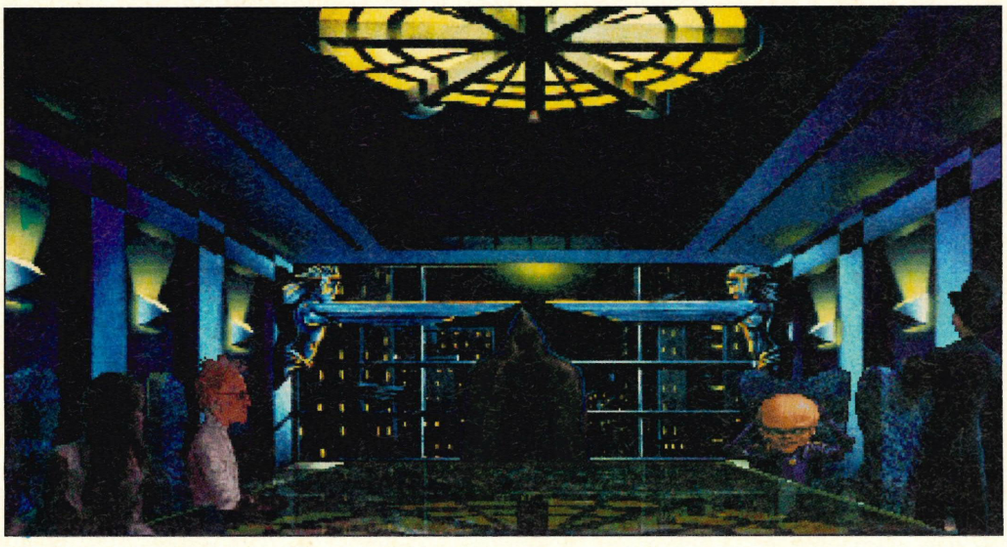
Hall of Records
Enter Hall of Records. Use jawbone. Talk to the clerk about the mausoleum. Go to mausoleum.

Stiletto's apartment
Talk to the door, then to Stiletto. You can't persuade her to join you at this stage.

Mausoleum
Open gate and side door and go inside. Look at the tag on the coffin. Move body. Take key. Use key. Go to coffin.

After the succubus attacks, move the statue. Get the lace and go down the steps. Get the spear from small statue. Move the pillow and look at the diary. Use the spear. Return to the cathedral.

Inside cathedral
Talk to Father Desmond. Look at the altar until you find the bomb. Move the pillow. Get the detonator. Get the chalice and then get the holy water from the font. When the succubus is busy fighting Stiletto, use the holy water.



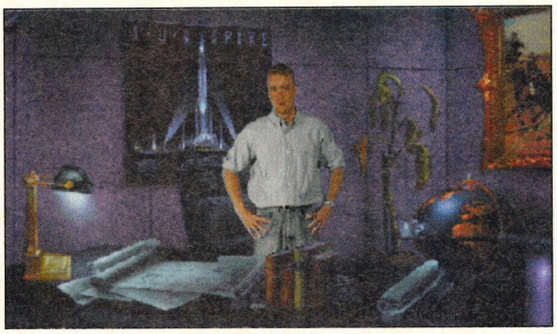
Shadowlair
Examine the pillars until you find the secret compartments. Open them. Get the Dark sheer suit and grenade from one, then the book and Noctroglyph from the other (right of fountain). Go to the Bornick Mansion.

Bornick mansion
Talk to Mrs Bornick and ask about every topic. Go to the Sunspire site.

Sunspire
Talk to the guard until you find out about Sam Jenkins.

Cygnus
Talk to Wanda and ask for some iced water. Tell her that you'll help her with the air conditioning. Got through the door to the right. Talk to Leon. Talk to Stiletto. Move switch.

Go back to the lobby and talk to Wanda. Then go and talk to Sam Jenkins. Ask about everything then get the clock. Return to lobby. Pick up the pass card and when Wanda leaves, go to the lift. Use the pass card and talk to Ms Shoto. Return to lobby and travel to Incarnate offices.



Incarnate
Talk to the guard, then go to the Neon Noose and talk to Drake until he mentions Nunio Schwarz.

Sunspire
Look at the van. Talk to the guard. Talk to Stiletto. Go past the guard and walk to the lift. Move the bricks, then move the lift motor. Get the glass from the bucket and the glass cutter from the ground. Exit, then travel to the Cygnus building. Return to Main Street and talk to the paper vendor about the greenhouse.

Greenhouse
Use the glass cutter to get into the greenhouse. After you've been attacked, use the liquidark grenade. Go outside, get the poster and go to the truck. Get the seeds and quick-grow solution. Go back to the Shadowlair to heal, then travel to Main Street again. Ask the paper vendor about the opera, then enter the Hall of Records and ask the clerk also.

Opera
Ignore the prostitute and go inside.

Observatory
Travel to the observatory. Use the Noctroglyph and go through the gate. Use the seeds and fast grow to make a hole in the wall. go through. The next part requires careful timing so save now. First get the screwdriver. Then walk from right to left, carefully avoiding the beams and get the oil can. Get on to the lift, get the logbook and use the screwdriver and oil. Get the lens. Save again. Then make your way back again. Return to the opera.

Opera
After being captured by Tophat, ask the janitor to help you. Get the knives and a brick. Stand on the trap door and use brick.

In the dressing room, get the make-up kit and jewellry. Move the costumes and go through. Get the screwdriver and use it. Move the valve and get the hose. Outside, talk to the gang. Offer them the knives, then the jewellery to find out where Stiletto is. After returning to the Shadowlair to heal, go back to Main Street and ask the vendor about the butcher. Go to the butcher.

Butcher's
Ask the butcher about sausages and offer him the paper to get some. Go through the left door. Get the hook and move the carcasses. Go down.

Sewer maze
After Dr Macabre has tied you to the table, move the acid beaker and the cart. Get a beaker from the shelf and go through the door. Next, use the beaker to get the acid and exit right.

Go through the fan blades. Get the wheel and use the shard of glass to cut the rope. At this point, go back through the fan and use the rope. Exit right.

Use the acid to cross the water and go through the door. Go through the first door of the catwalk and get the rebar. Go back to the catwalk and use the rebar. Exit left. Use the wheel and get the net. Return to the room where you found the rebar and go through the pipe. Go to the end of the tunnel and talk to the creature. Offer him the make up. Move the pegs in the door until the colours are lined up with the arrows. Return to the Shadowlair and heal.

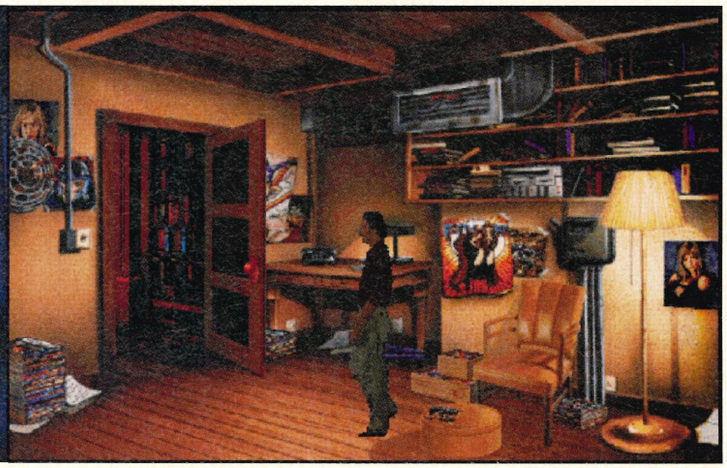
Dream realm
Get the paint and go inside Mr Smiles. Go into the clown's mouth and get the pick. Exit Mr Smiles. Use the pick to get inside the funhouse, then get a match. Go back inside Mr Smiles and enter the tower. Get the torch. Exit. Move screen and go into the thorn forest. Use the match. Get the egg sack and a piece of web. Exit. Go back inside the tower, use the egg sack and get the diamond. Return to the funhouse, use the diamond, move the shaker and get the pepper. Return to Mr Smiles, re-enter the clown head and use the pepper. Get the paint brush. Exit, then use the paint. Go through the door. Use the web and go to the tower window. Move the mat and get the key. Talk to Drealmer. Go to the Cygnus building and talk to Ms Shoto.

Boiler room
Leave the Cygnus building and get a wrought iron shaft from the lamp-post. Use it. Go down through the manhole and open the furnace. Get the broken chair pieces and use them. Go down.

Talk to Whisperman.

Cygnus building
Enter the lift and use the logbook. At the top of the building, use the meathook. Get the duct tape from the stairs. Go up and get the rope. Go up again and get the broom. Go up, go to the landing and use the rope. Then use the sausage. Use the hook. Use the broom and hook. After talking to Flux, use the gold token. Congratulations! You've now completed Noctropolis.



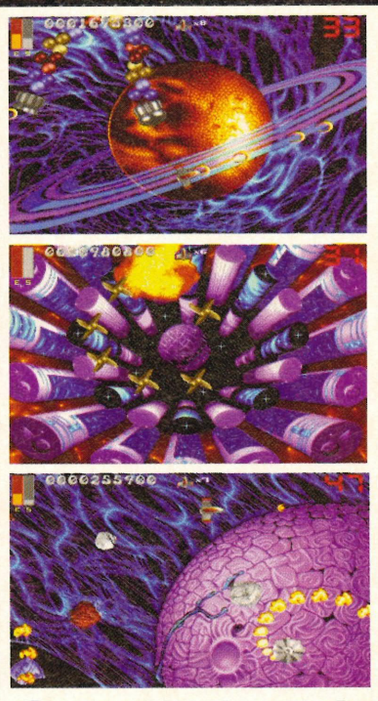


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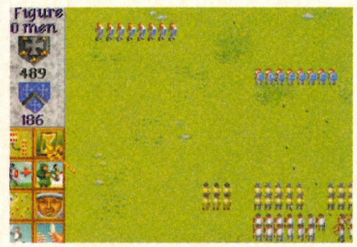
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Lords of the Realm



Crop rotation, castle-building and peasant armies are easy to handle, according to Lord of Strategy Simon Shaw.

First try to increase the size of your population. Concentrate all your labour in food production. It takes time to build up a herd, but you can sustain a medium-sized population on dairy produce alone. Sheep are a luxury early on. Grain feeds the most but takes a lot of labour to produce. One field will be sufficient until your population grows, but it's sensible to keep two in case you lose one to flooding. In harvest season put every spare peasant in your fields. It doesn't matter if you take all your serfs off maintenance and lose a field — you can reclaim it next year. If you're employing the steward he'll take a more conservative view, so watch him. Keep one third of your fields fallow to maintain fertility.





Morale duty

Putting up the tax rate and cutting rations has an adverse effect on morale — don't unless you have to. Buying ale from merchants is an excellent way of raising happiness; increasing rations is a more expensive method. If your morale level drops below 10 you won't be able to recruit troops. Conscripting more than nine per cent of the population in any one turn is a bad idea for the same reason.

There's little point in having a small army of peasants. Save up and hire mercenaries immediately they appear — early on you need every farmer you can get, so pay someone else to do your soldiering. You can only have one company of mercs per army, use them as a nucleus as you build up your strength, adding home-bred troops when you can afford them. When numbers fall too low, detach them from the main body and send them on a kamikaze mission to reduce your wages bill.

The ideal mix of units is archers or crossbows, spears and knights. Screen the archers with the spears and let the enemy attack you. Whittle them down from long range, then when battle is joined, send in your knights. Envelop the enemy line wherever possible for best effect. If you're heavily outnumbered you've still got a chance if there's a marsh on the screen. Go round the marsh until it lies between the armies and the enemy attack will be broken up.

Castles

I prefer to invest in troops rather than castles. Even a small castle is very expensive to build. Pursue an aggressive strategy and fight on enemy territory. This drains your rivals' food supplies, not your own. Keep expanding your border, and when you have to consolidate your conquests, it'll be easier to repair a captured castle than to build one from scratch. Castles should be garrisoned with peasants, not armed soldiers — the exception to the rule.

If you've a big enough army, besieging a castle successfully is only a matter of time. You'll need missile engines to bash a hole in any outer walls, then throw as many ladders as you can against the keep. If the county is too vulnerable or under-resourced to defend easily, demolish the castle (the materials are added to your store), recruit as many peasants as you can and march into the next territory, leaving devastation and depopulation in your wake. If you do want to hang on to the county, try and seize it in a turn when there's a merchant present, so that you can immediately replenish supplies. Otherwise be ready to transport food from one of your other counties.

But there's something to be said for just bashing into the enemy heartlands, massacring peasants and destroying crops without trying to keep all your conquests. As a rule, only keep what you're strong enough to defend, and expand slowly.

Fooling the AI

Finally, there's a flaw in the AI which allows you to get away with a devious sleight-of-hand: if a county is under threat, design a castle (as basic as you like) and give the build order. Now assign no workers at all to it, but place a minimal garrison on the town cross. The enemy will attack and destroy the castle, but unless they've got two armies they won't be able to seize the town cross. When it's your turn, reload the same castle design and give the build order again. The enemy will have to attack it again, and again ad infinitum.

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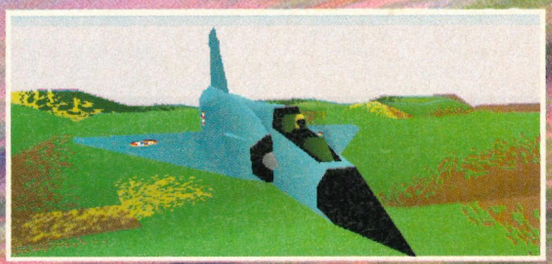
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Quarantine

Iain Pattinson of Meopham, Kent, has discovered a cheat which gives you an infinite amount of Reaper ammo. To achieve this handy power up, use up all your current Reaper ammo, select the Punisher and then tap at the Ctrl key. While you are tapping the Ctrl key, tap on the Alt key at the same time. Keep trying until the end figure disappears from the Reaper counter, and if you continue pressing Ctrl the figure should keep rising.



Colonization

Luke Wilson of Surrey has a tip for Colonization which allows you to play all four nations in the same game. Start a new game and on the country selection screen, click at the bottom of the screen beneath Spain. You should find you've selected the country of "Spring". Accept this, then change your name to the name of your choice. To get rid of the red tinge on screen, just save, quit and then reload.



Zool 2

An anonymous person has written in with the following cheats for Gremlin's platformer. On the options screen, press Esc and type in the word PHONEBOOK, then press Esc again. Now start the game. If you press 0 during the game, you will be able to skip the level; pressing 3 whilst jumping increases the height of your jump and pressing 1 will skip straight to the bonus level.



Lemmings

Erik Larsen of Denmark has a useful tip for the original Lemmings. Instead of entering a level code, type BILLANDTED, then while playing, press 5 on the numeric keypad to complete the level with all your lemmings intact. Rather takes the fun out of it, doesn't it?



Eye of the Beholder

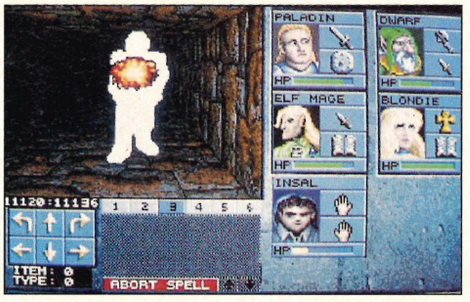
DANGER!

Nigel Donnelly of Ireland has some useful hacks for the first game of the Beholder trilogy. Use a hex editor (eg Norton or PC Tools) and remember to back up any files (in this case, EOB.EXE) before you change them.

For invulnerability, search for the line:
2A 46 08 26 88 47 1B
and replace with:
2A 46 08 90 90 90 90

To walk through walls search for the line:
A9 01 00 75 05
and replace with:
A9 01 00 EB 05

For super weapon search for the line:
8B 46 0A 26 29 (first occurrence only)
and replace with:
33 C0 90 26 89



Dungeon Master

Gina Smith of Liverpool has found some undocumented spells in this classic 3D role-playing game:

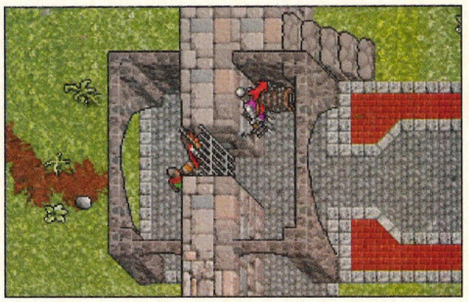
ZO	*Open doors*
OH KATH RA	*Lightning bolt*
FUL BRO NETA	*Shield against fireballs*
VI BRO	*Shield against poison*
DES IR SAR	*Darkness*

Ultima VII part 2: Serpent Isle

Christopher Thomas has been hacking his way through Serpent Isle, and has a couple of cheats for all those lazy people who can't be bothered to play the game properly. Hmph. When starting the game, type SERPENT PASS instead of the usual SERPENT. Then press F3 a couple of times while waiting for the game to load. Begin a new game and press F3 again when the blue loading screen appears.

Once the game has started, press F3 (again!) to bring up a map of the Serpent Isle. You can now teleport anywhere by clicking on the relevant part of the map. If you teleport to the southern end of Claw Island, you'll find a cave which contains several boxes — open these and you'll find the Serpent Armour, whole suits of magic armour and other goodies.

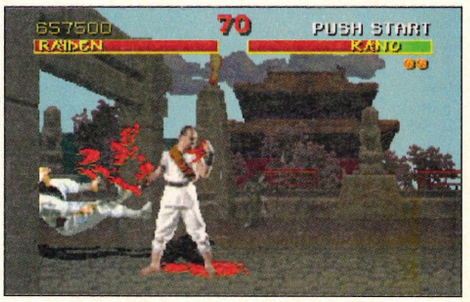
You can also press F2 to bring up a screen in which you can make the Avatar invincible, among other things.



Mortal Kombat

Robin Hickman of Shrewsbury has not been playing by the Queensbury Rules. The enterprising chap has discovered a cheat for Virgin's beat 'em up, and it's really very simple. On the options screen, press F10, hold down the Caps Lock key and type the word DIP. With a bit of luck a cheat screen will appear and you'll be able to alter the following variables:

0	*fatalities*
1	*gore*
2	*music*
3	*advert*
4	*fatalities*
5	*freeplay*
6	*announcer's voice*
8	*other voices/fatalities*
5	*freeplay*
6	*announcer's voice*



Do not attempt the cheats marked with the Danger icon unless you have access to a file editor such as Norton or PC Tools and you are confident that you know what you are doing. PC Review will not accept responsibility for damage to data caused by trying out these cheats. Remember: always back up your files before editing so that you can restore the originals if you need to.

DANGER!

HELP WANTED



I am completely stuck in Simon the Sorcerer. I have just become a wizard and don't know what to do next. Looking back at past issues of your wondrous mag, you mention shopping lists and goblin villages. So can you tell me where is the fabled goblin village and how do I get into it? And where is the shopping list and how do I open the fridge in Calypso's cottage?

Ben Wallis, Andover, Hants

Answer: The goblin village is right next to the dwarven mine. Once you get there, go in, look at the stone and take the shopping list from beneath it. Take this list to the shop and then when a basket appears outside, climb in. This should take you into the village itself. As for the fridge, don't bother. It doesn't open.

I have written to helplines without success. You are my last hope. I am stuck in The Dark Half and for the life of me cannot figure out how to get into the study behind the bookcase where George has locked himself in. Can you please help?

Sarah Philips, Australia

Answer: It sounds to me like you're playing the game of Stephen King's novel The Dark Half. Unfortunately, I've never come across it (the game, that is) so I can't really help you there. If anyone out there can help, please write in to PC Review Help Supplied at the usual address.

Could you please tell me where to find the Scion key in Ultima VIII?

Dave Cosnette, Gloucestershire

Answer: After talking to Lithos, bury Lothian (it's easiest to use the recall device to return to Tenebrae), then go back to the tomb and speak to Vividos. Vividos will give you the Scion key.

I'm completely stuck in Infogrames' Eternum. I'm in the pyramid and have placed the statues in the right place but can't get any further. There's a scorpion in the main room but I can't get past it. Help! Please!

William Grant, London

Answer: You also need the mirror from one of the wall paintings, and the rackets you found on the French island. In one room there's a stone block which crushes you if you stand in the wrong place, and an "X" marked on the floor. Place the mirror on the "X" so that it gets broken by the block. Take the pieces. Go back to the downward-sloping passage and you'll notice a beam of light shining down from the ceiling. Put the first piece of mirror on the rock which directs the beam into the next room. Work your way back to the statue room, placing the mirror pieces wherever the beam of light needs to change direction. When the light reaches the statue room, use the rackets to climb up to the now open trapdoor.

A couple of questions about Maniac Mansion. How do you open the safe above Nurse Edna's room? How do you open the medical cabinet on the second floor? What use is the man-eating plant? How do I open the files drawers in the dark room on the third floor?

Joseph Dimmer, Fareham



First, place someone in Edna's room. Then switch to another character. Go into the man-eater room. Use the Pepsi (from fridge) on the plant. To open the safe, first go to the hatch, use the dime in the coin slot, push the right button, then repeat with the second coin. Use the telescope to read the safe combination. That should be all you need to know for now.

We don't reply to queries in person, so please don't include stamped addressed envelopes or postal orders along with your requests. If we can help with a problem, we will reply in the Help Wanted section of the tips page.

PUBLISHERS HELPLINES

Hopelessly stuck in a game? Many software publishers run games helplines to help out hapless souls with hints and tips.

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Helpline number: (0181) 887 0880

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Helpline number: (0181) 343 4838

Domark
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Electronics Arts
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Gremlin Graphics
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Infogrames
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Interplay
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(Games before '93): (01734) 304004

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Virgin Games
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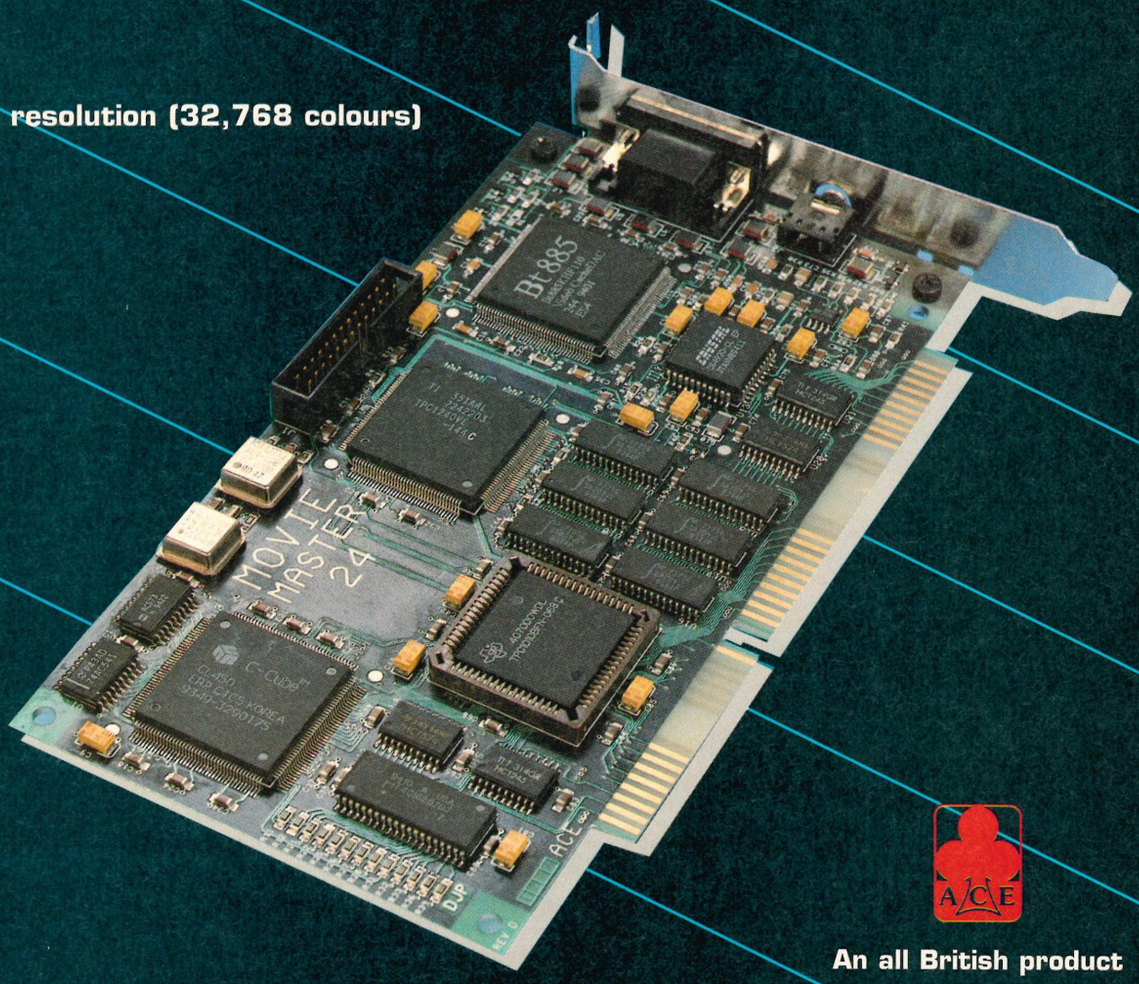
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Finally taken off your mayoral chain? The SimCity Urban Renewal Kit could rekindle your interest in town planning.

