

Forthcoming attractions



↑ In a spin: you won't be able to get Xtreme Rally Championship out of your head

This month, we've gone football crazy with FA Premier League Manager 2002 and FIFA 2002. So if you fancy yourself as the next Sven Goran Eriksson now's the time to prove your worth.

Also knocking around in the Lifestyle cupboards are real-time strategy games MechCommander 2 and Battle Realms. There's a digital version of Scrabble that our very own pontiff of pedantry and deputy editor thought not up to challenging her, plus our globetrotting editor takes a

look at Michelin's online travel guide. We peek into space with Deep Space Explorer, while Double Top is reviewed by a PCA member of staff who came close to winning the Paddy Powers Media Darts Championship. Finally, Oz Clarke's wine guide is tasted by a true swiller.

Out in 2002, in theory, is the sequel to the godlike FPS (first-person shooter) Project IGI, which is imaginatively titled Project IGI 2. Let's hope that new publishers Codemasters will see fit to add multiplayer support.



↑ Time out: even Project IGI heroes need to take a break from all that killing



← House of God: here's hoping that multiplayer support will feature in Project IGI 2

Also out soon is Xtreme Rally Championship from Actualize. If you've ever fancied driving at breakneck speed down tight and twisting dirt tracks, while having a co-driver shouting pace notes at you then look out for the review in a forthcoming issue. ■

FA Premier League Manager 2002

The world of football management can be tough – one week you're the flavour of the month, the next you're crying into your cornflakes as you read in the morning papers that you're out of a job. When you're in work you are paid a pittance compared to the top players, and are forced to talk in clichés all the time.

Football management sims are commonplace these days and rapidly improving season by season. FA Premier League Manager offers plenty of choices in terms of how to manage your club, loads of figures and endless ratings for the stats-mad among you.



← Play a manager: lead your team to the top of the table, just don't expect any praise

When it comes to matchday you can choose to watch the match in full, just see the highlights, or opt for fastview with an onscreen commentary. You have control of the player's training regimes and in-game player tactics. A particularly good feature is that players' ratings go down and they cease to be as effective when you play them out of position. Plus, the restrictions on non-EU players and how suspensions are applied is spot on.

But after successfully guiding AC Milan to the Serie A title, I was disappointed to receive no congratulation or confirmation that I had won the championship. Another problem arose when I attempted to buy Kanu from Arsenal: although the money was taken from the club's bank account, he failed to appear on my squad list.

FA Premier will keep you entertained – just remember that it's only a game. ■

Ben Camm-Jones

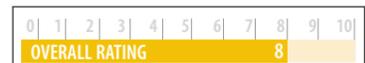
FA Premier League Manager 2002

System requirements: 233MHz Pentium; Windows 9x/2000/Me; 32MB RAM; 300MB hard disk space.

EA Sports: 01753 549 442

Website: www.uk.ea.com

Price: £18.99



FIFA Football 2002