SimCity 2000 was right up there with Doom as one of *the* big hits of 1994, and it's still selling, with the help of a single scenario disk to keep the interest going. But the Urban Renewal Kit is more than a scenario disk.

There are three separate modules in the Urban Renewal Kit: the buildings creator and editor, the facility to import new building sets into SimCity 2000, and the 'custom city creator', for want of a better term to use to describe it.

The buildings editor and creator is essentially a paint program which is tailored to SimCity 2000. The program will take every single object, from bits of rubble to the launch arcology, and give you the means to change them, add bits, rub other bits out, and change the colours.

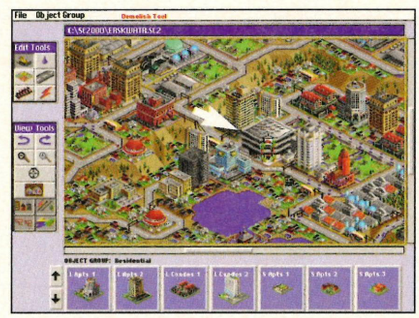
You will also be able to create buildings from scratch and you don't even have to use the Urban Renewal Kit's paint module, since you can import any .PCX image.

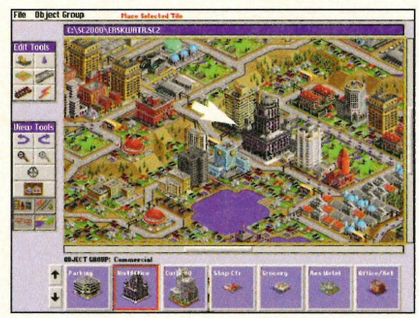
You'll also be able to see your own designs in SimCity 2000, the game, with the import-to-SimCity-2000 facility. This will take your designs, or one of the sets which comes with the program, or a mixture of these, and make it the standard graphic set for SimCity 2000. You will be able to choose from the original, a 'future' set, with highly colourful, post modernist architecture (see picture), mediaeval and gothic.

The third module is the custom city creator. This enables you a) to print out cities, and b) to place whichever buildings you like wherever you like. So you can bring up an existing city on-screen, and blow up all those naff car parks and put beautiful historic offices in their place.

The SimCity Urban Renewal Kit is part of Maxis's SimWorld initiative, the idea of giving players an entirely customisable world to immerse themselves in. There's potential for players' own Sim buildings to be swapped on-line (and on disk) and for the game to take a whole new lease of life.

❍ **Christina Erskine**

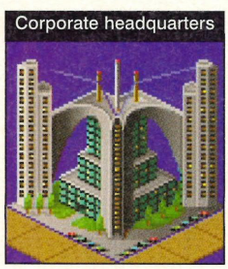


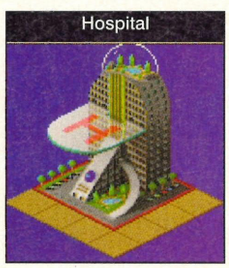


Blow up the car park, top and arrowed, and replace with something a bit more attractive, such as the historic building, above.

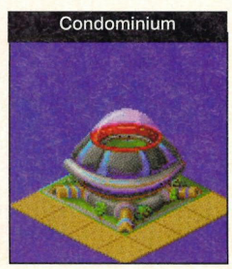
FAXBOX

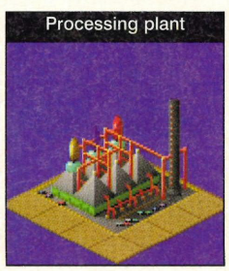
Developer:	Maxis
Publisher:	Maxis
Release Date:	February
Genre:	Sim City add-on


Corporate headquarters


Hospital


Large apartments


Condominium


Processing plant


Museum

Discworld



Good British adventure games have been a bit thin on the ground in recent years, but it looks as if Psygnosis is about to give the Americans a run for their money with Discworld. Based on fantasy author Terry Pratchett's multi-million selling Discworld series, the game captures the comic irreverence of the novels through cartoon-style graphics and jokey dialogue.

Discworld, if you're not familiar with the books, is a huge, flat planet which is being transported through space on the back of Great A-Tuin, a giant turtle of unknown gender. This somewhat unusual world is home to all those hardy fantasy regulars: wizards, heroes, dragons, and dwarves.

Miserable failure

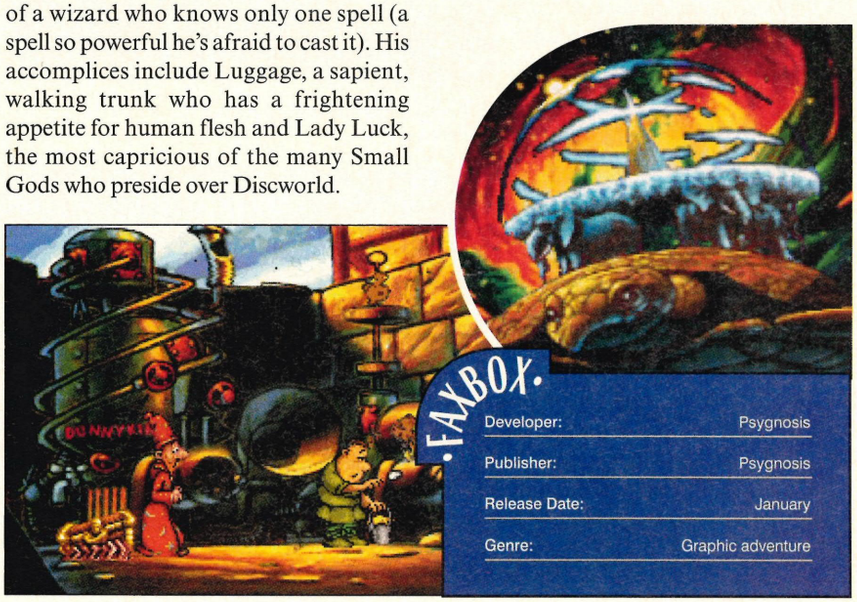
The hero, Rincewind, is a miserable failure of a wizard who knows only one spell (a spell so powerful he's afraid to cast it). His accomplices include Luggage, a sapient, walking trunk who has a frightening appetite for human flesh and Lady Luck, the most capricious of the many Small Gods who preside over Discworld.

New story

Discworld (the game) is a new story, so lack of familiarity with the books shouldn't put you at too great a disadvantage. However, if you're a Pratchett fan you're almost guaranteed to enjoy it. And if the promise of Pratchett's humour isn't tempting enough, you should also be aware that the characters' voices are provided by such well-known comedy actors as Monty Python's Eric Idle (as Rincewind), Tony Robinson (Black Adder), Kate Robbins (of Maid Marion and her Merry Men) and Jon Pertwee (oh, come on! You must remember him as Doctor Who, for heaven's sake!).

With credentials like these, it's hard to imagine that Discworld won't be a big hit. Look out for a review in our March issue.

❍ **Cal Jones**



FAXBOX

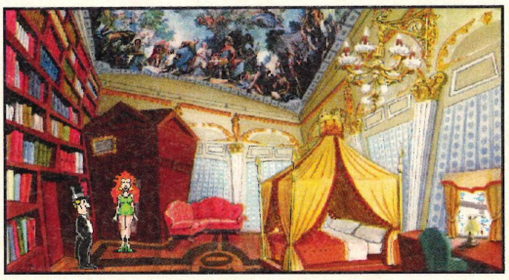
Developer:	Psygnosis
Publisher:	Psygnosis
Release Date:	January
Genre:	Graphic adventure

COMING SOON

Big Red Adventure

Core Design

Not to be confused with Little Big Adventure, Big Red Adventure is a humorous, cartoon-style game set in pre-Perestroika Russia. Written by Italian developer Dynabyte, BRA is the sequel to Nippon Safes Inc, but is a vast improvement over that game. Looks promising.



King of Thieves

Team 17

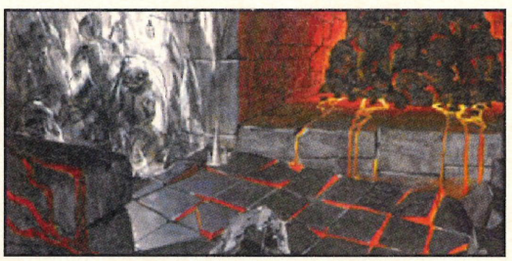
Created by the team that brought you Alien Breed, King of Thieves is Team 17's first game created specially for the PC. Set in mediaeval England, the game is a mixture of arcade and strategy in which the aim is to conquer the land.



Prisoner of Ice

Infogrames

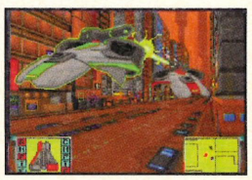
A sort of sequel to Shadow of the Comet, Prisoner is a Lovecraft-inspired graphic adventure set during World War II. The scenario is based on the premise that the Nazis experimented with the supernatural, and the game promises frights aplenty. Out April.



Zephyr

US Gold

If Quarantine was Doom in a taxi, Zephyr looks more like Doom in a shopping trolley. Well, perhaps that's a little unfair. Zephyr is a fast-paced action game in the Spectre mould and features lots of shooting. Potentially very good — if you own a Pentium.



Sim Isle



Care about sustainable forests, rare insects and conservation vs economic growth? Make like Sting and run your own rainforest.

Intelligent Games (profiled in Issue 34) is an independent games developer which specialises in strategy games and simulations. One of its most exciting projects is Sim Isle (formerly called Sim Rainforest), a game currently being developed for the sim giant, Maxis. Based on a real rainforest, Sim Isle is set on a series of islands in the Far East where you have to manage the precious resources offered by the environment. Your goal is to encourage plant and animal life, and economic prosperity through exploitation of local materials and social development, but achieving all three is far from easy given the rainforest's fragile ecosystem.

True multimedia

Based on a 3D isometric map, Sim Isle is a true multimedia product, featuring full motion video, digitised sound effects and music. Although in keeping with the rest of the Sim range, it does, however, have its own strong identity. Unlike games such as SimCity 2000 and Bullfrog's Theme Park, you can't manipulate anything directly, but you do have a team of agents at your disposal who will attempt to carry out your instructions. All your agents have their own personalities and specific skills and you can send them anywhere on the island.

Numerous scenarios

There are numerous scenarios in the game, including an oil tanker disaster and a UFO sighting, but all are highly complex. The rare animal scenario, for example, is not simply a case of building a nature reserve: you have to get the local villages to provide the building materials and this means cutting down trees — something which could upset the environment. You might also decide to make the reserve pay for itself by turning it into a tourist attraction, but again you'd have to find the raw materials to build a hotel and port.

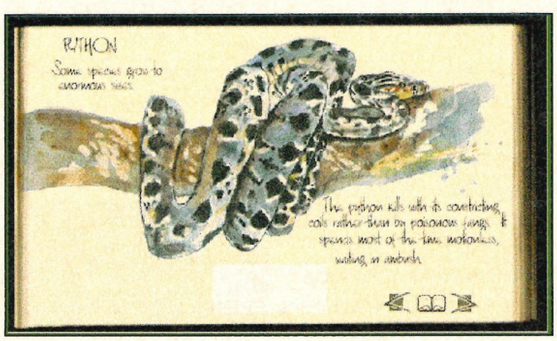
Obviously, there's plenty to think about when you're running your own environment. "I was attracted by the dilemmas of ecology versus economy," says Intelligent Games founder and director Matthew Stibbe. "The rainforest is something everyone has heard of, and with concerns about the environment running high at the moment it's a topic that should be of interest to a wide range of people." But don't be put off if you're not a dedicated Green — you can still deforest and exploit to your heart's content if that's what you're into.

Either way, Sim Isle is certainly shaping up to be a beautiful and fascinating game.

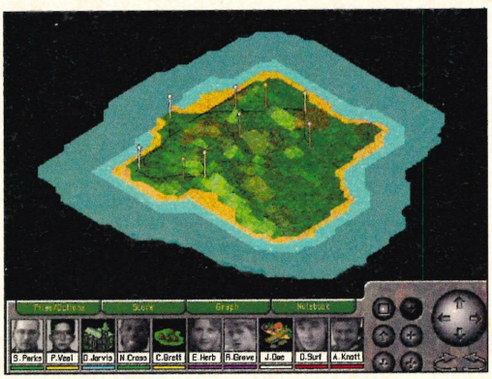
❍ **Cal Jones**

FAXBOX

Developer:	Intelligent Games
Publisher:	Maxis
Release Date:	March
Genre:	Simulation



Any new species of flora or fauna you discover are noted down in your sketch pad.



From a distance it doesn't look terribly interesting, does it?



Zoom in and you still can't see a lot, but it's an improvement.



Zoom in again and you'll see trees, buildings and even roads.

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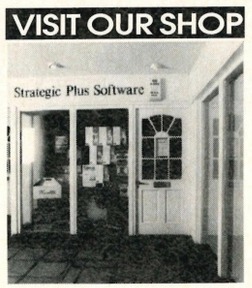
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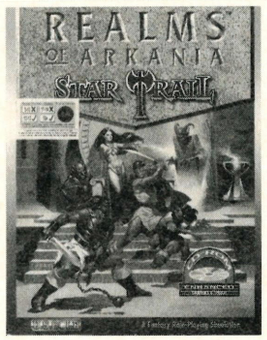
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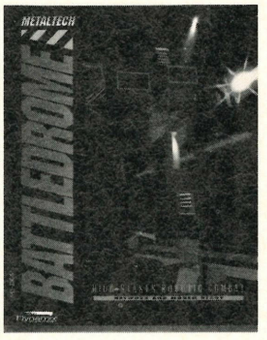


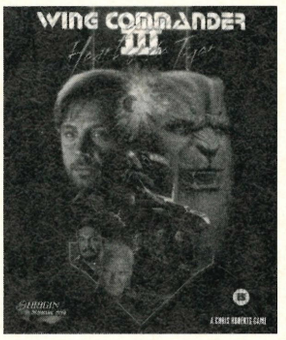
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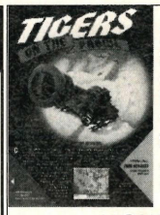




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With all the hoo-ha over the flood of digitised pornography, let's turn our attention back to the sillier side of life with a brief guide to some of the dafter attempts at rudery that have appeared in PC games over the years. Censorship? Pah!

	Foreplay	Swordplay	In the best possible taste?
DREAM WEB (EMPIRE) 	For a game with an unrepentingly sordid theme, the only real naughtiness in this one comes right at the very start of the game. Still, if you're a very sad person it might keep you playing the game through to see if there's more.	The hero has been told to kill a rock star called David Crane. He wanders in when Crane is *in flagrante delicto* with an unspecified person of the opposite gender. The hero points his weapon at Crane, the woman jumps off the bed stark naked and you're presented with a brief flash of Crane's family jewels. . .	. . . not that there's a lot to see. We're talking about a small handful of pixels here. Size isn't everything, but sadly the suitably animated top-down view of the ongoing action manages to look like nothing recognisable at all.
ECSTATICA (PSYGNOSIS) 	Nudity features heavily in Psygnosis' mediaeval romp, with half-naked and frequently impaled balloon people cropping up in the background with alarming regularity. Towards the end of the game, our hero (or heroine, the choice is yours) wanders into the local dungeon . . .	. . . Lo and behold, he/she is confronted with an assortment of naked men recklessly waving feathered fans and bodily parts with a complete disregard for the safety of spectators. And who could forget the scantily clad female blatantly admiring herself.	The ellipsoid graphics make it difficult to take anybody seriously whose backside looks like it's been constructed from a mating pair of Space Hoppers. Still, it's all in a good cause, apparently. And there's not a Tory MP in sight.
CYBERIA (INTERPLAY) 	Bar this very brief moment of tenderness, when boy meets girl and they kiss as the sun sets behind them, Cyberia keeps the action pretty clean from start to finish.	When Our Hero should be trying to get out of the enemy base, he indulges in a very tender, Mills'n' Boon-type embrace with his would-be rescuer. She is immediately dragged away by armed guards and killed. He, however, decides that enough is enough, and hightails it out of there.	Well, I suppose the moral of the story is that snogging in Cyberia is not a bright thing to do. Zak, ypu've only got 15 seconds to save the Universe!
VOYEUR (INTERPLAY) 	Throughout this Dallas-esqe murder mystery game, there are titillating promises of all sorts of shenanigans, but the only real misbehaviour happens between these two lovely characters, mainly in the opening credits. Selling the game on sex? Surely not?	A Carol Vorderman lookalike (this is supposed to be a turn on?) handcuffs lucky Frank to the bed. She promptly whips open her dress to reveal the full black kit (not the Manchester United away strip), rips down his trousers, jumps on top and wriggles a lot. Very silly.	Voyeur makes all sorts of promises, but rarely delivers the goods. This time, wouldn't you know it, the phone goes . . . and she makes a hasty exit leaving our poorly digitised Frank still cuffed to the bed.

WAS THAT IT...?

Rex Nebular and the Cosmic Gender Bender (MicroProse)

Totally daft sci-fi adventure with a neat line in sex change humour. Infamous for having the brothel as the only location you can't get into.

Leather Goddesses of Phobos I/II (Infocom)

Who could forget these bizarre text-based adventures which introduced the concept of 'lewd' mode, plus 3D specs, a free comic and a scratch 'n' sniff card (which smelt either of toilets, or of chocolate smelling like toilets?). Remarkable.

Sorcerers get all the Girls (Legend)

Leather Goddess creator Steve Meretsky went on to create this 'High School plus magic' comedy series, taking 'lewd' mode to new heights of schoolboy silliness.

Late Night Sexy TV Show (Dynabyte)

Very rude game show featuring virtual sex and an orgasmatron. The, er, climax of the game is to exchange bodily fluids with your opponent . . . an Italian concept game. Need we say more?

LeisureSuit Larry series (Sierra)

Larry — the Sid James of unfunny American point 'n click — actually did it in the very first game of the series. If you didn't remember to wear a condom you caught a disease . . . Nice touch, that. Subtle.

Defender of the Crown (Cinemaware)

A pioneer of computer 'romance', way back in 1986 (or thereabouts) the hero and a suitable lucky(?) lady take time off from mediaeval swashbuckling. Sadly the scene fades to nothingness before you see anything interesting. It was in CGA, anyway.



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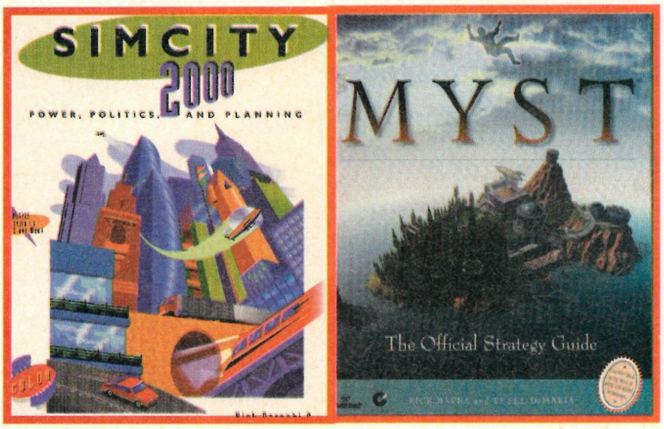


The ultimate in playing guides from Computer Manuals

There is nothing quite so frustrating as being stuck in a game. Not just hitting a bit of a hitch, but well and truly stuck at a mediocre level and with no idea how to get going again or improve your rating. Well, let PC Review come to the rescue.

We have here six of the very best playing guides to six of the very best games to hit the PC in the last year. These guides are published by the leading computer book supplier Computer Manuals, and they go some way beyond a simple do-this-do-that approach to the games in question.

The six books are: ***Doom II: The Official Strategy Guide; Myst: Official Game Secrets; SimCity 2000: Power, Politics and Planning; Microsoft Space Simulator: Official Strategy Guide; TIE Fighter: Official Strategy Guide and Under a Killing Moon: Official Strategy Guide.*** One overall winner of this competition will cop the lot: yes, one copy of each of this splendid books goes to the main prize-winner. Then for ten runners-up, we have the book of your choice — just mark on the coupon which book you'd like if you win.



How to enter

Six books, six questions on the games they cover:



1. What is pictured, right?
- a) Mayors' house
- b) Fusion power plant
- c) Industrial thingamajig

2. What is the new weapon in Doom II that did not appear in the original Doom?
- a) Swiss Army knife
- b) Double-barrelled shotgun
- c) Hand-held thermo-nuclear water pistol

3. What is the name of the team which developed Myst?
- a) Cyan
- b) Magenta
- c) Yellow

4. What secret order did the bloke in a cloak in TIE Fighter belong to?
- a) The Secret Order of the Emperor
- b) The Freemasons
- c) MI6

5. The world-weary barmaid in Killing Moon is played by which well-known actress?
- a) Pamela Anderson
- b) Emma Thompson
- c) Margot Kidder

6. Microsoft's Space Simulator is an interactive history and simulation of space flight. What else has Microsoft simulated for us?
- a) Grand prix driving
- b) Civilian aircraft
- c) Submarines in World War II

When you think you know all the answers, fill out the coupon below. Then send the form (or a photocopy if you don't want to spoil your copy of the magazine) to:

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It *must* reach us by February 15th, 1995. This is the closing date and any entries which arrive after that will not be eligible for the prize draw.

Rules

- Employees of EMAP Images and Computer Manuals, and their families and associates are not eligible to enter this competition.
- No multiple entries, please.
- No entries received after the closing date will be accepted.
- No cash equivalent to the prizes is available.
- The editor's decision is final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

All the books — and many more — described on this page are available from Computer Manuals on (0121) 706 6000. Please mention this competition when ordering.



Reading matter

Answers

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If I am a runner-up, I would like the book on the following (tick one box only, please)

☐ Doom II ☐ Myst
☐ SimCity 2000 ☐ Space Simulator
☐ TIE Fighter ☐ Under a Killing Moon

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☐ Data protection: tick this box if you do not wish to receive further information or other offers or services in the future

☐ I am under 18. ☐ I am 18 or over.

Closing date February 15, 1995
PC Review Issue 40 February 1995

Six steps to Pe

From a 486 to a Pentium in six easy steps? John Bennett shows you how to upgrade your PC the painless way.

If you have a 486, or even a 386, upgrades are relatively straightforward. Even if you don't have the now commonplace ZIF (zero insertion force) socket, the job of slotting in a new chip is hardly the toughest one in the world. Change a couple of jumpers to make sure the PC knows it's got this fancy new processor, and Bob's your uncle — a faster PC.

The top of the 486 line is currently a choice between the 66MHz iDX/2, the 80MHz AMD 486 chip and the clock-tripled iDX/4. The latter is a very powerful little chip: set up properly, a DX/4-based PC can easily be made to run as fast as the bottom of the range Pentium PCs.

But after that there's only one viable option — upgrading to a Pentium PC.

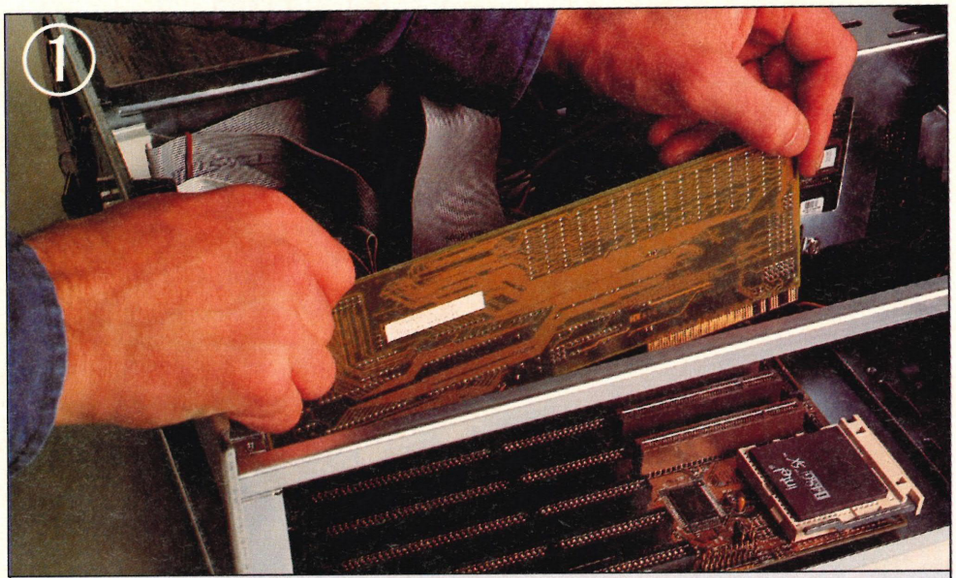
The thing is can you afford a complete new Pentium PC? Indeed, you may ask yourself, why should I bother buying a whole PC again, if I already have a perfectly good monitor, sound card, mouse and keyboard you're familiar with? Well, there is an alternative.

Pentium motherboard

The way to save yourself some money is to go for a new Pentium motherboard, rather than a new PC. Many people shy away from this route because they're nervous about a job that involves dismantling their entire PC. But, believe me, it can be a simple job.

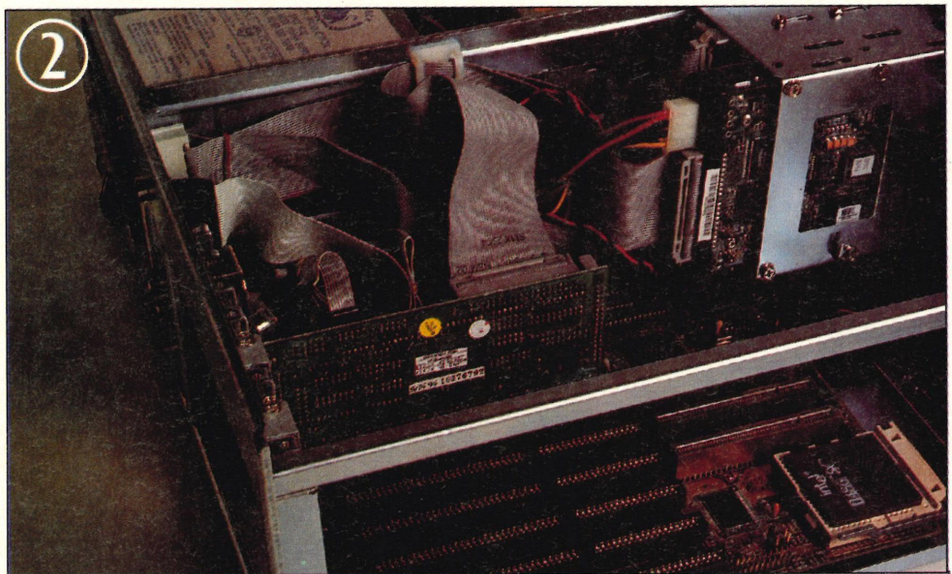
Pentium motherboards can be bought from any number of PC retailers and suppliers, at between £500 and £700. Usually, they come with 8Mb of RAM on board, a 256K or 512K cache and a mixture of PCI and ISA bus slots as well as either a P60 or P90 processor.

But if you're still nervous about the idea of tackling a motherboard upgrade yourself, read on to see how it can be done without tears or bad language, and in under 20 minutes.



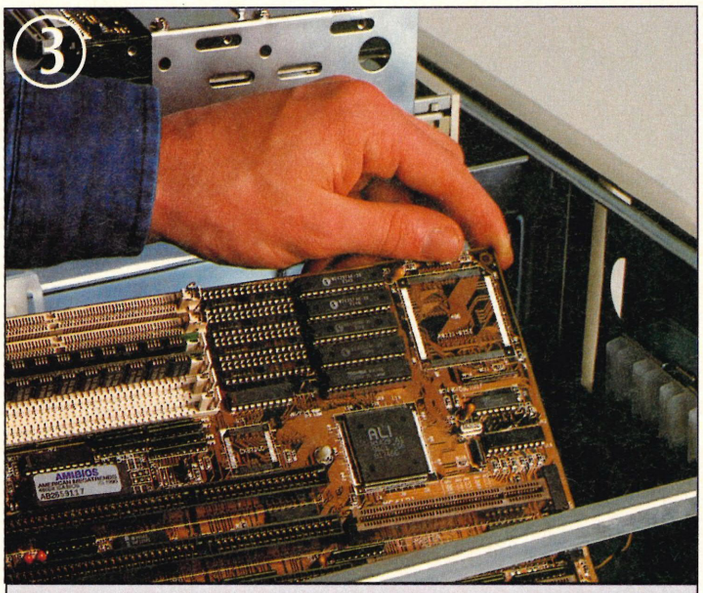
1. I've got the new motherboard, carefully wrapped up in its padded anti-static bag. I've got all the tools I'm likely to need (actually you don't need anything more complicated than a Philips screwdriver, but it makes me feel better to have all this stuff on hand).

Now, the temptation is to dive straight in, to rip the innards of my 486 to shreds in seconds and get the new, super-powered incarnation up and running pronto. But no! I've done that sort of thing before and all it ever gets me is five leftover bits of important looking multi-coloured cable and nowhere to put them. This time I'm going to do things by the book. In fact, the first thing I did was 'familiarise' (five minutes skip reading) myself with the manual'. That done, it's time to check the PC is turned off and set apart getting the case off. Let the dog see the rabbit, that's what I say.

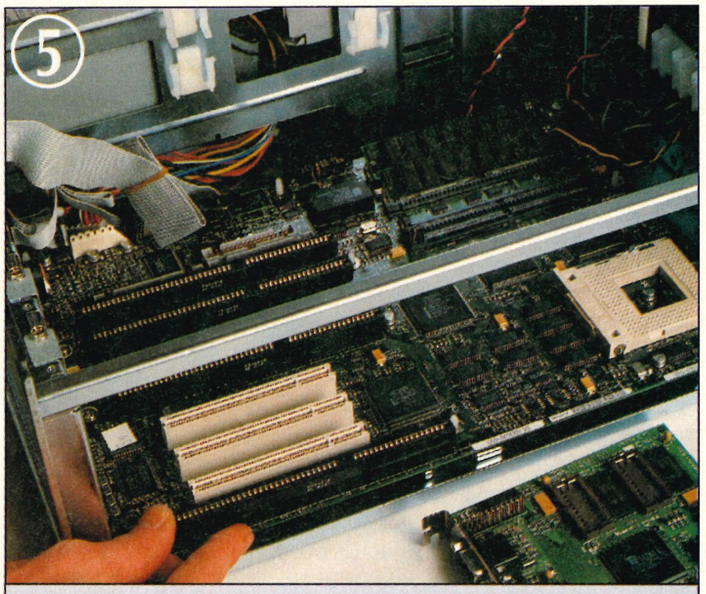


2. OK, the first thing I've got to do is take the old stuff out. Before you touch anything that looks like a circuit board or a chip make sure you discharge any static electricity you may have built up by touching an unpainted bit of the PCs metal casing. If you don't, you can easily damage the boards. Starting with all the expansion cards, I'm going to (gently) remove each one and place them out of harms way in anti-static bags. The I/O cables from the hard and floppy disks I've left connected to the respective drives. COM and parallel ports connectors should also be left fixed to the case.

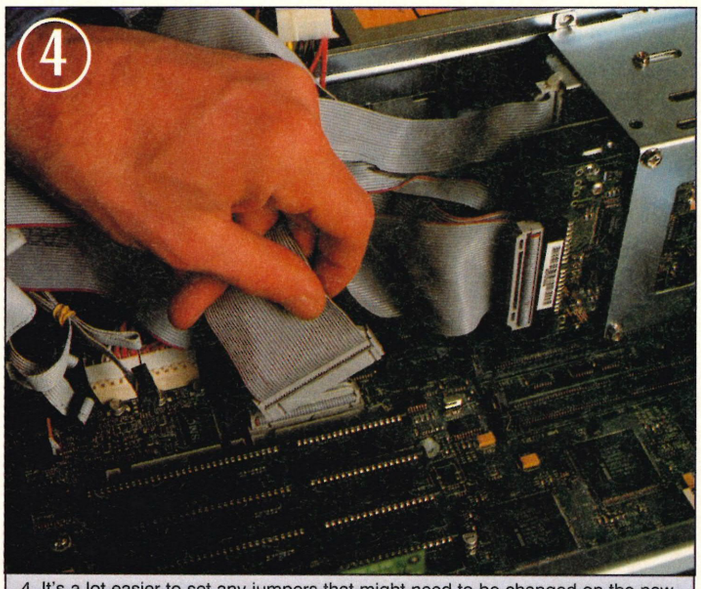
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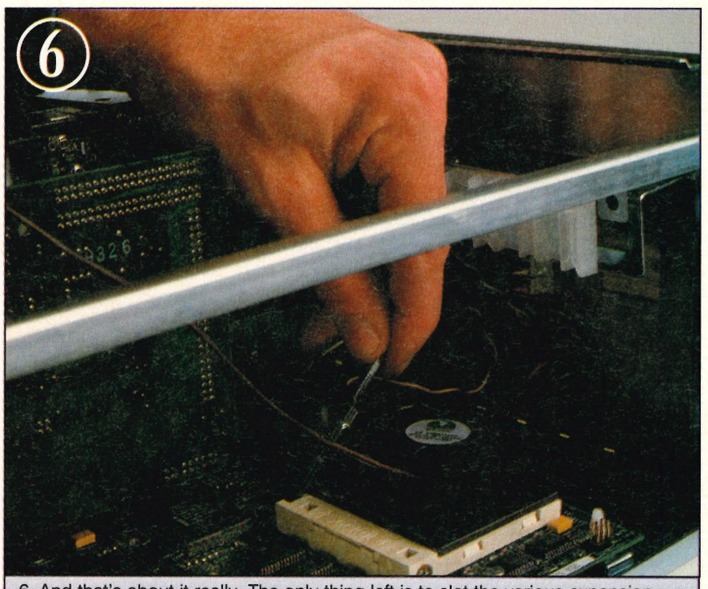
3. This leaves me with a bare bones PC and a motherboard ready for removal. Just in case there's something wrong with the new board, I decide to keep a crude diagram of where everything was connected before I unplugged it. The cables that need to be disconnected are the speaker/turbo/reset and hard disk lights, and the two sets of cables from the power supply to the motherboard. With this PC, as with many, the hard disk and floppy drives are in the way of a lot of things so I found it was easier to unscrew both and move them well out of the way. The motherboard itself is only held in by one screw, and mounted on a series of plastic legs. Once undone, it slides out in seconds.



5. The new board is in place (not screwed down, yet). Unfortunately, it didn't come with the custom plastic 'feet' it needs to sit on, so I had to jury-rig some from an old motherboard. From here on, all I have to do is reconnect the cables. The manual doesn't offer a great deal of help, but it does give me a diagram of the board layout, which is essential. The speaker and LED stuff is all straightforward, and the power connectors to the motherboard go back easily enough. It's not clear whether getting these two round the wrong way will fry the board. I did get them wrong, as it happens —but only found out when I eventually turned on the PC. . . Fortunately the board wasn't damaged.



4. It's a lot easier to set any jumpers that might need to be changed on the new motherboard *before* you fit it in place, and the instructions should tell you which, if any, need changing. Jumpers are just on/off 'gates'. Fit a connector between two and you complete the circuit. In most cases, the only jumpers you'll need to change are the processor speed (some Pentium 60 chips run at 60 or 66MHz), IRQ addresses for PCI cards.



6. And that's about it really. The only thing left is to slot the various expansion cards back in place, screw in the hard disk and floppy drive, and reconnect all the internal power cables and the I/O ribbon cables before hooking up the monitor, keyboard and mouse. As a safety check, I've reseated the chip to make sure it was fitted properly. Then, it's on with the power (no point putting the lid back on just yet) and time for the first test run.

How was it for you?

Even given that this is the sort of thing I do for a living, I was surprised at how easy a job it was — and also that it worked first time.

All in all the job took me maybe 20 minutes from start to finish. If you follow the basic precaution of noting down what went where before you take things apart, you can't go far wrong.

The only thing that caused me any real trouble was optimising the machine. Given a particular configuration and 486 motherboard, it's fairly easy to juggle cache settings and so on to get the best out of the whole set-up. But because a Pentium motherboard is a radically different design from the 486s I'm used to tinkering with, setting the PC up with the best CMOS options is a new experience. It meant more than a few phone calls to find out what the hell a 'memory hole start address' is, for example.

Still, having realised how basically simple a PC is to put together (motherboard and processor, expansion boards, disk drives and power supply all plug together in a totally simple manner), it amazes me that people can still make and sell us poor PCs.

If suppliers take a bit of care putting the bits together, and make the right choice of components, then there is just no excuse for a flaky PC.

Worth the money?

Anyway, the improvement from a 486/50 to a Pentium 60 is considerable. The machine is now a real flier, it is a joy to play games on and finally I'm using a computer that makes mincemeat out of Windows (and not the other way around).

But — and this is an entirely subjective 'but' — I'm not sure I'd pay around £650 for the difference.

Basically, the new set-up is good, but it's not as good as I'd expected it to be. I would wait until maybe May or June of this year to make the Pentium upgrade. By that time there will be enough really demanding games out there to make an upgrade a necessity rather than a luxury: at the moment the only games that are really pushing for a Pentium are Magic Carpet, Wing Commander 3, Nascar Racing (in Super VGA) and US Navy Fighters.

More importantly, there's a good chance that the 90MHz Pentium chip (P90) will be much the same price as a Pentium 60 (P60) is now. The P90 shifts quite a bit faster than the P60. I'd guess the closest comparison would be the performance difference between a a 25MHz 486 and a 33MHz 486.

Jumping on the bandwagon

The long and the short of all this is that if you want to jump onto the Pentium bandwagon, then it's not that traumatic a chore to upgrade your existing PC, rather than buy an entirely new one. The physical job of removing the old board and installing the new one is actually very straightforward (even if the documentation is always going to be on the brief side). Other than that, you'll need to learn a whole new set of ways to get the best out of your PC's new engine room — but that goes with the territory).

Pentium flies, CD crawls

There's just one last thing, and it doesn't really have a great deal to do with the basics of installing a new motherboard, it has to do with compact disc: doing this upgrade made me realise just what a lousy medium CD is.

Once I'd installed this new motherboard, I couldn't resist the temptation of scavenging up a complete set of expensive peripherals, (like a 64-bit PCI-based video card, another 16Mb of RAM over and above the original eight megabytes, a top of the range SCSI quad speed CD-ROM drive, and so on).

By the time I was finished I was looking at something like £3,500 worth of PC. And boy, did it shift. The difference with both Windows and games installed on the hard disk was impossible to ignore. This was the sort of set-up to make any PC user go green with envy.

But the difference with CD-ROM games was less noticeable. They were smooth, true, and the accessing was superficially less irritating, but the overall impression was that it was barely better than my old set-up.

CD-ROM complaint

You could say that this should have been obvious — and I'd agree with you. But it really did bring home the fact that while PCs are getting faster by the minute, CD-ROM is still way behind acceptable performance levels.

As one PC manufacturer (who shall remain nameless) so eloquently puts it: "CDs are rubbish compared to a hard disk. A faster CD is only a faster kind of rubbish." And on what format can we expect the vast majority of the coming year's A grade games titles? CD-ROM of course.

Stop Press: Nervous about Pentium scare stories in the media? See this month's News section for an update.

THINGS TO CHECK WHEN BUYING A NEW PENTIUM MOTHERBOARD

- Does the motherboard take 30-pin or 72-pin SIMMs? 72 is preferable (and most common), but this will mean that you can't use your existing 32-pin 1Mb SIMMs. Some rare motherboards offer both types — it's worth checking because adding RAM is expensive.
- Check the design of the board with a view to both your existing cards and future expansion.

  Most boards come with four PCI and three ISA slots. First off, try and visualise how the board will sit in your PC and whether this will leave any of the ISA slots obscured and consequently unusable. Is the I/O on the motherboard, or do you need to use your existing card? (That's one ISA slot gone.)

  You may want to use a PCI video card (something like the Diamond Stealth PCI or the Orchid Kelvin PCI), but chances are you'll have a standard ISA or VL-BUS card. An ISA video card isn't a problem (although that's one more ISA slot gone,) but it's never going to be the fastest thing on earth, and a local bus card won't work in a PCI or ISA slot, So, bear in mind that you may need to buy a new video card.
- Check the BIOS set-up. Does it take into account Plug and Play (ie, will it autodetect new hardware as you install it?), because with Windows 95 on the way it would be daft not to be able to take advantage of it.
- Does the motherboard support Enhanced (or Atapi) IDE?
- Check that the processor has some kind of heatsink or cooling fan. Pentium chips get hot enough to fry eggs on, so if it's not adequately cooled, it's likely to burn out in under 20 minutes.



Pentium technology is rapidly coming down to mass market price.

THANKS TO:

Bluepoint for providing the Pentium motherboard used in this article.
Contact Bluepoint on (0908) 277007.

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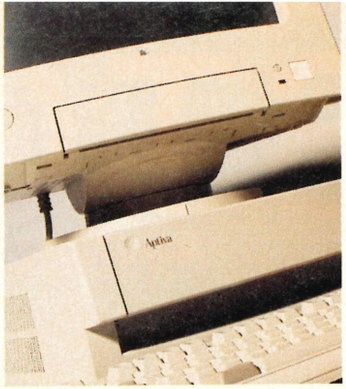
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PCR 02/94

Product reviews



It may not be on quite the same financial scale as a new car or the family home, but at an average price of between £1,000 and £1,500 the home PC represents a sizeable dent in the wallet department. What's more, you then have to keep up with the endless stream of 'must have' add-ons and enticing software packages that suddenly appear on the scene. It can be a very expensive business indeed.

And with interest in the PC, and CD-ROM in particular, going through the roof, we're going to be deluged with ever more in the way of brand new PC products over the coming year. The result of this interest should be plenty more choice, which for most of us, ought to be a good thing.

Unfortunately computer advertisements are often all people have to go on when considering which PC products to buy, but many new users find them wrapped up in technical gibberish of the most appalling kind. This is the sort of jargon that your local, self-confessed 'PC expert' thrives upon, but which most same human beings would far rather avoid at all costs. And to cap it all, PC technology has a nasty habit of changing almost daily.

So how do you decide which of these clever gadgets, high-spec PCs or software solutions is right for the job you have in mind and the budget you have to spend? After all, nobody minds splashing out if something really is worth having—but few people can afford to make a mistake.

That's how this section is going to help you, by summarising the effectiveness of new PC products as they hit the streets, looking at their strengths, weakness and overall value for money in a simple, direct and thoroughly jargon-free way.

The PC Review product section covers software in all its guises where it is relevant to home users: be it for educational, leisure or practical purposes. On the hardware front, we will bring you the latest in multimedia PCs, sound cards, CD-ROM drives, joysticks, speakers, printers and portables — you name it,we'll test it and bring you the results.

And what those results will tell you is, quite simply, what a product is *supposed* to do and whether it actually it does it, what is out there that might do the same job better or cheaper (both right now or on the horizon), and we'll also tell you whether a product has been well-enough designed or constructed to stand up to the rigours of everyday use.

The rating system explained

Whether it's games or general interest products, everything's scored out of the magic ten:
0: How anyone could produce something this bad is beyond us.
1-3: Poorly done, irrelevant and generally lacking in any redeeming features.
4-5: Averagely useful, but lacks anything special.
6-7: Does the job it's supposed to well, has interesting/powerful features.
8-9: Good bordering on exceptional. Must be on any shortlist.
10: Unique and impossible to live without.

Reviewed this issue

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Microsoft Home Mouse
Pointing device

Microsoft's new home range mouse is a considerably lighter, more delicate device than its hand-fillingly curved and chunky predecessor. For that reason alone, I wasn't overly keen when I first saw it. However, the mouse has been designed to fit as many different hands as possible — from child to adult — and it is quite comfortable to use as well.

The latest driver software installed faultlessly, and the Windows customisation options available, should cover every mouse-type eventuality.

All in all, the Microsoft Home Mouse is surprisingly rugged for a relative lightweight, colourful slate-grey piece of hardware and it has the added blessing of coming with an extra long cord. If you do need to replace your old, dirt encrusted pointing device with something a little more up to date, then you won't go far wrong with this one.

❍ *John Bennett*

MICROSOFT HOME MOUSE
- Pointing device for both Windows and DOS, connects via 9-pin serial port. Comes in a variety of colours.

Supplier: Microsoft
Contact: (01734) 270000
Price: £27

PC REVIEW RATING 7

Compro Multimedia Kit
Quad Speed CD-ROM kit

Just as the 486 is being superseded by the Pentium, so the double-speed CD-ROM drive is being mugged in the consumer alley-way by a gang of low-priced quad-speeds.

This Compro Multimedia Kit is noteworthy because apart from including the usual 16-bit sound card (the Futura, which performs adequately but is hardly breath-taking in terms of compatibility or sound quality), the cheap speakers and the free CD software (a good selection which includes the Microsoft Sound System V.2, Iron Helix, Megarace, Mad Dog Macree and Kings Quest VI), Unica has dropped the double-speed drive option and has replaced it with a brand-new quad-speed model.



The drive in question is the TEAC Super Quad, a smooth-looking, tray-loading drive that has a whopping 600Kb transfer rate and a sprightly 195msec access time. It's a good drive, and while you won't necessarily notice the difference in speed at the moment (because there isn't a huge amount of software to really push it) it's a solid performer and relatively future-proof for the coming year.

The only problem that I can see with it — and I must point out it's not a fault with the kit itself — is a} there are rumours of at least one company aiming to bring out sub-£200 quad speed drives after Christmas, b} the street price of the Teac drive on it's own can be as low as £239, and c} decent 16-Bit FM sound cards cost around £80. So, at £399 the Compro Kit already looks pricey. But it's a good and affordable package and if you're worried by horror stories of compatibility problems and DMA/IRQ conflicts, then a complete multimedia kit like this may prove a reassuring bet. At the very least, you're guaranteed hassle-free installation and fairly good value for money. I'd just advise you to wait a bit longer to see if Unica drop the price . . .

❍ *Dean Evans*

COMPRO MULTIMEDIA UPGRADE KIT
- Quad-speed CD-ROM drive, 16-bit Futura sound card, speakers and a varied selection of CD software.

Supplier: Unica
Contact: (01734) 814121
Price: £399

PC REVIEW RATING 6

Reference and general interest

Creepy Crawlies
Reference CD

Ushered into the world by its creators as "The definitive multimedia guide to the creatures we love to hate" Creepy Crawlies leaves the cute touches of the children's educational title to Knowledge Adventure, and concentrates on some serious reference.

The ever-impressive interface that MDI has put together is guardian to fact files on 74 creatures, with video sequences liberally interspersed throughout and high quality sound all round. Don't expect to see only insects here, either, there are plenty of other animal encounters too. Whether it's crabs or mosquitoes, however, quality is never compromised.

MDI has a history of animal-based software, and a reputation for never producing a totally duff title. Creepy Crawlies is indeed animal-based, and certainly not duff in any way. Yes, I would have liked to have *more* animals creeping and crawling and yes, I would have liked even more about each one.



However, I'd also like to be sole winner of the lottery this week and marry Claudia Schiffer, neither of which I realistically expect to happen — just yet at any rate.

Under the circumstances MDI has packed this CD-ROM with a good quality reference, which is clear and easy to find your way around, not overly technical and yet neither too shallow. For the money, you can't honestly expect any more of it than it delivers.

❍ *Martin Klimes*

CREEPY CRAWLIES
- You need a 386 processor PC, 4Mb RAM, 256 colour VGA monitor, sound card, CD-ROM drive and Windows 3.1

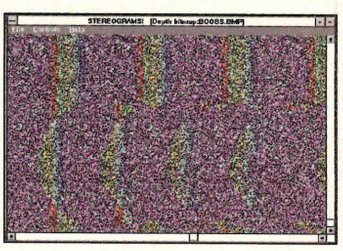
Supplier: MDI
Contact: (01252) 737630
Price: £29.99

PC REVIEW RATING 7

Stereograms!
Stereograms

Stereograms are those infuriating pictures which look, at first glance, to be just a load of dots, but if you stick your face right up to the paper, go cross-eyed and squint a bit you're supposed to be able to make out an image. This particular bit of software allows you to make your own dotty pictures which you can then distribute to your friends and enemies in order to give them a migraine.

The package, which runs under Windows, is fairly easy to use and contains several ready-made images which you can stare at to your heart's content. And, as I've mentioned already, you can also make your own. All you have to do is draw a picture in Windows Paint-brush, load it into Stereograms!, specify which parts of the picture are to appear in front of which and then process the image. And hey presto! You've just created your first Stereogram.



On the positive side, Stereograms! is very easy to use. But there's also a negative side. No doubt you've heard how harmful it is to sit very close to the computer screen and stare at it without blinking for several minutes. Which is exactly what you have to do if you want to see all those lovely dotty images you've just made.

Overall this package isn't bad. Just be warned: if you suffer a massive epileptic seizure, go blind or end up with a splitting headache, don't blame me. You pays your money, you takes your chance.

❍ *Cal Jones*

STEREOGRAMS
- Minimum 386 PC required, plus Windows 3.1, 2Mb RAM, and a mouse. And some eyes.

Supplier: Mindscape
Contact: (01444) 246333
Price: £19.99

PC REVIEW RATING 6

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Magic Eye!

Stereograms

The official Magic Eye CD-ROM looks is a lot better presented than Stereograms!, largely due to the rendered images and spoken introduction which have been tacked on to the program in the name of multimedia. However, this product is more concerned with the stereogram images themselves rather than the creation of them, making Magic Eye little more than a "coffee table" CD. Central to it is the large gallery of images which are both more interesting and easier to "see" than those in Stereograms!, but rather than just selecting the images you wish to view from a menu, you actually tour the rendered hallways, clicking on pictures and examining them at your leisure.

You can also make and print images (a good colour printer is a must). But the creation facility of Magic Eye isn't nearly as versatile as that of Stereograms! This is because you are limited to choosing from an existing collection of 3D objects and backgrounds — so you can't import your own Paintbrush creations and then process them.

Of the two programs here, Magic Eye is an attractive product which has little practical use, whereas Stereograms! is a bit basic to look at, but is infinitely more functional and would be more suitable for those of you who feel like being creative.

❍ *Cal Jones*

MAGIC EYE

- Minimum PC required is a 386, running Windows 3.1, with 4Mb RAM, SVGA and a mouse.

Supplier: Mindscaper
Contact: (01444) 246333
Price: £24.99

PC REVIEW RATING 5

Art de la Table

Recipe books

ART DE LA TABLE

- Minimum spec: 386DX running Windows 3.1, with 4Mb of RAM, double-speed CD-ROM drive, SVGA display, and sound card

Supplier: Gem Distribution
Contact: (01279) 822822
Price: £39.95

PC REVIEW RATING 8



American outfit Arome Interactive has come out with a couple of the nicest presented CD-ROMs I've seen in ages. Packaged to look like those big hard-back cookery books you see in WH Smith, there is nothing inside except the disc itself.

And what a couple of corkers they are. Sub-titled 'The Four Seasons of Gourmet French Cuisine' and 'The Art of Making Great Pastries', these are cookery guides for the proudest of chefs. The interface is absolutely beautiful, the icons easy to get around, and the photos . . . simply mouthwatering.

As for the recipes, well to be honest you do need to be a dedicated man or woman about the kitchen to make the most of it. Crab millefeuille with baby calamari is hardly a dish you'd knock up in 10 minutes after coming home late from the office, to eat as you crash out in front of Telly Addicts.

However, if you ever entertain guests, or enjoy experimenting with pastry, then give it a whirl. The concept of multimedia really suits cookery as a topic, because each recipe can come with its own photos and videos of how to prepare it step by step. The Art de la Table ROMs take full advantage of it.

I may not be the dabbest of dab hands around the oven, but even I could follow the instructions in a totally unflustered fashion to produce an unbelievably tasty end result. I didn't think I'd say it, but I'm certainly keeping this pair of discs in my collection, and maybe every Sunday night I'll try a new dish out.

❍ *Martin Klimes*



Sail Simulator

Sailing tutor

Sail Simulator is a slightly misleading title, really, since it's actually a tutor for several craft, both sail and motor powered. Before you go messing about on the water, go messing about on a simulated lake to see if you can handle your Laser without getting a soaking as the craft capsizes.

Personally, I wish something like this had existed before I had taken my first boat out. Thirty seconds after casting off I tacked hard and promptly ended up in the water — which taught me very quickly to put the keel down. It was with those precious memories that I approached this product, and I found it a surprisingly accurate approximation of what it's like to be in a boat, particularly since part of the package is a special controller that means you don't have to use the keyboard. This gives it all a reality boost, much needed if you're going to suspend disbelief for long enough to be out there in the salty sea breeze.

Created by a Dutch company as an off-shoot of their wave research, the characteristics of how the boats handle are astonishingly accurate. You can even design your own marinas to sail in, with realistic consequences of putting in shallow water, jetties, and the such.

The simulator is plenty fun enough for me to say that not only sailing students will enjoy having a bash. It's unlikely to make a big splash in the games market, what with its basic graphics and slow pace, but it's definitely worth a look if you'r e into all things boats.

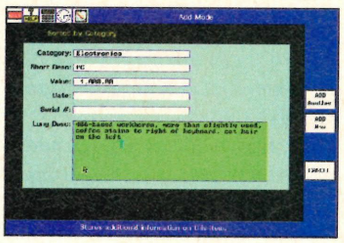
❍ *Martin Klimes*

SAIL SIMULATOR

- You need a 386 PC with 2Mb of RAM, 2Mb of hard disk space, and an EGA/VGA display

Supplier: RC Simulations
Contact: (01272) 550900
Price: £69.99

PC REVIEW RATING 6



Premier Collection: Home Inventory

Dedicated card file

Home Inventory is a pre-created cardfile in which you can enter in the name of a product, a serial number, a classifying category, its monetary value and also the date it was purchased. Presumably this will mark you down as a model of efficiency with the police should you be unfortunate enough to be burgled. But I can't see a vast advantage over a list on a piece of paper, and since PCs are 'desirable' items, it's quite likely the burglars will have nicked it along with the video recorder.

Of course, there are other modules, such as a screen saver, clock, calculator and also a jotter pad. But the home inventory side of things could be created very easily using just about any simple database, or cardfile, such as the one supplied with Windows, or a shareware program.

It's a nice idea, but you have to ask yourself if it's even worth the admittedly cheap price of a tenner.

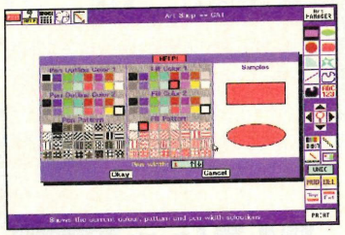
❍ *Andrew Downie*

HOME INVENTORY

- Any PC running Windows 3.1. Rare as it is to come across software like this, that's really all it needs.

Supplier: VCI Software
Contact: (01923) 255558
Price: £9.99

PC REVIEW RATING 3



Premier Collection: Art Shop

Simple paint package

This paint package enables you to draw different geometrical shapes, change the colours that you draw in and also write text to annotate your drawings. It has a function which allows you to zoom in and out and view your creation at different magnification levels.

At first it looks worse than it actually is, because everything is presented in brash-coloured 'kiddie' style, but there are some good functions to use in different sub-menus. These are things such as allowing you to stretch your picture, rotate it and move it and copy it around the screen. There's also a lot of different fill patterns for the shapes you create, compared to the distinctly unsubtle colours you can paint them in. It's very simple to use, but very clumsy — it's difficult to place anything exactly on-screen.

As with Home Inventory, (see page 111), the package also includes a calculator, screen saver and jotter pad utilities in addition to the paint program. Also like Home Inventory, it's a bit primitive compared to, say, Paintbrush, which comes with Windows, or Neopaint, which is shareware. And if you want a paint program designed for children, Kidpix is still the leader in this field.

❍ *Andrew Downie*

PREMIER COLLECTION ART SHOP

- Any PC capable of running Microsoft Windows 3.1... and a mouse would be helpful, too.

Supplier: VCI Software
Contact: (01923) 255558
Price: £9.99

PC REVIEW RATING 4

Manchester United Interactive

Multimedia biography of the Premiership champions

Somebody somewhere has evidently made the correlation between the fact that most football followers are male, and that most PC users are male — hence, PC users must follow football. At any rate, there's been an outbreak of football club reference programs out recently.

Unlike others, Manchester United Interactive isn't a screen saver; it's more like an end of the season annual on CD. It has pictures of the reds in action, photographs of the players, and in a section reminiscent of the questionnaires in Shoot magazine, a 'personal file' for each player, which includes favourite food, favourite film, and so on.

I refuse to believe that Eric Cantona's favourite record can really be Come On You Reds, by (curiously enough) the Manchester United team. But then, that's indicative of the adulatory tone of the whole program. This CD, not surprisingly, is for fans, who suspended any objectivity long ago.

As someone who has never forgiven Manchester United for winning the 1990 FA Cup, I'm probably not best placed to be objective either.

However, it has to be said that the video clips and photographs are of high quality and there are plenty of them.

What I don't understand though, is what Manchester United Interactive does that a big photographic book on glossy paper couldn't do — or a conventional VHA videotape, say.

Given that it's not a screen saver, nor a memory-resident program, you'd have to do a fair amount of faffing about if you wanted to check up quickly on Andrei Kanchelskis's Favourite 70s Hairstyle, for example.

❍ *Christina Erskine*



MANCHESTER UNITED INTERACTIVE

- Comes on a dual format PC and Mac disc. We'd recommend a 486 running at at least 33MHz, but it will run on a 386.

Supplier: VCI Software
Contact: (01923) 255558
Price: £34.99

PC REVIEW RATING 6

The Big Green Disc

Eco-reference

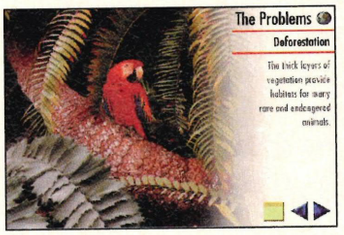
Well, hoorah for the Big Green Disc. Not because it jumps on an eco-bandwagon that's been running out of (fashionable) steam since the late '80s, but because it goes another stage to proving that MDI, probably Britain's finest exponent of multimedia references, can do something other than animal products.

I'm still certain that the follow up to 'Behind the Scenes at the Zoo' (reviewed last issue) will be 'Behind the scenes at the Ark' or some equally cute-animals-on-display, but there's nothing wrong with that. For what we have here on the Big Green Disc is a success, despite scoring only 1 out of 10 on the furry mammal scale (there are a few, but only a few. Some offcuts from the Marwell Zoo footage seem to have made it into BGD as part of the conservation section)

So, what is BGD, apart from a thoroughly pompous title that it can hardly live up to? Well, it's a look at most of the eco-disasters in the making that mankind seems so happy to heap upon himself and all the other living creatures of the world. The research has been thorough, with plenty of good data to back up the various arguments, and participation from major environmental organisations such as GreenPeace.

Best of all, however, is the lack of hippy 'Oh woe is me' sentimentalism that traditionally seems to accompany the topic of pollution and 'green' issues, and it's that fact, together with all the other parts, that means that BGD nearly *does* live up to its title.

❍ *Martin Klimes*

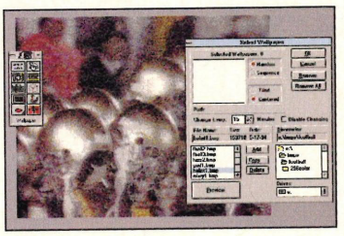


THE BIG GREEN DISC

- Requires a 386DX PC or better, with 4Mb of RAM, 256-colour VGA, Windows 3.1, sound card and CD-ROM drive

Supplier: MDI
Contact: (01252) 737530
Price: £39.99

PC REVIEW RATING 8



ESPN Sports Shorts

Personalised Windows desktops

Here we go again. Moon Valley, the people who brought us personalised desktops through Icon Do It, Icon Hear It and ROMaterials, has been at it again. This time it has hooked up with the sports giants of the cable TV world, ESPN, to offer all their usual tools, albeit with a sporting slant.

Whereas previous titles from the range have been a rather random hodge-podge of cursors, icons and backdrops, Sports Shorts unifies it with a single theme. Whether you'll appreciate or despise it, depends on whether you want a sportingly specific Windows environment or not.

The other factor to consider is the fact that ESPN are an American cable channel, serving American tastes. Expect plenty of baseball, basketball, hockey (of the ice variety) and football (American, of course). There is other stuff present, but it's in a distinct minority. As for the sound effects, well let's just say that crowds cheer differently at a Blue Jays vs. Red Socks game, than they do when Villa meet Spurs. I haven't quite figured out why, but they do.

So, if you can handle the distinct Stars and Stripes slant that your PC will get, and like sport more than you do grey Windows backdrops, then ESPN Sports Shorts is just the ticket for you.

❍ *Martin Klimes*

ESPN SPORTS SHOTS

- 386 PC running Windows 3.1, with 4Mb RAM, 10Mb of hard disk space. CD- ROM drive, VGA display, and sound card.

Supplier: One Stop Software
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PC REVIEW RATING 5

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CORRIDOR 7. Good demo of an updated Wolfenstein.
ELECTRO MAN. New platform game from EPIC.
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Bug Adventure
Educational Reference

Knowledge Adventure always seem to come up with quality products aimed at children, primarily 5-10 year olds, full of colour and life. You get an interactive tour of the subject matter, complete with games and puzzles, and heaps of colour pictures and relevant sounds.

Bug Adventure fits the Knowledge Adventure multimedia formula perfectly. Although the stereotypical user might be the Just William boy-with-a-chloroform-jar, there's a ton of stuff here for everyone. Click on various icons to find out about all the nasties that slime, crawl or own more legs than is decent.

People, especially children, have an amazing curiosity when it comes to spiders, caterpillars, scorpions and the like. And to put it in its simplest possible context, Bug Adventure offers them, and us, our fill of all things bug-like.

If you're looking for a piece of CD 'edutainment' software to keep the kids enthralled and entertained, and maybe even educated, then you're on safe ground if you take your pick from among the Knowledge Adventure range.

Their average quality is very good. Among their considerable range of titles, Bug Adventure is very much a middle of the road product — not outstanding above the others in any way, but that's hardly a disgrace.

In the end I think it will be the subject that sells any CD like Bug Adventure ajust as much as the fancy trimmings that go with it. Other Knowledge Adventure offerings such as Speed didn't have quite the same life to them.

It's a testament to the programmers that they've captured the essence of a very bizarre set of animals, but captured it they have, and that's something you can feel as an end user.

❍ *Martin Klimes*

BUG ADVENTURE
- Requires a 386 PC with 5Mb of hard disk space, a VGA monitor, sound card, and CD-ROM drive.

Supplier: Guildsoft
Contact: (01752) 895 100
Price: £44.95
PC REVIEW RATING 7

Learn to Speak French/ Pronunciation Tutor
Language tools

Learn to Speak French is a no-messing tutorial program. It comes in a big, heavy box with a big, heavy book, and a CD-ROM stuffed to bursting with the latest in language gizmos.

What you get is a 16 chapter course in basic to intermediate language skills, including grammar and vocabulary, but majoring on oral and aural skills. Video footage is used repeatedly to give you the feeling that you're learning 'real French', and there are numerous exercises to test yourself against.

Learning a new language is hard work, and LTSF doesn't make it any easier on the student. You still need to put the time in, and swot up on the vocabulary. However, the final result tends to be better than you could hope for. Believe me, there's nothing like listening to your own mistakes next to a native person's smooth sentences, to embarrass you into trying harder.

As for the multimedia reference and cross-reference parts of the package, they're well drawn together too, allowing you to chase a particular point of grammar without undue fuss and bother.

Pronunciation Tutor is a cut down version of LTSF concentrating on pronunciation. Since the greatest advantages the LTSF has over a book or linguaphone method of learning is in this department, you can get pretty good results from the smaller product at substantially less cost. Of course, it won't teach you the grammar or vocabulary, but if you have your basics sorted, you might give Pronunciation Tutor a try.

❍ *Martin Klimes*



PRONUNCIATION TUTOR (FRENCH)
- Required: 386 DX/33 with Windows 3.1, 4Mb of RAM, 256 colour VGA, sound card, CD-ROM drive and microphone.

Supplier: Guildsoft
Contact: (01752) 895100
Price: £139/£44.95
PC REVIEW RATING 7

Treasure Hunt
Edutainment

Omnimedia, a company better known for its music video CDs, has recently entered the edutainment market with a program aimed at four to nine year olds.

Treasure Hunt is based on the children's book of the same name by Amanda Wood, and like the book , it features distinctive colour wash graphics.

The story follows the adventures of a crew of pirate mice who are voyaging the high seas in a search for hidden treasure. The 12 chapter story is a central part of this package — it provides clues that are indispensable to playing the 15 games which have to be completed to reach the final reward — and so the user has to be patient enough to concentrate on the story before switching to the games.

There are plenty of animated "hot spots" within each chapter which are intended as an incentive to keep the children's attention.

The games include finding hidden objects, spot the difference and matching activities, plus a colouring module — something



which seems to be included in software for this age group much more often these days.

The program also features a bedtime story. This responds to the need of many children in this age group to be lulled to sleep by something familiar and repetitive. The story simply plays over and over and the sound fades each time round.

This feature is, of course, only useful if your nursery has a fairly powerful PC (MPC2 standard) equipped with a fast CD-ROM.

❍ *Sue James*

TREASURE HUNT
- Minimum PC is a 386/33 (recommended 486/25) with fast CD-ROM drive and 4Mb of RAM. 256 colour VGA is also required.

Supplier: Omnimedia
Contact: (0181) 974 6766
Price: £30
PC REVIEW RATING 4

Stradiwackius — The Counting Concert
Edutainment Software



Stradi-what? Who thinks up these titles? Ah, a company called Vroom Books, that's who. Says it all, really.

But wait, before you write this piece of software off, it's worth a look. Behind the name is a good little program. The concept's pretty simple, an educational program for younger children, covering the music field and throwing in various other bits of learning between the songs and demonstrations and the such. Sort of like an episode of Sesame Street, except that you get animated worms as the presenters instead of puppets.

All in all, the whole shooting match is wonderfully presented with lots of lush colours and cute voices. There always seems to be something new to do without the pace flagging too much or feeling that you're going at a gallop. It's relaxed, it's fun, and you find yourself learning as you go. Marvellous.

Innovatively, there's a parents' guide to view before joining your children in the programme. This helps you get a head-start so that, when you open it up for the first time and everybody's expectant of a smooth, easy-going and fun time, you can get right on with exploring the programme without making too many mistakes. It's the icing on the cake for a thoroughly decent piece of edutainment.

By the way, neat packaging guys. Just come up with a better name next time, okay?

❍ *Martin Klimes*

STRADIWACKIUS THE COUNTING CONCERT
- Requires a 486 PC, with 4Mb of RAM, 256 colour VGA, a sound card, CD-ROM drive, and Windows 3.1

Supplier: zzzzzz
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PC REVIEW RATING 7



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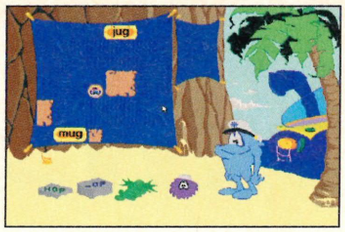
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123/ABC with Hickory and Me/Monker's Math Factory/Monker's Spelling Submarine

Educational software

Step Ahead Software is launching four disk-based early education programs that are brash and bright and thereby succeed in keeping children's attention.

Two titles are aimed at the pre-school age group which feature Hickory, a mouse, and his companion, Nat, a flying insect. As their titles imply, 123 with Hickory and Me introduces numbers, counting and matching ,while ABC with Hickory and Me covers the alphabet and other pre-reading skills.

Although still unmistakably American the programs do make provision for the differences between English and American English by allowing a choice between two sounds, "zed" and "zee", for the letter Z, for instance.

Both programs offer a choice of two levels of difficulty in a well focused lesson activity which is made more interesting by animated events that occur in response to exploring the screen. Each also incudes a maze game to test the skills being developed.

The character used in the two programs for six to eight year olds is called Monker and he is an indefinable critter with a booming voice and an energetic style. Monker's Math Factory, a title which is a reminder of its American origins, is set against a background of a toy factory and clicking on the objects on the screen bring toys to life to add an extra element of entertainment. As you might guess, Monker's Spelling Submarine has an underwater theme. There is a central lesson screen with three choices of activity and two levels of skill in each program. The maths options are adding, subtraction and place value while the spelling ones are to supply the initial letters, the middle letters and the final letters of words.

Both program also include a game screen in which the games involve negotiating mazes. The object of the maths games are to follow a sequence or to practice addition while the spelling mazes involve rhyming words. These games are made more lively by the inclusion of obstacles to overcome — but as the effect is to make the kids enjoy practising essential skills, then I'm not going to complain.

This software does not and cannot make any claims about conforming to the National Curriculum, but the skills it develops are equally important on both sides of the Atlantic and it has the advantage of a cheerful approach and a relatively cheap price tag.

❍ *Sue James*

ABC WITH HICKORY

- Minimum PC is a 20MHz 386/SX, with 4Mb of RAM, 256 colour VGA and AdLib, Sound Blaster and Roland support.

Supplier: Step Ahead Software
Contact: (0171) 323 1212
Price: £19.95

PC REVIEW RATING 7

Rosie and Jim Talking Activities: Duck loses his Quack/Jim Gets the Sneezes

Educational software

Sherston Software has two titles based on Central Television's Rosie and Jim series for pre-school children. This is talking software that encourages reading, in so far as each word is highlighted in turn as the story is read. But compared to other software for this age group these programs can only be described as thin.

True they are inexpensive and undemanding of computer resources. But we have come to expect more, even from talking software. Each title has a few introductory frames of story and then an activity of very limited scope and duration. The programs require a sound card to run and once installed you have to have a DOS mouse driver loaded and the floppy disk in the drive as a security measure. I found it easiest to run from the DOS prompt — and even then it was not well behaved.

❍ *Sue James*

JIM GETS THE SNEEZES

- Minimum 386 PC with 1Mb of RAM, VGA and a Sound Blaster compatible sound card

Supplier: Sherston Software
Contact: (01666) 840433
Price: £11.75

PC REVIEW RATING 2

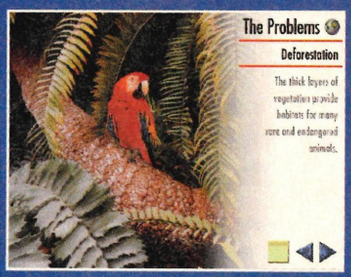
Tried and tested

Some software gets deleted from the hard disk the minute the review is written, some we wish we'd never laid eyes on. But, every month there are products that do prove to be reliable and enjoyable, and above all genuinely useful. All of the products featured in the PC Review tried and tested section are worthy candidates for anybody's short list.

Art de la Table
'Cookery guides for the proudest of chefs' is how we describe this superb CD collection three pages earlier. Shows how developers can make the best of CDs for hobby and reference interest.



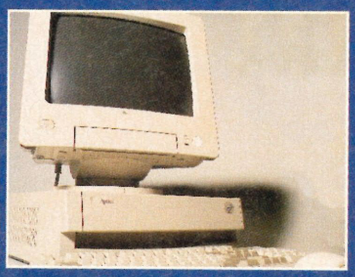
Big Green Disc
A CD that examines mankind's finest eco-disasters in detail: thoroughly researched and with participation from organisations like GreenPeace to lend it some authority.



Teac Super Quad
A super performer — particularly when you compare it with double speed drives. The Teac Super Quad is still the cheapest (£250) quad speed on the block. At least until Christmas ...



IBM Aptiva PC
The PC that sets the standard in helpful;ness and home-oriented features for the first-time user. Excellent build quality is slightly offset by the overall price for the higher spec versions.

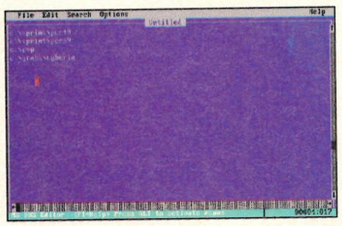


Recommended so far

❍ Gateway 2000 486SX/33 (PC) ❍ Fauve Matisse (art software) ❍ Art Gallery (art CD) ❍ Fine Artist (kids' drawing software) ❍ Gamewave 32 (sound card) ❍ Sound FX Classic 3000 (sound card) ❍ Micrograph Tabby (tablet) ❍ Dan Vantage MM (486PC) ❍ KidDesk (PC front-end) ❍ NEC3Xi (CD-ROM drive) ❍ InfoCentral (PIM) ❍ Mitsumi FX001D (CD-ROM drive) ❍ QY8 (sequencer) ❍ Vivid 3D (surround sound) ❍ MJM 486/66 (486PC) ❍ Stowaway! (edutainment CD) ❍ IBM Aptiva (PC) ❍ Prehistoria (edutainment CD) ❍ DR-U104x (CD-ROM drive)

Shareware reviews

This month Alan Clarke takes a look at three shareware utilities.



QC — Quick Change

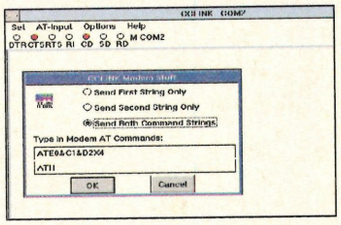
QC — Quick Change is a replacement for the DOS Dir command that allows you to replace complicated paths with easy to remember, customisable aliases instead.

Using a data file that you create with any text editor, you must first set up your aliases by typing QC along with the alias. For example, if you have an application that installs itself to a directory via the command c:\microstuff\programs\wp. Instead of typing this out every time you wish to access that directory, just create an alias WP (or something similar) in the QC dat file, and hey presto!

QC is a very small program that's extremely useful and simple to use.

Available from AfterHours BBS
01785 228214





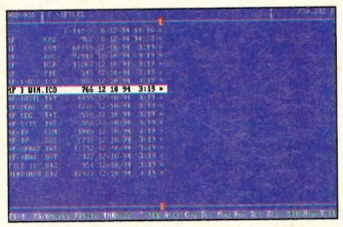
CCLink

CCLink is a Windows comms program that monitors the serial and parallel ports of your PC. It displays a series of LEDs that represent the various modem functions — ideal for users of internal or portable modems.

CCLink will also detect possible interrupt conflicts and port usage by other devices as well as detect whether or not your system uses 16550UARTs. You can also save a variety of configuration options including screen position.

Available from AfterHours BBS
01785 228214





4Files

This multi-purpose file manager includes a full featured text editor for 4DOS and NDOS 'file notes' and can also act as a program launcher for all your favourite applications and utilities. A variety of command line switches also allow you to control the sort of criteria for directory and file listings, including reverse, size, date, etc.

Disks and directories are navigated via a series of keypresses, but so you don't need to remember a huge amount of keys, each one has multiple functions depending on the action you take. If you have highlighted a directory, a certain keypress will display the contents, whilst a press on the same key when a file is selected will display the file.

These keypresses have also been logically assigned; so N creates a new directory, K will kill (delete) a file and R will rename a file.

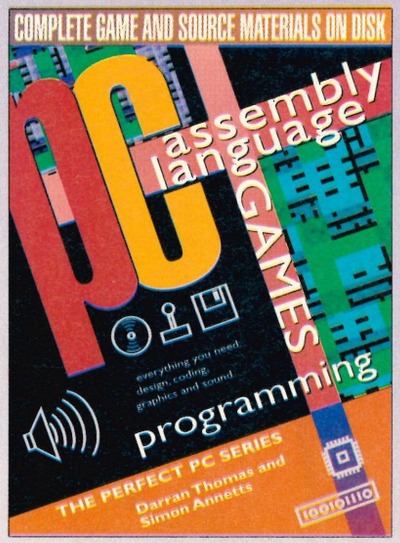
4Files is a very thorough program and contains a whole host of functions. The accompanying documentation file is well written and presented. A great little utility.

Available from AfterHours BBS
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Power up your PC!

Got as far as you think you can go? Push back your boundaries with these great books from BSB!



PC Assembler Games Programming, ISBN: 1-873308-41-8, £24.95, 464 pages.
Presented by professional programmers in the UK games software industry, this is for anyone with a basic knowledge of programming who wants to transform their ideas into programs for fun and profit! The book and disk contain both program code examples and useful data such as screen backgrounds, character designs, sound effects and other components which the reader can fully rework to write a playable PC game. Subjects covered include game design and organisation; characters, sprites and screen maps; scrolling, panning and palette animation; sound effects and Soundblaster cards; selling a game and industry contacts. Start designing your hit game today!

Microsoft Office for Windows First Steps, ISBN: 1-873308-29-9, £14.95, 352 pages.
Ian Sinclair's new *Insider Guide* is easy to read and packed with information. It is specifically designed for the computer novice who wishes to get the most from the UK version of *Office* without having to learn computer technology and jargon, covering such topics as installation, customisation, the Toolbar and importing and exporting data. Highly affordable, yet comprehensive and up to date, this refreshingly reader-friendly book makes learning the world of *Microsoft Office* a veritable pleasure.

PC Beginnners Pack, ISBN: 1-873308-44-2, £39.95, two books, video and shareware collection*.
An ideal gift, this is a combination of two best-selling guides, an instructional video, Windows reference card and Shareware collection. The two books offer a blend of experience and hints and tips, with no previous knowledge assumed, and cover using Windows; running programs; copying files; changing settings; using built-in Windows applications; successful printing; setting up a CD-ROM drive; sound cards and using a Modem. Every stage is dealt with in a step by step fashion, the video providing a perfect visual backup to the books. The Shareware collection provides a range of Windows programs to complement your existing setup with handy utilities, games, edutainment and home interest programs all detailed in a separate booklet. **provisional specifications.*

Quicken for Windows Insider Guide, ISBN: 1-873308-32-9, £12.95, 224 pages.
This *Insider Guide* teaches you how to use the UK versions of Quicken 2.0 and 3.0 and relates its features to real-life financial scenarios everyone will recognise. Leading chartered accountant Graham Rawlinson provides chapter by chapter financial recommendations and advice to balance Stephen Copestake's tutorial text.

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- Secrets of Sim City 2000 @ £9.95 ☐
- Visual Basic Beginners Guide @ £17.95 ☐
- QBASIC Beginners Guide @ £17.95 ☐
- QBASIC A-Z Reference Guide @ £17.95 ☐

WIN! WIN! WIN!

LOADS OF KIT AND ocean GAMES!

John Menzies in association with ocean Software, the people who brought Syndicate (SNES) and Inferno into our homes, are offering one lucky person the chance to win loads of console equipment! What's more, their generosity does not stop there! – 50 games from a selection of Ocean's extensive multi-format catalogue will form the equally impressive runners-up prizes! These fabulous prizes are brought to you by ocean, top newsagent John Menzies, and EMAP Images, the leading light in video game magazines. Entering the competition is simplicity itself. Just follow these pointers:

- **Go into your local John Menzies store.**
- **Pick up an entry form and answer the three easy questions on it.**
- **Mark your name and address on the space provided.**
- **Post your completed entry to the name and address stated.**

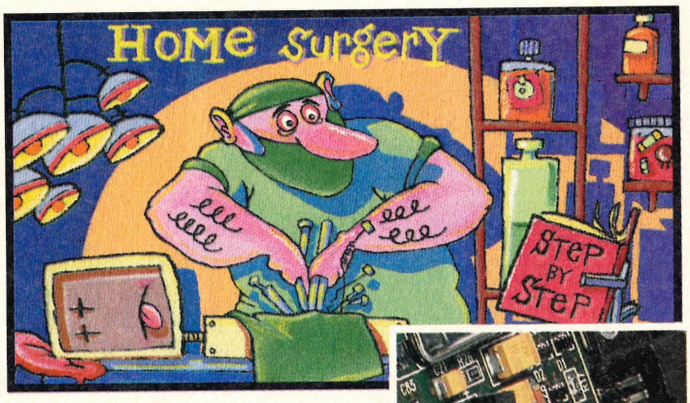
The entry leaflets will be in all the UK's John Menzies stores between 20/01/95 and 24/02/95 , so make sure you get down there pretty smartish, as the competition closes on the 4th of March 1995.

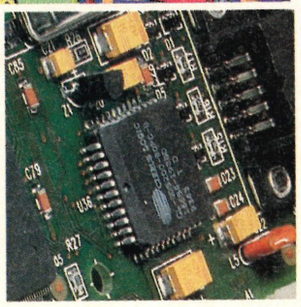
John Menzies



Full prize details on entry form

Technical Help





PCs are great — most of the time. But PCs move in mysterious ways. When they're not being great, they can be the most irritating, frustrating, downright incomprehensible machines you ever tried to use. So, where can you go for help, when the manuals are full of jargon, your techie friends won't return your calls and there's smoke coming out of the back of your PC?

Try PC Review's Technical Help section. Whether it's your hardware that's hung up on you, or software which just won't do what you ask it to, we'll try to explain what's going wrong without getting too deeply into PC jargon and obscure acronyms. Here you'll find workshops on popular PC pursuits — including the second article in our series about the Internet — a regular help section which explains common and basic procedures, a jargon-busting glossary of terms, and if you're still stuck after all that, our agony uncle Mike James is on hand to solve your specific problems on our Q&A pages.

We aim to cover the areas which most often cause confusion with the PC, but if there's anything you think is missing from this section and which you would like to see covered, let us know. Drop us a line at PC Review, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU, or e-mail us on pcreview@cix.compulink.co.uk and we'll do our best to help!

In this issue

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Accessing the World Wide Web **121**

Absolute Beginners

Back to basics **124**

Making the right connections **125**

Help! It's not working **126**

Technical Help

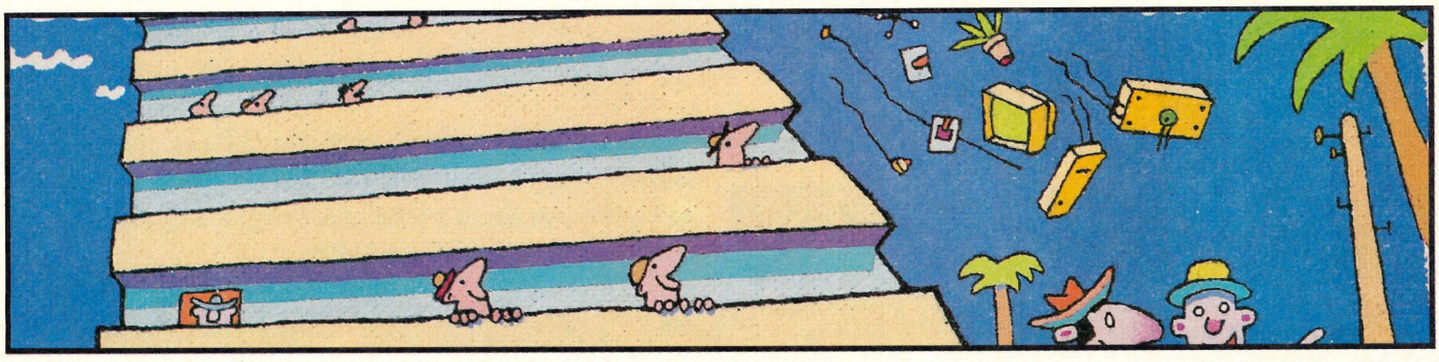
Formatting your disks **128**

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Making a boot disk **130**

Q & A

Your questions answered **136**



The Whole Wired World

The World Wide Web is a fast-growing, easy to use area on the Internet. We explain how to get around the Web and who you might meet while you're there.

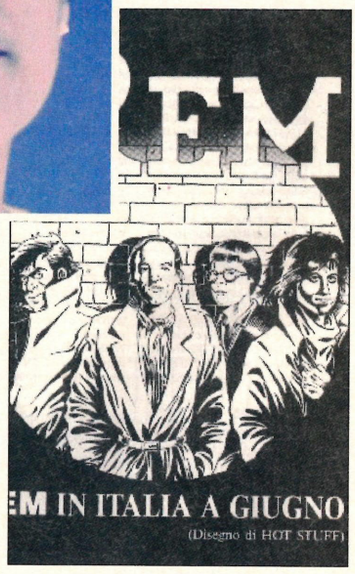
The Internet is growing fast, and the part of it that is growing most rapidly is the World Wide Web, or WWW — you didn't think that those three letter acronyms would be resisted for long now, did you?

More and more companies, organisations, and divisions within them are joining the World Wide Web, partly because it's easy to gain access to it, and partly because it's easy at the providers' end to design and produce pages for it. Each separate screen which you and I call up on the Web is a page designed simply as a document by the service provider.

The World Wide Web was originally designed just five years ago in Switzerland, as an easy way for physicists to keep in touch with each other over the Internet. It has since mushroomed to become a simple and convenient way of accessing a wide variety of Internet services. Its simplicity is based around the fact that you move around the pages on the Web by means of hypertext links. Any highlighted word that appears on-screen has been 'hot-wired'; by selecting this word with your mouse pointer you can move to the page or site associated with this word. Also, when using the Web, you aren't restricted to visiting only World Wide Web sites — you can also access gopher, news, telnet and ftp services (see glossary, page 122).



Left: Soulful, mysterious, or just having a bad hair day, from the official Cocteau Twins WWW pages.



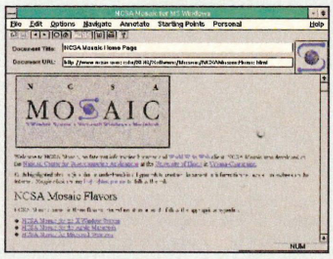
Right: REM. The unofficial REM web pages not only contain the lyrics to nearly all REM songs but also a number of pictures available for downloading.

To get the best out of the World Wide Web, you need to be using a broswer with full graphic support, such as Mosaic. But you can only get this if you have a direct dial-in link to the Internet, such as the one provided by Demon Internet Services or Easynet. With this, you will see the Web pages you access in graphic format with illustrations, pictorial icons and sound effects available. However, you can still access the Web services with a text-based Internet gateway such as the ones provided by Cix or Delphi — it just won't be very pretty, and you won't be able to see any of the pictures either, your screen will just be full of text.

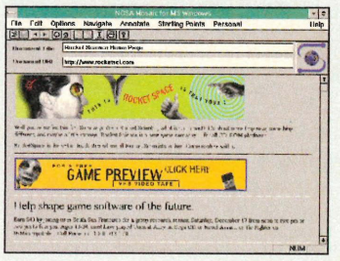
What's on the Web?

So what can you find on the World Wide Web? As always with the Internet, the answer is a rather daunting, "anything you like". Many of the more long-standing Web providers are academic institutions — in the UK, for instance, most universities have their own Web pages, but the growth in the last five years has seen it spread to many more varied organisations, such as the Electronic Telegraph (online version of the Daily Telegraph), the BBC, a wide range of rock and pop artists, and some more fringe activities which you might have expected to find in an alt. newsgroup, and which are frequently a spin-off from a newsgroup.

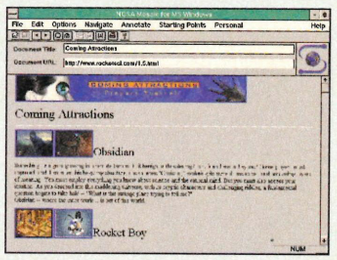
You start off with your Internet service and a vague idea of where you want to go. The World Wide Web works on a hypertext basis — that is, certain words and phrases will be picked out in highlighted or differently coloured text. Click on these with the mouse and the program will take you to the page dedicated to this new subject.



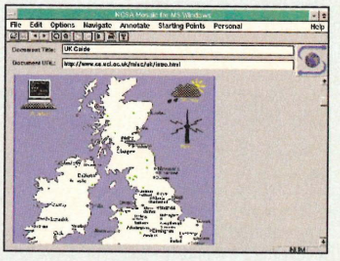
This is the home page for NCSA Mosaic, one of the best of the graphically-based browsers. I've heard there's some good stuff on forthcoming games in Rocket Science's WWW pages, so let's try going straight to http://www.rocketsci.com and see where that gets us.



This takes us straight into Rocket Science's Web pages. There's some information here on Cadillacs and Dinosaurs, and Loadstar, but you'll have read about that already in PC Review, so let's look for some information about brand new games.



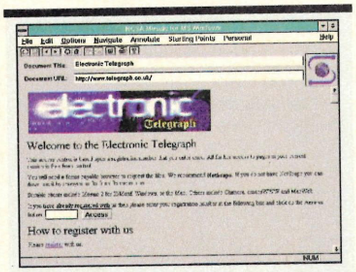
The pictures shown here can be downloaded to your hard disk in JPEG format (pictures on the Internet are usually either in JPEG or GIF format) or viewed on-screen.



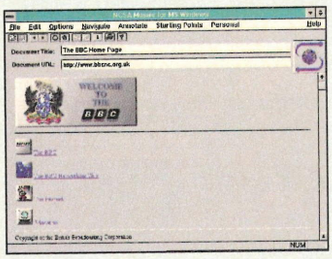
After leaving Rocket Science, we decided to come back to Blighty, and start right at the beginning. Just click on any city on the map to see what's available on the Web in each location.

How to contact PC Review online
PC Review has its own electronic mail account with CIX. You can contact us on pcreview@cix.compulink.co.uk. By sending your messages from your own bulletin board to the full address it should reach us through various gateways and you should be notified if your mail doesn't get through.

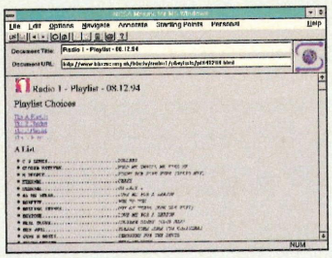
TOURING THE WEB



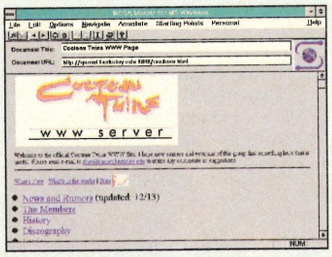
The Electronic Telegraph is an online version of the newspaper, which was set up in conjunction with Demon Internet last year. Here you can access not just stories from the newspaper itself, but additional snippets of information as well.



Next, why not drop in on the web pages for the BBC, which as well as including a fully featured bulletin board, Auntie, and e-mail service, also offers lots of information about the BBC and a gateway to the Internet proper.



From the BBC menu, select 'TV and radio' and then 'Radio 1' to find this fascinating set of pages, where this week's playlist is displayed in full. The records on the A list, shown in part here, will have a guaranteed 25 plays per week on wonderful 1FM.



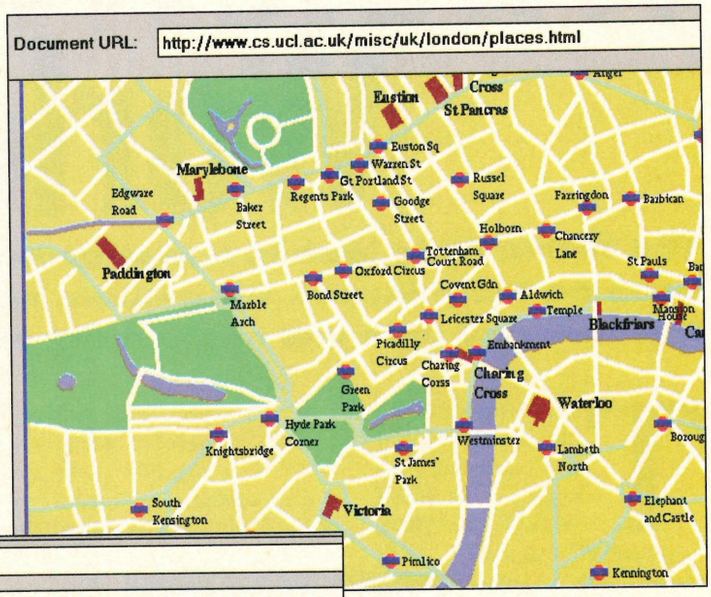
Back at the Radio One main page, you can also access a list of featured artists who all have their own dedicated Web pages elsewhere on the Internet. Just by clicking on Cocteau Twins, I've been magically transported to Berkeley, California, and the Cocteau's very own WWW site.

Key to the Web

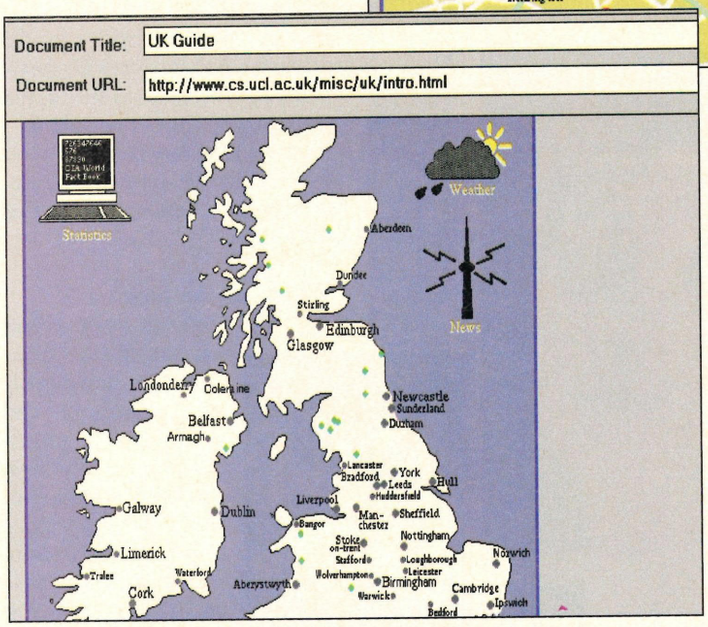
Again as always, knowing how to find it is the key to making the most of the Web.

If you know the complete address of the site you want, you can enter it straightaway of course, but all those http's and html's aren't easy to remember.

What you need to help you find relevant Web pages is a search facility and the Internet is stuffed to overflowing with search engines,



Right: click on any of the highlighted items here to see descriptions of central London which range from the terse ("No information on Chancery Lane yet") to verbose,useful tourist style information.



from plain alphabetical directories of services, to Lynx, and Lycos, in which you type keywords to search for — often hundreds if your search wasn't too specific.

However, you can have a lot of fun just browsing through the Web, and you will almost certainly alight on some interesting and surprising things (see the panel, left). Just make sure you keep an eye on the phone bill and you don't end up wandering aimlessly in cyberspace.

If you've bought the CD-ROM edition of PC Review, you can try out the Internet and the World Wide Web for yourself with our free Delphi access software. For more details on our cover CD offer, see page 9.

GLOSSARY

HTML
Stands for HyperText Mark-up Language — the language which Web documents (pages) are written in.

WWW
Stands for World Wide Web. A service developed in order to make access to different parts of the Internet easy through hypertext links.

URL
Stands for universal resource locater. Type in, or select the name of the Web site you wish to access, and the URL will take you straight there.

Gopher
Developed at the University of Minnesota, a gopher is an application which enables you to find a required Internet service through a system of menus.

Telnet
Telnet is a service which enables you to access the files on a remote computer by, in effect, acting as if you were actually working at that computer rather than being on a phone link maybe thousands of miles away. It does it all for the cost of a local call, as well.

Ftp
Stands for File Transfer Protocol — the service which lets you download files from another computer to your own via the Internet.

Newsgroup
A special interest forum which anyone interested in the subject matter can join in a post messages. See last month's Internet workshop for details.

Usenet
A large collection of special interest newsgroups accessible on the Internet. These groups cover anything and everything, from rec.pets.cats (all about your moggy) to alt,.sex.bondage.

INTERNET SERVICES

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Conferencing system with text-only access to Internet anD World Wide Web.

Compuserve (0800) 289378
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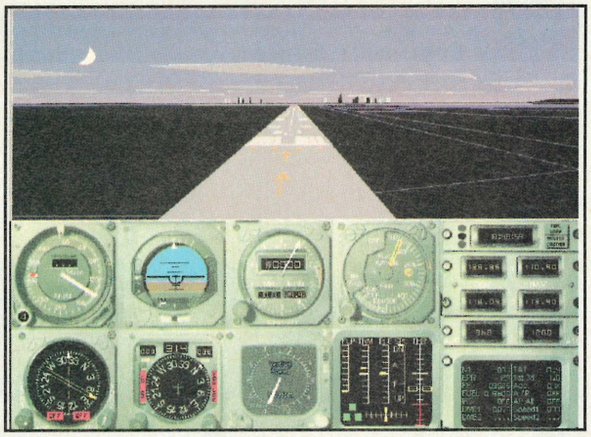
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Absolute beginners



Most so-called 'beginners' guides' take the liberty of assuming that the PC is up and running and you're ready to start loading and using programs. Not this one! PC Review takes you right back to basics.

If the manufacturers' estimates are correct there are a lot of you reading this with a brand new PC at home, thanks to the pre-Christmas boom in 'family' PCs. Now, if you're about to connect up your new PC, or you've tried but can't get it to work properly, read on. This is the PC Review almost-infallible (all other things being equal, of course) guide to setting up your PC correctly.

Unless you've bought a PC piecemeal and practically in kit form, you should find that your software has been installed for you. The latest version of the operating system, MS-DOS, should already reside on your hard disk, your nice friendly Windows should be all ready to go, and your essential start-up files (which are called Autoexec.bat and Config.sys — see PC Review, Issue 38) should be all present and correct.

There are still pitfalls, however. Far too few PC makers label the ports at the back of the machine, so that when you gather up all your cables (the power, the monitor, the mouse, the speakers . . .) and attempt to match them to various sockets, a sort of 'slot blindness' descends and it all ends up looking like so much spaghetti. Sound familiar? Check out the labelled picture on the opposite page and see if things start to fall into place.

Tidying up

OK. You have a whirring, live PC. You probably also have a floor strewn with boxes, loose disks, swathes of bubble-wrap and polysterene nibblets. It's tempting, but not advisable, to put the whole lot into a bin bag and chuck it out.

Polythene, bubble-wrap and polysterene chunks can go (except, of course, you can never get rid of every single polysterene chunk — there'll always be one lurking under the sofa). The pictorial A4 sheet with Japanese captions is similarly useless. However, *keep* any scrap of paper that says 'warranty', 'guarantee', 'license' (sic — it'll be American), or 'registration' at the top. If you need support, or maybe even to have the PC repaired, you'll need these scraps of paper. You should also keep a note of any registration numbers you are allotted for software. You'll need these if you have to ring up telephone helplines.

And always, always, keep any floppy disks or CD-ROMs. These are your master disks, and if you ever want to re-install your software, you'll need them.

Why re-install your software? You might, one day, inadvertently delete the program files. Or you might want to change the configuration — and find that the correct files for the new settings are on the original disks.

Ideally, you should keep all the master disks together, in a disk box, or their original boxes if they had such things, somewhere safe like a drawer or cupboard. If you leave them lying around the desk, there's always a danger that one day you'll overwrite them with files of letters to your accountant by mistake.

What to do with the original hardware boxes is always a thorny problem. If the PC does ever have to be sent away to be repaired or replaced, the only feasible way to pack it is in its original box. If you are short of storage space anyway, you could try flattening the boxes without destroying them in the hope that you could reconstitute them if the need arises.

It is a good idea (though one not always adhered to in this office) to spend five minutes planning where your PC is going to go. Preferably before you unpack everything. Here are four things to bear in mind before your park the PC in its final resting place:

Space

These days, PCs seems to come in two sizes: supermodel-slim and extra large. An extra-large Tower system can be remarkably economical on space, however, if you stack it under the desk. But the bit that tends to dominate your desk space is the monitor. Don't forget that monitors stick out a long way at the back. You need a desk or table that's at least 18 inches deep just to accommodate the monitor and as much space between the screen and your eyes as you can comfortably manage. Sitting too close to the screen will make your head ache, your eyes ache, and has even been implicated in fears over photo-epilepsy and radiation absorption.

On these last two, alarming notes: if someone is predisposed to photo (light sensitive) epilepsy then long periods of sitting too close to a very bright, frequently flashing screen *may* trigger it off. It's highly unlikely to happen on a PC, which doesn't have the same sort of whizz-bang-flash games as other formats, and you can't 'catch' it — if you don't have that predisposition to start with, your PC can't give you a fit. Most monitors boast low radiation emission these days as well, but that still means that it's a good idea to sit around two or three feet away from the screen and to take frequent breaks, if possible.

There are other space considerations as well. You need a gap between the back of the machine and the wall, both for the cables and so that it doesn't get too hot. Your machine needs space to 'breathe'. You need room on the desk to type comfortably and with

MAKING THE RIGHT CONNECTIONS

Now, no two PCs are exactly alike, so unless your new PC is a 33MHz 486DX by Dan Technology — the model pictured here — the layout won't be precisely the same. But the ports and types of sockets are standard, so all you need to do is to match a socket on the back of your PC to a socket pictured here and then read the accompanying text.

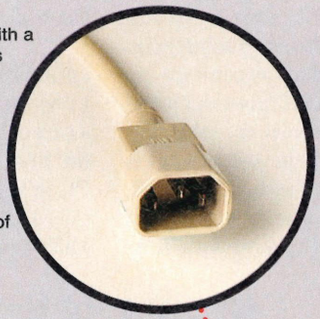
Most connectors come with screws to fix them securely to the sockets. We would suggest that at first you should fit the connectors into the sockets but don't tighten the screws, just yet. If everything works fine, go ahead and secure the connection. But if you do encounter problems, you don't want to be eternally unscrewing and screwing up again.

Start with the keyboard, monitor and mouse cables. Leave the main power supply cable until last.

Never force the pins into a socket. Align the pins to the socket and push gently but firmly. Once halfway into the socket, trying rocking the connector very very gently into position rather than just shoving the plug as far into the back of the PC as possible.

Finally, attach the power cable, first into the back of the PC, then into the 3-pin wall socket, then switch on at the wall. Now you're ready to switch the PC on at the front (or, if yours is a Virgin Euromagnetics PC, at the back, bizarrely enough).

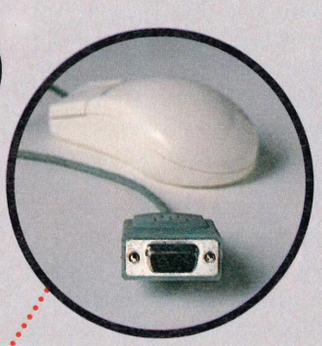
Monitor power supply
Some monitors come with a power cable which goes into the back of the PC; some have a separate power supply. You will also have the monitor to graphics card connector, which plugs into socket A on the monitor and slot A on the back of the PC in the main picture.



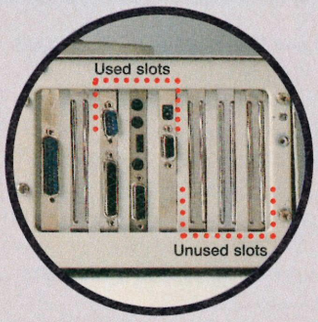




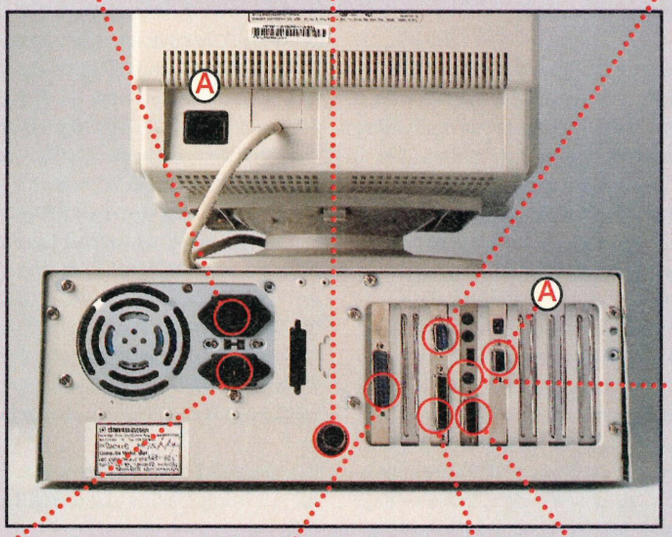
Keyboard
This is a standard sized keyboard socket — your PC may have a smaller PS/2 style keyboard socket, pictured above right. Your connector should have the word 'top' embossed on it somewhere to indicate which way up to plug the cable in.

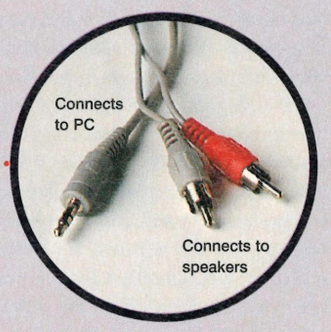


Serial mouse
Serial ports come in two sizes: 9-pin and 25-pin (the one pictured here is a 9-pin version). You will usually, but not always, find an adapter supplied with your PC. If you have a serial mouse, ie, if the cable coming out of the mouse ends in a connector with nine pins, or one with 25 pins, you can bet your last pound coin that it will plug into a serial port called COM1.



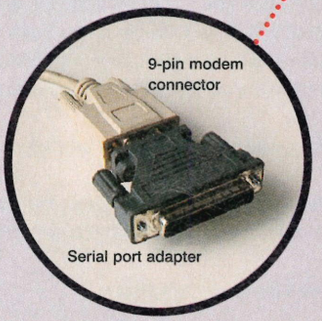
Expansion slots
Actually, these are the backplates which cover up the expansion slots inside the PC and prevent them from getting damaged or dusty. Should you wish to add a peripheral to your PC which requires an expansion slot, you need to open up the PC's casing, and remove the backplate, in order to insert the new circuit board.



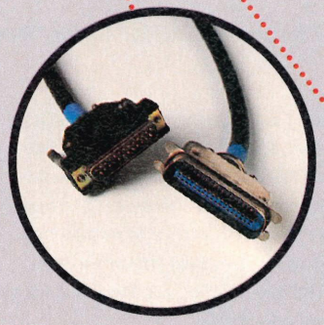


Speakers
The two connectors on the right plug into the back of your speaker or speakers, the one on the left goes into the socket indicated on the sound card interface (usually labelled Line Out or Spk Out).

Mains power supply
One cable you definitely need is the mains power lead. Nearly all PCs these days come with the three-pin plug already attached — but it's worth checking before you buy, that the plug will be included. Sounds silly, I know but it saves on annoyance when you unpack the thing.



Second serial port (modem)
If you do have two serial ports, you ought to have one of each type. The most common use for the second one is to connect a modem. Again, hunt for that adapter if one socket has nine pins and the other 25, as in the picture above.



Parallel port
There are few people these days who use a parallel port for anything except a printer, and parallel ports, you'll be pleased to know, are entirely standardised. To connect your PC to a parallel printer, you'll need a lead which looks like the one pictured here.

Game port
A joystick is not an essential part of the PC owner's armoury, but if you have one, it goes in here. Some PCs, notably some Amstrad and Packard Bell models, have joystick ports built in — often labelled 'game port'.

space to rest your wrists in front of the keyboard. You need room for the mouse and a mouse mat, so that you can move the mouse freely and at a comfortable angle (without your elbow then sending coffee, or stacks of disks flying).

Note also that if you're left-handed, many mice are designed to be comfortable for right-handers, but left-handed mice are available — ask at your local computer store for either an ambidextrous or left-handed model.

Light sources

Light shining on screen is a bad idea, whether it's natural daylight, a bulb, or a fluorescent strip. So don't place the monitor directly opposite a window, and don't position it so that it has to be tilted upwards and catch the reflection from a light bulb (see below).

Comfort

A few things to consider when choosing where the PC should go:

1) Is there enough desk space to rest a book or magazine, if you need that for reference while you use the computer?

2) Is the chair at the desk or table comfortable, with good support for your back?

3) When you sit in that chair, is the monitor at your eye level without being unnaturally tilted?

4) Can you reach the controls on the PC — the power on/off, the reset button, the disk drive doors, without training as a contortionist?

Access (and spaghetti)

Stacking your Tower PC discreetly under the desk has its advantages, but can you get at the back of the machine without rearranging all the furniture? At some stage you will want to disconnect something, or just check that the connections are secure, and if this means you have to crawl under the table and make your way through a tangled forest of cables, the chances are you will break something. One solution is to see if the PC came with 'feet' — two bases that you can slide the Tower casing on to, so that you can pull the machine out from under the desk relatively smoothly. If they're not supplied, try asking at your local computer store (again) for some generic ones.

Try to keep the mass of cables at the back reasonably tidy, so that you're not tugging on a tight speaker lead, say, whenever you move the mouse. I'm afraid this is a case of 'do as we say, not do as we do' here, since there isn't a single PC in the PC Review office that doesn't look like a mass of boiled knitting at the back.

HELP! IT'S NOT WORKING

I press the power switch, but the PC won't come on

First determine whether it's the PC that isn't on, or the monitor that isn't on. Are there any lights shining at the front of the PC? If so, the PC is on, so check the monitor. Is that switched on? If it's also on, check the cabling at the back. There should be two cables coming out of the monitor. One will plug into the PC, usually above or next to the power supply socket (see diagram on page 125), or into a three point wall plug. The other plugs into the PC's graphics card and is normally a small connector with pins arranged in three rows. There's only one socket at the back of the PC it will fit into, so it's difficult to get wrong. Check all external power points.

Still no joy? Find the monitor's brightness and contrast controls — usually at the front beneath the screen. Try turning these up to maximum. Nothing? If possible, persuade a friend to let you borrow his monitor-to-PC cables and try connecting the two with the different cables. If it works, it's a cable problem and having two cables replaced is a lot less hassle than having a monitor replaced. If it doesn't, start to suspect a fault very strongly indeed. It could be the graphics card, it could be the connectors — any which way, as a new user with a brand new PC, you don't want to have to start this sort of in-depth diagnosis.

Every time I try typing a command, I just get a message saying "Bad command or filename".

Either your typing is dreadful (you need to be letter-perfect with MS-DOS), or you don't have the right 'paths' defined. To see what you have in the way of paths, type EDIT AUTOEXEC.BAT [Enter]. This will take you into MS-DOS's Edit program, and the contents of your Autoexec.bat start-up file will be displayed. This file contains commands which determine how your PC is set up, and it's called a start-up file because whenever you switch your PC on, the commands in Autoexec.bat are carried out right at the start, before you see the C:> prompt on-screen.

Look down the lines of text for the word PATH, and you'll probably find something like PATH=C:\DOS;C:\WINDOWS;C:\MOUSE. The effect of this is that whenever you type a command, MS-DOS will look first in the current directory to see if the command file is stored there, then in the C:\DOS directory, then the C:\WINDOWS directory, then the C:\MOUSE directory.

Let's invent the command GOMOUSE, which will load a mouse driver, as an example. The file which contains all the instructions for loading the mouse driver is called GOMOUSE.COM and it is stored in the C:\MOUSE directory. You have a prompt on-screen that reads C:>. You type GOMOUSE and back DOS comes with "Bad command or filename". You look in your Autoexec.bat file and you find a line reading PATH=C:\DOS;C:\WINDOWS. No mention of C:\MOUSE. You now have two alternative courses of action. You can, 1) go back to your C:> prompt and type CD MOUSE, so that your on-screen prompt now reads C:\MOUSE>, and then type GOMOUSE, or 2) go back into the Autoexec.bat file, move the cursor down until it's at the end of the PATH line, and add ;C:\MOUSE, so that the line now reads PATH=C:\DOS;C:\WINDOWS;C:\MOUSE. Then, and this is crucial, save the file (Alt-F, S), exit the program (Alt-F, X), and then press Ctrl-Alt-Del — the Control key, the Alt key and the Delete key — simultaneously. This will restart the PC. No changes that you make to Config.sys or Autoexec.bat will take effect until you restart your PC.

I've plugged in the mouse, but when the PC starts up, there's a message saying Device not found [or similar].

Assuming that you have the correct mouse driver the most likely explanation is that you've plugged the mouse into the wrong serial port. Most PCs come with both a 25-pin and a 9-pin serial port and if the mouse in box has a 9-pin connector, then it's tempting to plug it in the 9-pin port. If this is case, try plugging the mouse into the *other* serial port using an adapter.

My serial cable is the wrong type.

There should be an adapter in the box. If there isn't, you can buy serial adapters very cheaply from a specialist computer store.

The leads are too short.

Well, they nearly always *are*, with anything coming out of the monitor being a particular offender. For generic cables, such as power supplies, or parallel printer cables, you should be able to buy a longer one. For anything hard-wired, such as the mouse cable, or keyboard cable, try contacting the manufacturer to see if they have any longer leads to replace yours with. If you're buying new peripherals, ask about cable lengths before you buy — you may be able to have a specially lengthy lead made up for you.

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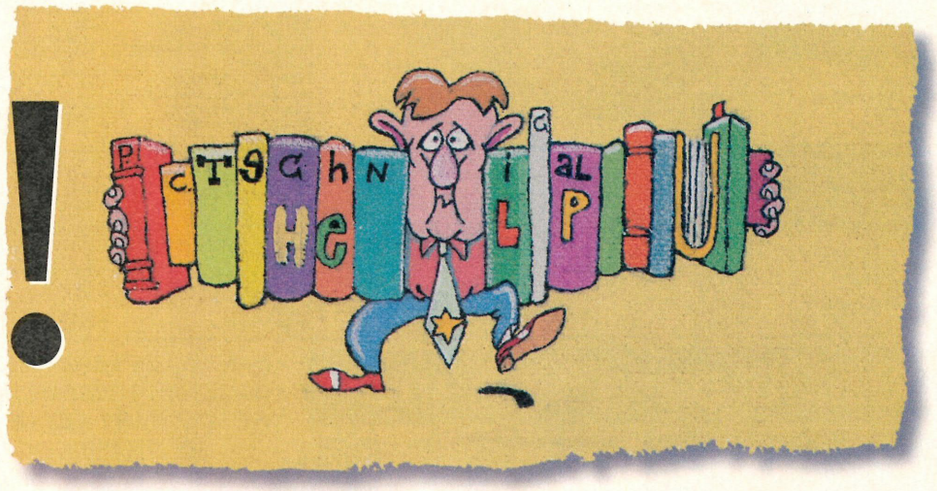
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Help!



This month, in conjunction with our beginners' guide, we show you how to format a floppy disk and create a boot disk. Plus, let our PC glossary guide you through the mystery of PC terminology.

FORMATTING YOUR DISKS

Blank disks that you buy from the shops will almost always be unformatted: that is, they are truly blank. In order to use them on a PC, you will need to format them. Formatting imposes a structure on the disk, marking the disk magnetically into areas called tracks and sectors, which makes it easier for the operating system to keep track of files when you store them on the disk. If you format your blank 3.5" disk in an Apple Macintosh, it will be formatted for use only in an Apple Mac; if you format it in a PC, the tracks and sectors will be marked specifically for use in a PC.

Where formatting gets a bit scary is that, **a)** you can reformat disks with data already on them, and the process of formatting also erases any information already on the disk, and, **b)** you can format hard disks as well as floppy disks.

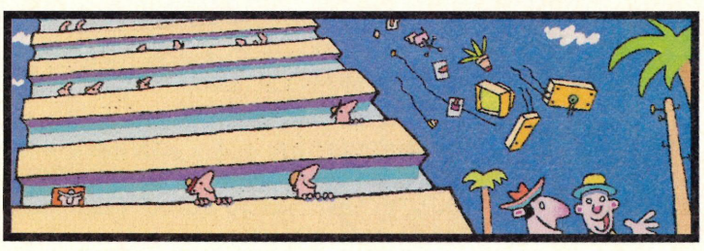
We defy anyone who has used a PC for any length of time to claim that they have never formatted the wrong disk by accident. However, while it can be agonisingly easy to reformat the wrong floppy disk, current versions of DOS will warn you in capital letters if you try to format the hard disk by mistake.

If you do accidentally wipe out the wrong data with the Format command, and you have version 5 or 6 of DOS, try running the Unformat program immediately (type Unformat at the C:\DOS prompt). Failing that, you need a program such as Norton or PC Tools to try to recover your data.

How to format a high density (1.44Mb) floppy disk in a high density drive A:

1) Put the disk you want to format into your floppy disk drive A:.
2) At the C:\ prompt, type FORMAT A: /F:1.44 (don't hit Enter just yet)
3) Check that it really does say A: in the line you've typed.
4) Press Enter.
5) You will be prompted to insert the correct disk into drive A:. This you have already done, but you do have a chance to double-check that it's the right one now.
6) Press Enter to confirm the format.

The formatting process should



GLOSSARY

8-bit: a bus (see below) or processor which can transfer and process data eight bits at a time. See bit, below.

16-bit: a bus (see below) or processor which can transfer data 16 bits at a time. A 16/32-bit processor, such as the 386SX takes data in and spurts it out 16 bits at a time, but internally processes it 32 bits at a time.

32-bit: a bus (see below) or processor which can transfer and process data 32 bits at a time.

Analogue: a device capable of representation by electrical voltages rather than electrical signals.

Ansi.sys: this DOS file can be loaded as a device in Config.sys and then used to present very basic coloured block displays on-screen.

ASCII: (pron Ass-key) stands for American Standard Code for Information Interchange. An ASCII file is a plain text file which contains no codes specific to the software the file was created with.

Autoexec.bat: a file you create on your PC which is acted upon every time you switch on the machine and which tailors the PC's configuration.

BASIC: stands for Beginners' All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code. A programming language.

Batch file: a file with the extension .BAT consists of a series of other DOS commands, so that you can implement a series of commands in one go. A very simple batch file might consist of the following:

```
CD\
MOUSE\MOUSE
CD THARG
THARG
```

which would move you into the root directory, load up the mouse driver, move to the Tharg directory and start up the program Tharg. If you named this file GO.BAT, you would only need to type GO to load up Tharg.

Baud rate: speed of transfer by a modem as measured in bits per second. See modem.

BBS: stands for Bulletin Board System. A database of programs, demos, and mailbox areas which you can phone using a modem. Facilities vary, but normally include access to the programs, the option to upload your own data and to 'chat' on-line to other users.

Bit: the smallest unit of computer data, equal to either of the digits 0 or 1 (bit actually stands for 'binary digit').

Bitmap: a way of defining a graphics image so that one bit equals one pixel.

Booting: booting up the PC is the same as switching it on and loading up the start-up programs.

Buffer: an area of memory used for temporary storage. The buffers command in the Config.sys files specifies how much RAM MS-DOS reserves for storing bits of data that can be called upon more quickly than accessing the hard disk. Printers normally contain a memory buffer into which the file to be printed is transferred, leaving the PC free for work on other applications.

Bus: the software, hardware and wiring that enables the different parts of your PC to communicate with each other. The expansion bus connects the PC to external devices.

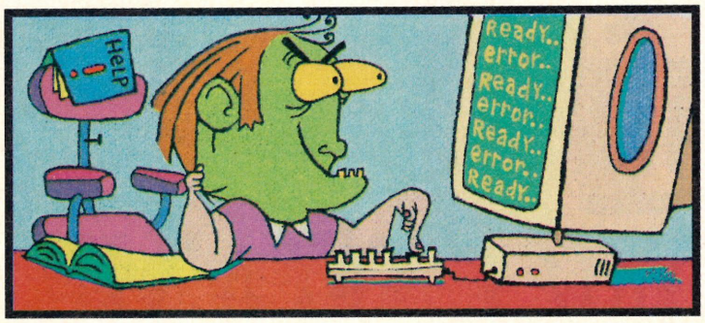
Byte: a unit of data equal to eight bits; more understandably, one character in ASCII (plain text) takes up one byte of space.

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now start. Note that if the disk is write-protected, you will get a message saying "Write-protect error" (write-protected disks cannot be (re)formatted). You can simply take the disk out, move the write-protect notch down, re-insert it and start again. First, however, you should try to remember why you write-protected it in the first place.

The PC should make a regular ticking noise as it marks the tracks and sectors. However, if this gives way to a distinct grinding sound, then the format program has found some bad sectors – areas on the disk that are damaged. Don't worry. The format program will mark these sectors as 'bad' and henceforth, your programs will not attempt to write data to these areas, although you will lose the space that the bad sectors take up.

Once complete, you will be prompted to enter a 'label', or name for the disk. Next you'll be asked if you wish to format another floppy disk. This prompt will always occur, whether or not you wish to format another disk of the same type. So, hit Y for yes and have the second disk handy, or N for no, and then exit the format program.

If you want to format a low density (720K, or 'double density') in a high density drive, you should specify it at the C:\ prompt:

FORMAT A:/F:720

Don't try to format disks at the wrong density. As for formatting hard disks, DON'T, unless you absolutely have to.

MAKING A BOOT DISK

If you're having difficulties freeing up enough memory to run a program and you're fed up to the back teeth with editing Config.sys and Autoexec.bat to no avail, why not make a boot disk?

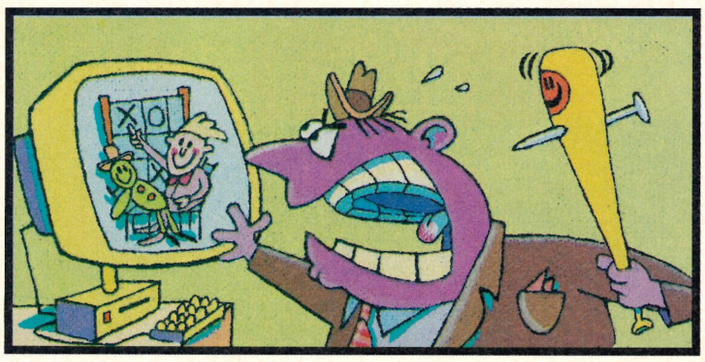
This is a floppy disk with just enough files on it to load MS-DOS, but not so many that it eats into your conventional memory.

There are two ways to create a boot disk, one for formatted floppy disks, and one for unformatted. All you need is the floppy disk, a sticky label and a pen.

If your floppy disk is already formatted, make sure it's blank, put it in your disk drive and then, at the C:\ prompt, type

SYS A:

This will transfer three files (four in DOS 6) from the hard drive to the floppy drive. The two system files, which are probably called lo.sys and Msdos.sys, are 'hidden'



GLOSSARY

Cache: a form of buffer memory, a disk cache or cache memory is an area where data is stored and can be transferred rapidly rather than being called up from the hard disk, floppy, or CD-ROM.

CD-ROM: stands for Compact Disc Read Only Memory. Physically the same as the compact discs you play music on, CD-ROMs hold up to 600Mb of computer data, stored digitally.

Centronics: the standard interface for computer printers, named after the manufacturer.

Chkdsk: Useful, but not foolproof, DOS command which when used regularly, will check your hard disk for file errors.

CIX: stands for Compulink Information eXchange, a bulletin board and e-mail service.

CLI: stands for Command Line Interface. A system, such as DOS, in which you must type in the correct commands to get the computer to perform.

Co-processor: an additional processor used for auxiliary functions, especially mathematical operations.

Command.com: This is MS-DOS's command interpreter, a file which contains the bulk of the commands for MS-DOS, and without which your PC will not function.

Config.sys: a file which you create on your PC to load up device drivers for items such as a sound card, CD-ROM drive, etc, every time your machine is switched on.

Conventional memory: The first 640K of RAM, into which MS-DOS is loaded, and the place where all your programs must run from.

Cpi: stands for characters per inch. Used to describe the width of character output by a printer.

Cps: stands for characters per second. Used to describe the speed of printer output.

CPU: stands for central processing unit. Generally means the processor inside your PC, but it's often used loosely to refer to that and the motherboard as well.

Directory: Your PC files can be grouped together in directories on a hard or floppy disk to make easier to sort them or find them.

A common analogy is to compare the files with documents, stored in folders (directories) in a filing cabinet (the hard disk).

Download: to transfer data from a bulletin board system or central database on to your own computer.

DR-DOS: stands for Digital Research Disk Operating System. An alternative and rival to MS-DOS, with some different functions, but compatible with it.

DX: The DX sub-set of processors are the full-blown versions in their grade. A 386DX is a 32-bit processor as opposed to the 16/32-bit 386SX. A 486DX is a fully enabled version of the Intel 486 family.

DX2: A version of the 486 processor which does its internal calculations at twice the speed of the equivalent 486DX.

EGA: Enhanced Graphics Adapter. PC graphics mode which succeeded CGA. Now, like CGA, virtually obsolete.

EISA: stands for Electronics Industry Standards Association. This interface is for use in 386 and 486 PCs and remains compatible with the older AT bus.

EMS: stands for Expanded Memory System. This was the first standard enabling MS-DOS to use system memory above 640K in the PC.

Emulator: a piece of hardware or software, which can be used to enable one computer to behave like another.

Expanded memory: a form of adding system memory above 640K to the PC so that it can be used by MS-DOS, and also programs written to support it.

Expansion ports, expansion slots: the connectors in the PC into which are inserted add-ons such as sound cards, joystick cards, internal modems.

Format: to prepare a disk, either a floppy disk or the hard drive, so that it will accept the relevant data (ie, format a disk on the PC and it will accept PC data, format it on an Amiga and it will take Amiga files, etc).

Game card: or joystick card. A board which fits into an expansion slot (see above), which a joystick can be plugged into.

Gigabyte: 1,024 megabytes.

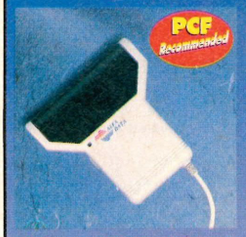
Graphical user interface: a system, such as Windows, in which you move an on-screen cursor and 'click' (usually with a mouse) on pictorial representations (icons) in order to make the PC perform commands.

Graphics card: the circuitry which drives the type of graphics and resolution (density) at which they appear on-screen.

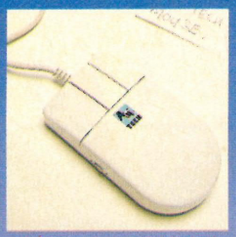
GUI: stands for graphical user interface. See above.

Hidden file: a DOS file which marked

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and not normally visible to a directory listing (so just take our word for it that they're copied across). The third is the all-important Command.com. The fourth, exclusive to DOS 6, is Dblspace.bin, which is also a hidden file. Once the files have copied over, your floppy disk is now a boot disk. It contains the bare minimum to run MS-DOS, while leaving plenty of memory free for running hefty games.

If your floppy disk is unformatted, you can format it and make it a system disk in one fell swoop. Put the disk in your floppy disk drive and type:

FORMAT A:/S

The format command will format the disk. The /s is called a switch, and tells DOS to transfer the three main system files to the floppy disk, making it a boot disk.

Now take the label and pen and label the floppy as a boot disk.

Because the Sys and Format/s only transfer the fewest files necessary to boot the system, your mouse will not be loaded, nor will a sound card or CD-ROM drive be loaded with a device driver.

You can load these separately from the C:> prompt, after using the boot disk to start up, but it's probably easier to make Autoexec.bat and Config.sys files on the boot disk itself.

To do this, copy over your standard Config.sys and Autoexec.bat files from your hard disk and then remove all the lines except the ones you need for the program to run, such as the mouse driver. To this, type *EDIT A:\CONFIG.SYS [Enter]*, and just delete all the commands you don't need — everything except, say, the mouse driver or CD-ROM driver. This at least guards against typing errors if you create new Autoexec.bat and Config.sys files on the floppy disk.

Note: you will find that several program manuals explain how to make a boot disk and suggest specific commands to go into the Config and Autoexec files on the boot disk. Let the program manuals recommendations override your existing configuration if you want the program to work.

GLOSSARY

as 'hidden' will not be displayed on the directory listing, and cannot normally be opened, read or deleted.

HMA, high memory area: a 64K block of memory above 640K which MS-DOS can load into with the command Dos= high after the Device= Himem.sys line in Config.sys.

Icon: a pictorial representation of a file or command on screen.

Io.sys: one of MS-DOS's two hidden system files. Needs to be present at start-up.

Joystick card: see game card.

Kermit: an old, not very advanced, protocol (method) for transferring files by modem.

Key disk: some programs require you to insert a master disk in your floppy disk drive while using the program on hard disk as a form of copy protection. This master disk is referred to as the key disk.

Kilobyte: 1,024 bytes.

Low level format: Formatting a hard disk is a two-stage process: the initial low-level format prepares the disk for a high level format, after which data can be recorded. Occasionally, a low level format may be the only way to repair a damaged hard disk, although you will lose all existing data in the process.

Main board: general term for the motherboard of the PC.

Maths co-processor: a second processor in the machine, which is used to carry out mathematical functions by programs which support them.

MCA: stands for Micro Channel Architecture. An expansion bus developed by IBM, originally designed to bring the bus in line with faster 386 processors.

MCGA: stands for Multi-Colour Graphics Array, a graphics mode on some IBM PS/2 machines.

Megabyte: 1,024 kilobytes.

Memory-resident: a program which remains in memory even while other programs are running. Programs such as desktop organisers are often designed to be memory resident so that the user can switch to them at a single keypress; virus scanners usually remain in memory so that they can scan any floppy disks as they are inserted in the drive.

MHz, megahertz: the unit of frequency at which electric current cycles through the processor. Used to describe the speed of the processor.

MIDI: stands for Musical Instrument Digital Interface. A system by which electronic musical instruments can be connected to each other and to a computer, which then controls all of them.

Modem: stands for Modulator/Demodulator. A device which enables you to connect your PC to the telephone line and send and receive data through it.

Motherboard: the main board for a computer circuit.

MPC: stands for Multimedia PC. A standard minimum specification for developing and running CD-ROM software.

MPEG: stands for Motions Pictures Experts Group, a compression standard for video images.

MS-DOS: stands for MicroSoft Disk Operating System. The standard operating system for the PC. The operating system is the base program which enables you to run applications on the PC, use disks and add-on devices and organise your files.

Msdos.sys: one of MS-DOS's two hidden system files. Needs to be present on start-up.

OCR: stands for optical character recognition. Software which 'reads' text scanned into the computer with a scanner (see below) and converts it into the original characters (when scanned, the document will be saved as a graphics file rather than a text file).

Parallel port, interface: interface for parallel signals usually used to connect printers.

Partition: division of a hard disk drive into more than one 'logical' drive, ie, although physically the same hard disk, different areas are assigned their own drive letter. Originally, users were forced to partition larger drives, as early versions of MS-DOS could only address up to 32Mb on one disk.

Patch: an add-on disk to a program which can be bought by existing users and which usually fixes a bug, or provides an update to the original program.

Path, pathname: the 'tree' of directories and sub-directories that defines the location of a file or group of files. For example, c:\wordpro\john\sample.let is the path for the file Sample.let in the sub-directory John, in the directory Wordpro, which is in the root directory.

Pentium: The name for what is logically the 80586 processor. Intel, the manufacturer, gave the chip a name rather than a number to make life more difficult for rival manufacturers. Numbers — such as 586 — cannot be trademarked in the US but, of course, names can be. Thus, while other companies can develop what is, in effect, also a 586 chip, they cannot call it a Pentium and reap the reflected rewards from Intel's high brand name visibility.

Processor: the chip that drives your PCs maths and logical operations.

Program Manager: the main screen, or 'front end' to Windows, from where all Windows operations can be accessed.

RAM: stands for Random Access Memory. This is the dynamic system memory which holds programs and data while they are being worked on.

ROM: stands for Read Only Memory. This is permanent memory, and in PCs is generally used for start-up operations — routines stored in ROM carry out the self-tests and activate DOS when you switch the machine on.

Root directory: the directory immediately under C:. See path.

SCSI: (pron Scuzzy) stands for Small Computer Systems Interface.
A multi-purpose interface between the computer and peripherals, mainly disk drives and CD-ROM drives. Provides very fast data transfer.

Serial port, interface: an interface which uses serial connections. Mainly used for modems, networks, and some mice. Standard serial interfaces on PCs come in two versions: 9-pin and 24-pin, and adapters are readily available.

SVGA: stands for Super VGA (Video Graphics Array, see below). A general standard describing graphics modes of 800x600 and up to 1024x768 pixels with at least 256 colours on-screen.

System disk: a floppy disk with DOS system files which boots up the PC.

System files: the files which make up the operating system of the computer.

TLA: stands for Three Letter Acronym, much beloved of computer programmers, journalists and data processing managers.

TSR: stands for Terminate and Stay Resident, a memory resident program which you can exit from but call up, typically with a single keypress, since it is still stored in system memory. See Memory Resident, above.

UMB, upper memory block: smallish areas of unused memory between the first 640K and 1Mb.
You can put drivers in here by using the command DEVICEHIGH instead of DEVICE in the Config.sys file.

Upload: to transfer files from your computer to another, typically to a bulletin board or central database.

VGA: stands for Video Graphics Array. An IBM graphics mode which has become the base standard for PC colour displays.

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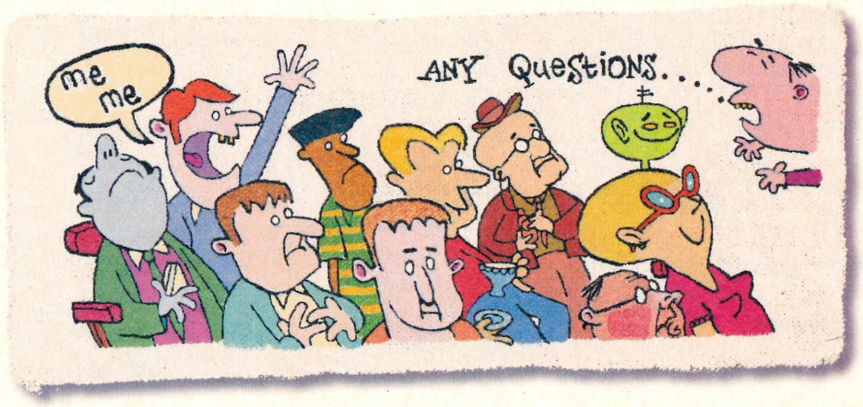
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Q&A



Is your hardware making your head ache? DOS driving you dotty? If you're having problems with your PC, share them with Mike James and he'll do his best to help.

Moving a drive

Q I own a Packard Bell 486SX20 with two floppy drives, one 5.25 and 3.5 inch. The 5.25 is configured as the A: drive, but I would like to change it to B: and have my 3.5 as my A: drive. In the near future I will be fitting a second drive and then a CD drive, so I will have to remove the 5.25 drive eventually to make room. Please can you advise me on how to go about changing the drive letters over as I want to boot from the 3.5 inch drive in the future?

Robert Punter
Huntingdon

A *It is possible to swap drive letters over using just software — but I won't bother you with the details because your last comment about wanting to boot from the 3.5 inch drive makes this method unsuitable. The A: drive that you boot from has to be physically set up as the A: drive.*

There are two ways to achieve this swap depending on the way your machine has been put together. If you open the box and look at the ribbon cable running from the disk controller to the disk drives you need to discover if it has a twist in it or not. Most drive cables do have a twist, but there are some that don't so you do have to look.

If the cable has a twist, then which drive is which is determined by which plug on the cable it is connected to. In this case to swap drive A: and B: all you have to do is unplug the cable and swap over the connectors. Given that 5.25 and 3.5 inch drives use different plugs this might be a little more difficult than it sounds, but the solution is to use a convertor or, at the very worst, buy a new drive cable.

If the cable doesn't have a twist in it, then which drive is which is determined by jumpers located on the disk drive. There is usually a block of four, but sometimes it is only two, labelled 0, 1, 2, 3. The jumper on drive A is on 0 and the jumper on drive B is on 1. Change the jumpers and the drives are swapped. The only possible remaining complication is that in many AT class machines you have to use the BIOS set-up to inform the machine of the size of each disk drive. Usually there is an instruction how to run the set-up just before the machine starts up. Once you have got into the BIOS set-up you can easily change the characteristics of each drive.

Too fast a boot?

Q I recently upgraded my PC from a bog standard Ambra Sprinta Plus to a Mini-Tower local bus 486 33Mhz. I kept a few bits from the Ambra, such as the hard drive and monitor, but on the whole, it's an entirely new system. The problem though, is that ever since the upgrade, my previously well behaved Sound Blaster Pro has, at irregular intervals, started to go wrong.

The symptoms are always the same, namely that an unpleasant and decidedly annoying crackling emanates from the speakers followed by the refusal of the Sound Blaster to work. The first few times it occurred, I ran the Test-SBP program and the message "hardware cannot be detected" was displayed. I assumed that a conflict within the system must be the cause, so I changed the IRQ setting from the default of 7 to 10. All was well for an hour or so until it went again. I changed the IRQ to 2 instead and this time it worked right the way through the weekend. Come Monday evening though, the problem returned.

I phoned the engineer who upgraded the PC for me and he couldn't explain it — like me he thought the sound card settings should be the problem, but clearly, they weren't.

I phoned Creative Labs helpline, and to cut a long story short their man told me (after considering the matter) that my best bet was to junk the SB Pro and upgrade to a newer card because my PC now boots up too quickly for the card!!

Is he correct? I will, in the not too distant future, buy a new sound card, but having only just spent the best part of £500 on the upgrade, it's not an option right now — nor is the "£50 pounds or so" I was quoted by Creative Tech to alleviate the problem.

I find it a little difficult to believe that this is the only option open to me so I would very much appreciate your opinion.

David Espinosa
Ruislip, Middlesex

A *I would agree that the most likely cause is an IRQ or DMA conflict, but given that you have tried changing the setup, my next guess would be some sort of hardware problem. I can't see how the speed that a machine boots at can effect the behaviour of the sound card, but perhaps the Creative Labs helpline was suggesting something subtle to do with operating speeds.*

Assuming that card is plugged into an ISA bus slot that is running at the standard 8MHz, there should be no problem. Some machines do attempt to run the ISA bus faster than 8MHz and you should at least check this possibility. Try running the machine with the Turbo button off and see if the fault goes away — usually, but not always, the ISA bus clock is a fixed fraction of the processor clock speed.

However, given that the problem seems to go away for a while after you have changed the IRQ setting, it might be that just unplugging the card and plugging it back in is what is doing the good. Try putting the card in a different slot and clean the card contacts with switch cleaner. If this doesn't work then all I can suggest is that in the move the card acquired an intermittent hardware fault and needs repairing.

RealMagic Lite

Q I have some questions related to the Real Magic Lite card. I have a 386 DX33 computer and I'd

like to add RealMagic to it. But if I did would it act as a graphics accelerator, ie, would it enhance and improve drawings and 3D renderings of AutoCAD and 3D Studio?

It is said that it plugs in the feature connector of the VGA card and mine is a 256c Trident card, so would this provoke some sort of incompatibility since Real Magic has 32,768 colours? Would these colours be available for all DOS and Windows programs including AutoCAD and 3DS, or is it only designed to display full-screen videos?

Finally what is the difference between RealMagic Lite and View-Logic 928 Movie? Is there a card that allows both graphics acceleration and MPEG capabilities?

Mahmud Shihat
Beirut, Lebanon

A RealMagic should work with any graphics card that has a VGA feed through or feature connector — Silica Shop can give you a list of compatible cards. The RealMagic card takes over the display so it isn't limited by the graphics card that it has to work with. It isn't a general graphics enhancer in any sense and its benefits would only be noticed when playing MPEG videos or games that use it.

The VideoLogic board does improve the general performance of your video display, but I can't say by how much in practice, because I haven't tried it. The whole question of playing MPEG video is still very much at the learning part of the curve. It is still a question of the makers of the movie cards keeping their software up-to-date with the CD-ROMs that are being produced.

Triple speed CD-ROM drives

Q I have been on the lookout for CD-ROM drives and at the moment I am hoping to get a triple speed one. I have two questions:

1) If you buy an internal CD-ROM drive, do they come with separate expansion cards, or do you have to have a sound card with a CD ROM interface?

2) Is it worth shelling out for a quad speed drive? How well and how much faster do they run as opposed to your ordinary single/double speed drive?

Quad speed drives seem to me that they will last for some time to come and I want to get something future-proof for at least the next three to four years, at any rate. I also have another question: if you have a fast CD-ROM drive (eg triple speed) do you need a minimum requirement for your actual machine? Or does only the tech spec of the CD-ROM drive matter?

Finally I have a question to ask on upgrading. I have a 486DX 33MHz. Is it possible for me to upgrade it, for example to something as powerful as a 486 DX2 100MHz or even a 586 (Pentium) 90MHz? (Using just an extra chip to be added to the main board.)

Mark Choi
London

A All CD-ROMs need some sort of interface to your machine and in nearly all cases you can choose to buy a drive with or without an interface included. If you already have a sound card that supports the drive, then buy a bare drive. If the drive uses a SCSI or IDE interface and your computer already has a SCSI or IDE controller fitted, then again buy the bare drive. In most cases there is a slight cost saving in buying a drive without a controller, but because most people opt for drive plus controller you may find special offers occasionally mean that you can get a drive plus controller for less than the cost of a drive on its own! If you find that this is the case — don't worry just put the controller on a shelf if you don't need it.

My final word of advice is that if you have a sound card, make sure that it really will work with the drive you are thinking of buying and make sure you have or can get the software drivers needed to make it all work. Most sound cards do not support triple speed drives.

I'm not going to stick my neck out and tell you to buy a quad speed drive or a triple speed drive. The choice is just too difficult! Obviously faster is better and a quad speed drive really is faster than a triple speed drive, but it costs more and it is up to you to decide if it is worth the extra. At the moment the lowest cost quad drive isn't much more than the average triple speed. Personally I find that for some tasks a quad speed drive is still too slow, while for others even a double speed drive is fine.

It also does depend on the machine you are using the drive with. You can use any drive with any machine, but if you fit a quad speed drive to a 486DX-25 that is running out of hard disk space, you will find that the software stops and starts and generally runs too slowly for reasons other than the CD-ROM. There has to be a balance in all things. Try to work out what factors make your machine run slowly — is it lack of RAM causing programs to make use of the hard disk, is it a slow video card making screen re-draws take an age, etc? By noticing exactly what it is that keeps you waiting you can work out not only what you might do about it, but what it is worth adding.

Yes you can upgrade your machine to a DX-2 by plugging in a new processor, but you might be shocked at the price — around £300! Upgrading to anything much faster than a DX2-66 might be possible, but it would depend on the motherboard your machine was using and whether or not it had an Overdrive socket and its exact type. You need specific advice from a dealer trying to sell you an upgrade.

Finally, I can't imagine the last word in CD-ROM drives being quad speed if you are looking three to four years ahead!

Buying a PC

Q My son wants to buy a PC with a CD-ROM drive and a hard disk which must be quite powerful and fast. The only problem is he has only £1,000 at his disposal and the PCs he has been looking at with the above specifications all seem to be priced at around £1,500. Can you recommend something? I would be prepared to add to the £1,000 if absolutely necessary.

Sue Ridehalgh
Burnley

A Because the prices of the most powerful machines are currently falling, you should be able to get a reasonable machine for around £1,000, even if you want to stick to machines with a reasonably well-known brand name. You need at least a 486SX-33, with a VL bus based video and disk controller. The disk should be at least 250Mb and the minimum RAM is 4Mb. You can get this specification for around £900 and adding a CD-ROM drive and sound card to the specification should increase the price by around £150. If you need to cut corners, then think in terms of saving on those areas where upgrade is possible in the future. For example, the hard disk is more difficult and expensive to upgrade than memory, so if possible go for a larger hard disk — 400Mb say. You can stick with 4Mb of RAM even though 8Mb is much, much better. You might even contemplate going for a better basic machine — a 486DX2-66 is almost twice as fast and only a bit more expensive at around £1000-£1100 — and then adding the multimedia extras later.

Jumping joysticks

Q I am having problems trying to get my joystick to work with several games including Megarace, Crazy Cars 3, Sleepwalker and Astrofire (which I got from the PC Review cover disk). My joystick is the Warrior 5 and the problems I am encountering involve the joystick not being able to move in some directions and moving constantly in others. In Sleepwalker, for example, Ralph constantly jumps and refuses to move to the left and in CC3 the joystick won't move down and has problems moving to the left. I've tried adjusting the trimmers, but this doesn't seem to help. Do you think my joystick may be faulty? (I have two joystick ports but have disabled one.)

My final problem is in connecting my CD drive to my sound card. I am currently using the host adapter supplied, but would like to be able to play CD's through my sound card. I have included diagrams of the connection on both. Can you suggest a suitable adapter or lead that will correct them?

Luke Noel-Storr
Telford

A Some games are better than others at working with the PCs joystick. If a game has a calibration routine built in, then the setting of the trimmers is more or less irrelevant. Without calibration the setting of the trimmers is important. It might be that your joystick is beginning to become sticky, but only trying another joystick would prove this beyond any doubt. Also it is worth making sure that the second game port really is disabled — a PC can only have one game port fitted.

To make the CD play through the sound card all you have to do is connect the audio out on the CD-ROM drive, to the audio in on the sound card. This is achieved using a simple audio cable with 4-pin connectors on each end. The only trouble is that there are two standards for this cable (at least) Sony and Mitsumi/Panasonic. As the CD-ROM drive that you have is a Sony standard drive (Philips CM 206) and the sound card that you have supports both standard — simply unplug the audio

cable from the host adapter and plug it into the Sony External connector on the sound card. In other words, you don't need any extra adapters or leads — just move the existing one.

Odd sounds from my PC

Q I recently purchased the October issue of PC Review. I am having difficulties with the Under a Killing Moon demo. This manifests itself in the manner of a low level, but noticeable rumbling sound coming from the speakers at the point when the game asks if you want the interactive demo or the movie. The noise gets much worse when the mouse is moved.

My machine is a 486DX 33MHz with 8Mb of RAM, a 340Mb hard disk, a 1Mb Cirrus logic VL-BUS video card and an SVGA monitor. I have a Sound Blaster Pro sound card installed. I have not had any similar problems with other games software. I changed the mouse and its software driver but to no avail. There was no difference in the symptoms.

B Kendrick
South Humberside

A *I have to admit that I get a low rumble too, although on my machine it doesn't seem to be affected by the mouse. I can only assume that it is something to do with the way that the program makes use of the sound card. It could be that servicing a mouse interrupt causes the program to ignore the sound card for a moment and so introduce a transient spike in the audio output. Moving the mouse would result in more mouse interrupts and more transients. Perhaps some users, and the games designers, can't hear the rumble because the speakers connected to their sound cards don't work down to such low frequencies.*

Is it a virus?

Q It all started about five months ago. I bought Test Drive II cheap and installed it to my hard drive. I played it a couple of times when it cut off! I bought the game from a Cash and Carry for £4.99. When this happened I decided to take it back, but in the end I never managed it, so I forgot all about it.

A couple of months later I played a shareware game that I bought for £1.99 in Ireland.

I got home and tried it, but just as I pressed the Return key it froze. I tried to reset my PC but nothing happened and I switched it off at the back.

I loaded Scandisk and checked all my disks. Every time it seemed to have a problem, and in the end my disk was full of corrections.

Can you please tell me, have I caught something? I'm totally confused.

Peter Thompson
Rugby

A *Installing software to a hard disk which then fails suggests a problem with the hard disk. The problem need not be caused by the software, but the last item of software you installed is likely to pick up the problem. Running Scandisk checks and corrects the entire disk. The fact that a shareware game crashed and the machine had to be switched off could either be the cause of the errors or just the symptom. Switching a machine off while it is writing to the disk can damage what is stored on it. Don't do it if you can help it. Run Scandisk on a regular basis and see if problems that it corrects re-occur. If they do, it could be the disk drive is beginning to fail — this is a pure hardware problem and nothing to do with software or viruses in particular. It's understandable to suspect a virus if your PC starts acting mysteriously, but unfortunately hardware faults are much more common.*

QUERIES TO:

Send your PC problems and queries to Mike James at
Q&A,
PC Review,
30-32 Farringdon Lane,
London EC1R 3AU
or via e-mail to
infomax@cix.compulink.co.uk.

We're sorry, but Mike can only answer questions on these pages, so please don't ask for personal replies.

Q&A UPDATE

WHAT'S NEXT?

It doesn't matter if you are about to buy a PC or already own one, the worry of how soon it will be obsolete, or at least not good enough to keep you happy, is a serious issue. There is no point in thinking that the PC market will settle down and allow you to make a safe purchase or stop worrying about whether or not your machine is still OK. The development of the PC towards increasing power for less cash isn't likely to change if the past is any predictor of the future. But if you are watching what is going on you might be a bit puzzled about the future of the PC. Until quite recently it looked as though progress was a matter of simple arithmetic. The 286 gave way to the 386 and then the 486. Even though Intel decided to call its next processor in line the Pentium, you can still think of it as the 586 and it is tempting to think that the processor of the immediate future is going to be the 686 and so on. Indeed Intel is hard at work on the replacement for the Pentium and it is code named the P6. But focusing on part numbers doesn't really reveal what is going on it isn't a simple arithmetic progression. Something changed dramatically when Intel introduced the Pentium.

The Pentium is a 'superscaler' processor. This sounds very technical, but all it means is that the Pentium tries to speed up programs by carrying out more than one instruction at a time. At best the Pentium can actually complete two instructions at one go. Before the Pentium all of the processors used in the PC were limited to a one at a time instruction mode and any increase in performance in going from the 286 to the 386 and to the 486, was brought about by increasing the speed at which a single instruction was obeyed. In other words the Pentium is the first sign that future processors will not be faster by being better. Instead, future members of the family will be faster because they will contain more than one processor.

OK, so the way that processors are getting faster has changed, but what has this got to do with the average PC user? In other words, why am I burdening you with this knowledge?

The answer is that it will probably start to affect things in a more radical way that you might expect. As well as building superscaler chips to make things go faster, you can actually include multiple processors on one motherboard. As the Pentium's price has fallen (yes, it has fallen and it will fall even more over the coming months) dual processor motherboards have already started to appear.

The problem is that to get anything out of a dual processor motherboard you need the right software. And this is where it really gets interesting. Which operating system can support more than one processor? Not Windows '95 — Microsoft's next version of Windows. Not OS/2, IBM's attempt to push Windows and Windows '95 from your machine. The only operating system that currently has this capability is Windows NT. It also happens to be the only operating system that can work with non-Intel chips, such as the PowerPC, the Alpha and so on that have appeared to confuse the issue. So here is a prediction for you — in the future you will have to consider not only how fast a machine is in terms of MHz, but also how many processors it has. "I've got a triple 90MHz Pentium — is it faster than a dual 150MHz Pentium?" is not a question I'm looking forward to answering. And of course the future belongs to Windows NT, not Windows '95

❍ **Mike James**

PC GAMES

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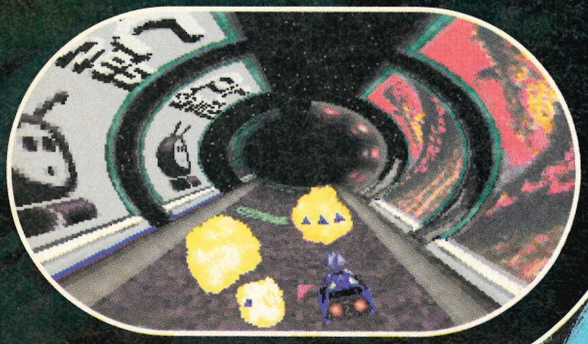
Grrrr!!!

In this month's fang-tastic PC GAMES you'll find the FIRST full review of WING COMMANDER 3, the new INTERACTIVE MOVIE from ORIGIN that many are already calling REALLY QUITE GOOD!

And on the CoverCD you'll find a superb WING COMMANDER 3 FULLY-PLAYABLE DEMO, as well as a fascinating 'MAKING OF WING COMMANDER 3' INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA *EXPERIENCE*, which tells how the GAME was created and even lets YOU interview the STARS!

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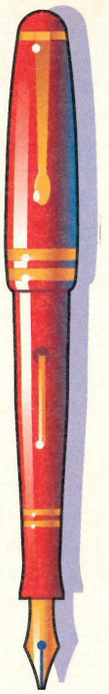


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Letters



PC Review welcomes your opinions on just about any PC-related subject. We reserve the right to edit your letters, and we'll also assume correspondence is for publication unless you state otherwise.

Net users down under

Greetings from Down Under. Now I am not going to begin with the usual blurb and tell you what type of system I am running. But I am instead going to say that I am a 39-year-old 'avid' games player, who is constantly saving up the money to purchase upgrades for my machine, so that I can keep up with the everchanging basic requirements needed to run the latest games on it.

So it is good to see a magazine that is not entirely devoted to games and has a good cross section of general articles aimed at the home computer user like myself.

I started out on computers many years ago with the C64, and have upgraded ever since, although I must admit that I still receive some flak from my old Amiga friends for changing to that evil office machine, the PC.

I read with much interest the articles in recent magazines regarding the advent of the superhighway and the use of the Internet. And having recently purchased a modem and begun to experiment with it bringing local BBSs, I thought it was time to go exploring on this highway to adventure and see where I would eventually end up.

I was amazed. I managed to dial into a University in Ohio and have a look around, before zooming off to the NASA centre library were I downloaded some GIFs of the Shuttle missions.

It was then off to Apogee Software to have a look around its system at the latest news items, then finally to another University in Baltimore for a browse through its files. All the while I was joining in to have a chat with other users in Arabia, France, USA, Sweden and so on. And all this for the price of a local 25c phone call.

I understand that in the UK, you have timed phone calls. In Australia the basic call price of 25c entitles you to one minute to infinity which makes it very handy if you possess a modem.

Mind you, I expect that if timed calls were introduced over here, I would probably sell the modem and go back to watching Home and Away or Neighbours.

I have heard good and bad about the Internet; at the moment I find it very useful and informative, but I do not intend to abuse this system and become hooked. In this day and age of computer advancement, it is good to know that I can dial into any reference source around the globe or send mail across the world in an instant. As I have done with this letter to you.

Keep up the great work in producing this magazine with the latest news and reviews — even though we get your magazine two months behind in Australia. It is funny seeing the December cover, wishing everyone a happy Christmas when I read it in February or early March. If any fellow Internet users would like to drop me a line I would love to hear from you all — contact me on the e-mail address below.

Michael Cross
cross@ozemail.com.au

Whatever happened to . . . ?

Recently a few games seem to have gone astray in the gaming world, or they have been delayed so far back that no one knows when they might or even *if* they might come out. So could you please bring back the Whatever Happened To . . . ? column so I can have a better idea when these games are coming out.

Do you know if Rebel Assault 2 is on the drawing board ?

Rahul Sareen
ratatak@cix.compulink.co.uk

The trouble with Whatever Happened To . . . ? was that it was dominated by the same games, month in, month out. Oh, the joys of waiting for Strike Commander, Dungeon Master, Under a Killing Moon et al.

There is no official word at all from LucasArts about Rebel Assault. However, we'd be amazed if it didn't produce another Star Wars CD game (wouldn't you?), and well, there are all those new Star Wars movies due to come out in the later part of this year too . . .

DOS dissenter

I am writing concerning DOS4/GW (or whatever it is) as I would like to state quite categorically that I loathe this piece of software. I'm sure it does wonderful things, but if you own a 2Mb machine (like I do) then you can't help but find it next to useless. I'm just thankful LucasArts doesn't seem to have started using it yet.

I will admit my machine is slow (an AcerPower 386SX with a 486SX chip in the upgrade slot), but I'm sure I could have got some enjoyment out of SimCity 2000, Gabriel Knight, and Doom. I played Sierra's demo of Gabriel Knight and really looked forward to playing the full game (the demo fairly zipped along.) But somewhere along the line it was changed to a 4Mb game. But wait a minute, this was an adventure game! They could at least have provided a 2Mb game with no sound effects.

SimCity 2000 is another bizarre game. It's slow on a 486DX/33, but would probably run faster if you could turn off all the little animations (not as pretty, I'll grant you.) Why wasn't it possible to get this game to run cut-down under 2Mb?

Doom is one of the worst offenders as far as I'm concerned. How come Underworld II can run under 2Mb, but this can't. How come the full game is so much more jerky than the demo (episode three is unplayable in some sections on my friend's 486DX/33!) Where is the fun I had in Wolf3D (yes I know it's atmospheric, but in Wolf3D you actually felt like you were killing people, not just zombies and daemons!)

Anyway, now I've got my self-pitying moan off my chest, I'd like to say what an excellent magazine you have. I personally uphold the 9 ratings you have given, with only a few comments: X-Wing deserves a 9 — it has all the hallmarks of an excellent LucasArts production, plus a longevity rivalled by only the most complete of flight sims!

There have been a lot of 9-rated games, but do all of them still

deserve their score? Surely Chessmaster 3000 can't cut the mustard these days as a 9. Try re-reviewing games over, say, two years old to check they still deserve their mark.

My third point: Civilization isn't as good as you say it is.

And finally, in reply to R J Scott (Issue 37): about a quarter of the British population may appear to watch Neighbours — that doesn't mean it's good!

Theo Graham-Brown
mbcx4tjg@stud.man.ac.uk)

Sounding off

I, like many Ultrasound users am getting completely fed up with the amount of games using DOS4GW, and not giving native Ultrasound support. Now we all know that for its money the GUS is the best sounding card, given native support that is. Granted SBOS isn't too hot, but Megaem and Ultramid give good results.

The problem with DOS4GW is that both SBOS and Megaem will not work — or rather SBOS will work with some games, but not properly.

It's got to the stage where I really have to consider hard what game I buy, just in case it uses DOS4GW. Even my enjoyment of your cover disks is being reduced. Recent games that have appeared on cover disks and haven't worked properly with the GUS include Under a Killing Moon, Cycle Mania, Super Karts, Theme Park and Creature Shock. I know that Theme Park has Ultrasound support, but what of the others? I for one won't be buying them if they don't have native support, its not worth buying it to find that due to DOS4GW you have to play the game without sound. Its time software houses stopped supporting the Sound Blaster, and started to give the GUS some decent support. Even the AWE32 is getting good support now, and I think it's rubbish compared to the GUS.

Take Dark Legions from SSI for example. After reading a number of reviews I thought, right, I'll get that (cue flashback, mist and soft music). As an old Spectrum owner I remember the nights playing Chaos with a few mates and thought that Dark Legions could give the same enjoyment (end mist and soft music). Having bought the game on CD-ROM (so saving the 30-odd Mb of disk space), I stuck the disk in and to my horror of horrors saw the dreaded DOS4GW.exe.

I was then relieved to see that the game uses Miles drivers, so I reckoned I could copy the Ultrasound drivers over and use Ultramid. After doing this I ran the game, and lo and behold, it crashed. The only sound I can get from the game is some very suspect music and no digital effects by using SBOS.

I e-mailed SSI in the states concerning the problem, as I recalled that I read somewhere that Dark Legions was going to have GUS support. SSI told me that version 1.1 of the game will work with the GUS. But I have version 1, so I wrote to US Gold and got a reply saying that they knew of no patch disk for the game. I e-mailed SSI in the States again, and they said that there is a patch for version 1.1 and I can order it from them in the US.

One final point: why doesn't anyone do a new version of Chaos? It would be a sure hit among the old Spectrum owners.

K Hoskin
k.hoskin@plymouth.ac.uk

Pen pal plea

Having recently discovered your magazine, I now have it on order every month from my local newsagent. I think you produce an excellent mag with the right info to keep you reading, and enough entertainment to keep you busy until next issue.

The one thing I have noticed however, is that you don't have a pen pal section, and I thought it would be interesting to communicate on disk or via modem with others across the world. If there is a chance of a pen pal column I would like you to add my ad.

"I'm looking for an English pen pal with an IBM PC, who is interested in role-playing games, flight simulators and strategy games. I am looking for a boy/girl between 13 and 14. I am a 14-year-old boy. I live in Australia and will answer most letters. Please include a photo, a list of hobbies and a brief description about yourself on either paper or a 3.5" disk."

Andrew Scott Sanders
12 Vandiemen Avenue
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Since there is little chance of us running a pen pals column, Andrew, we've printed your ad right here and now.

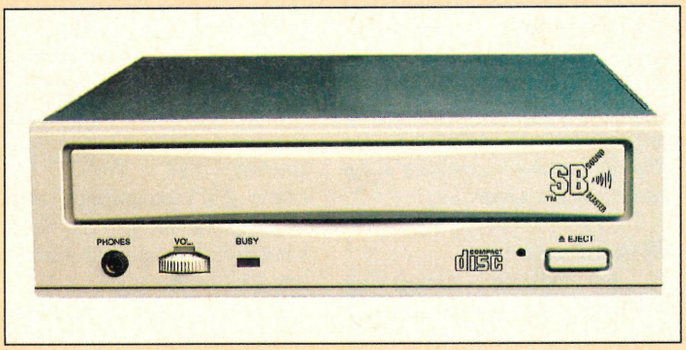
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NEXT MONTH *in* PC REVIEW

The fastest CD-ROM drives in the world

Quad speed CD-ROM drives are not only becoming increasingly common in the shops, but they are dropping in price faster than your average small rock. We take six of the best and put them under the microscope in the PC Review group test.



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PC REVIEW MARCH 1995. IN THE SHOPS ON FEBRUARY 15TH

NB Contents may be subject to change.

Games

There's just no stopping the PC these days. Look at all these games coming out . . . Stonekeep, Discworld, Aladdin, Wings of Glory . . . and we plan to be reviewing every single one of those next month.

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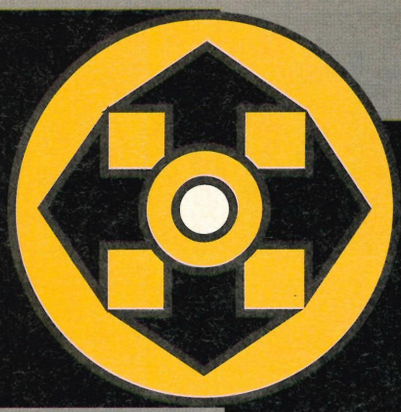
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vote now and you could win £500 worth of software!

BEST COMPUTER STRATEGY/SIMULATION
This category covers many several genres, specifically: racing simulations, flight sims and war games. Vote for your favourite of 1994 here.

BEST COMPUTER STRATEGY/SIMULATION:

BEST LICENSED COMPUTER GAME
Which arcade conversion, officially licensed title or movie tie-in appealed to you the most in 1994?

BEST LICENSED COMPUTER GAME:

BEST ORIGINAL COMPUTER GAME
What was your favourite game of the year which DIDN'T rely on an official license?

BEST ORIGINAL COMPUTER GAME:

BEST MULTI MEDIA GAME
The huge storage space of CD-ROM has enabled programmers to create incredible software that just couldn't be done on a normal, floppy disc based machine. Which CD title would you rate as the best of the year?

BEAT MULTIMEDIA GAME:

BEST ADVENTURE GAME
The adventure game market has remained extremely strong over the last year with some very commendable releases for all computers. Choose your favourite here.

BEST ADVENTURE GAME:

BEST ARCADE CONVERSION GAME
Conversions of arcade games are as popular as ever - vote for your favourite of 1994 here.

BEAT ARCADE CONVERSION GAME:

COMPUTER GAME OF THE YEAR
Which game overall would you rank as the greatest of 1994?

COMPUTER GAME OF THE YEAR:

SOFTWARE HOUSE OF THE YEAR
One of our most prestigious awards. Which games producer do YOU think has maintained the greatest quality and produced the best games in 1994?

SOFTWARE HOUSE OF THE YEAR:

BEST COMPUTER PROGRAMMER OF THE YEAR
As well as bestowing awards on the software houses and the games themselves, we can't forget some of the most important people in the industry - the people who program the games. Which individual or team do you rate as the best programmer(s) of the year?

BEST COMPUTER PROGRAMMER OF THE YEAR:

BEST AD OF THE YEAR
A decent marketing campaign can be the make or break of a particular game or brand. Which advert in particular stood out for you? It could be a game ad, hardware ad - on TV, radio or in the games magazines.

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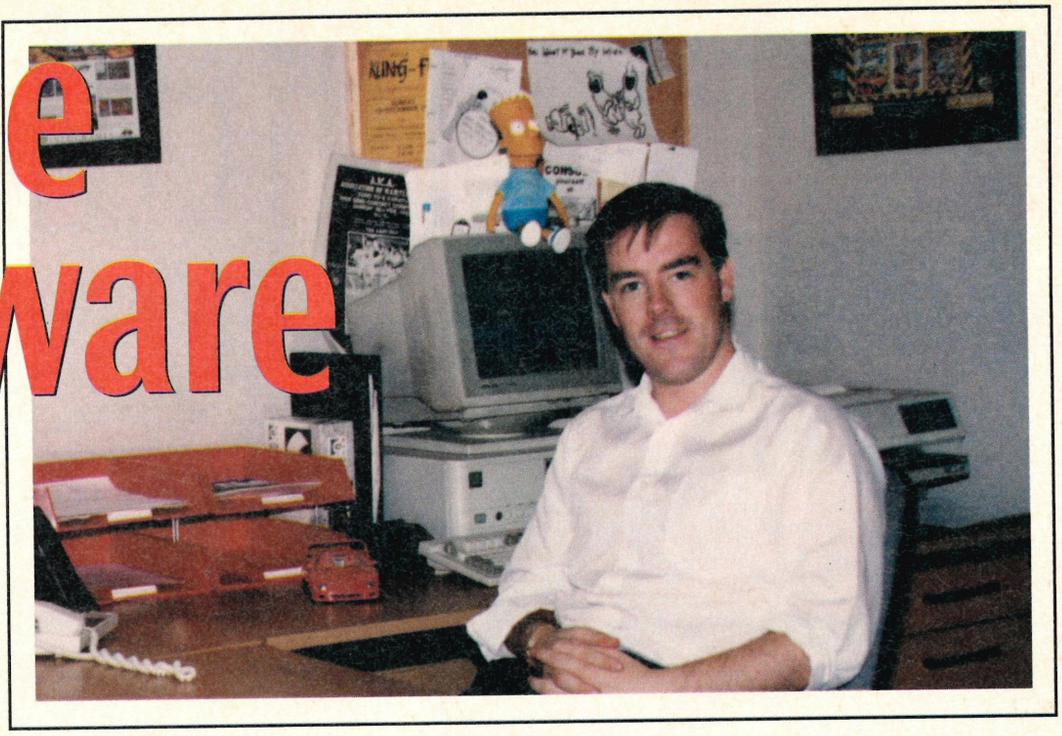
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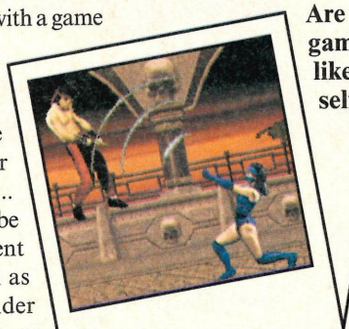


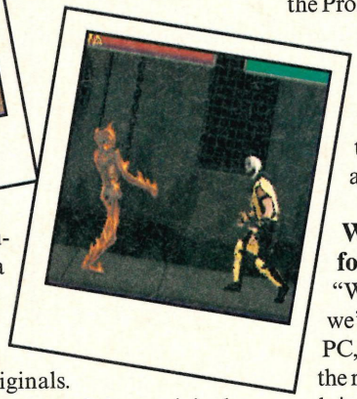
Fergus McGovern, founder of Probe Entertainment, tells PC Review about life as a games developer.

The PC Review profile

A self-confessed video game nut, Fergus McGovern set up Probe Software (now Probe Entertainment) 10 years ago, with a game for the Spectrum called Escape from Alcatraz. Since then, Probe has been responsible for some of the best-known titles in computer gaming: SimCity, Lemmings...

Yes Lemmings. You see, Probe Entertainment is a development house. Which means as well as creating original games under licence to publishers, such as OutRun for US Gold and Mortal Kombat II for Acclaim, it also handles conversion work — hence SimCity (for the Atari ST and Amiga) and Lemmings (for Sega). So what is life like when the world doesn't know your name?





Top: Fergus McGovern, founder and director of Probe Entertainment (formerly Probe Software). Right and below: one of Probe's most infamous games, Mortal Kombat, published by Acclaim.

PC Review: Do you feel restricted by the fact that you're always doing games for other people?

Fergus McGovern: "Well, half the time they'll give us something like this [holds up a huge tome of typewritten pages in a ring binder] and they say, 'Read this, design all of the game, look at the scenes from the film and put them in, and come back in a year's time, Fergus, and thanks for the game.

Are there original games that you might like to publish yourself?

"We are actually developing a number of original games that are both licences and originals. Alien Trilogy, for example is an original game that we are designing with original motion capture and backgrounds and everything else. And because it's not linked to a film launch, it'll come out when it's ready. As far as publishing goes, I think we've probably got a little bit further to go with development before we start to publish, but then, I would like to be a publisher at some point.



Do developers get enough credit for their work?

"No they don't. The publisher is the face to the public, but 95% of all games aren't written by publishers, they're written by either small independent groups, like Probe, or individuals. It's quite amazing that when you put in all that work and all that effort that the publishing company doesn't even want to give you credit."

Why do you let this happen?

One of the reasons why Probe lets it happen is that a lot of the stuff that we are involved with is licences owned by other people and they control the copyright and they control the artistic licence. So the best we can hope for is for them to say we actually developed it. Saying that, you'll notice that every year the Probe name on the box gets bigger and stronger on the software, so that it says "A Probe development". Now we try to keep that as a feature too — and that's encoded into the games so they can't do anything about that!

What have you got coming up for the PC?

"We've got a number of licences that we're doing, such as Bomberman on PC, Mortal Kombat II. We've also got the rights for Die Hard 3, for which we're doing a trilogy with loads and loads of stills from the movies, and then there's Alien Trilogy on the PC."

Why haven't you developed for the PC before?

"Because we develop so many projects, we actually *are* doing PC stuff, it just doesn't represent that much of our business. I mean, we did Supremacy three years ago. We did Terminator 2 the coin-op, Mortal Kombat 1. But the quest is now a lot more for Sony, Saturn, PC and Mac-based games. You write a game now which is easily portable, so that all the graphics are to the highest resolution, and then it makes sense to do it for the PC as well."

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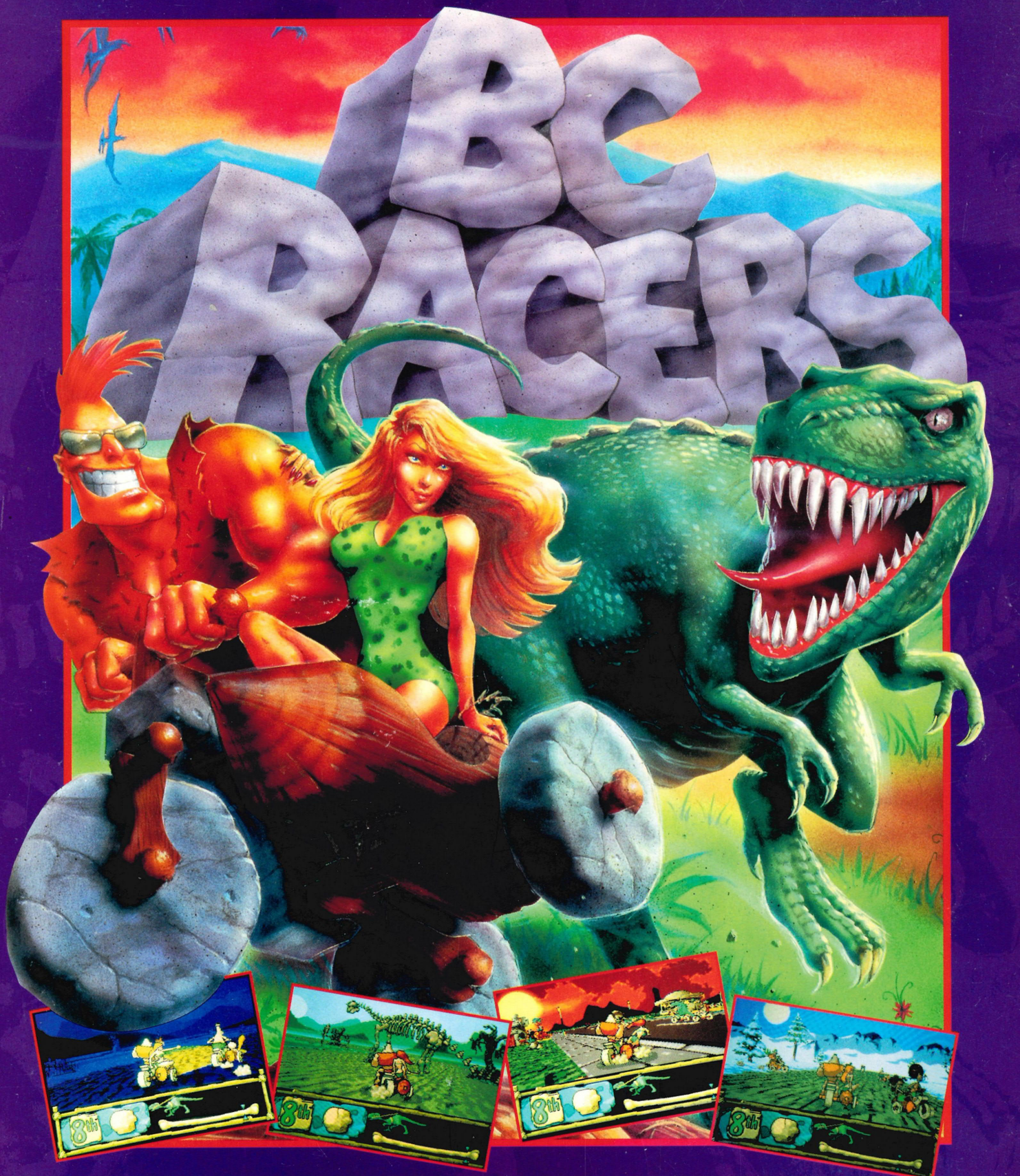
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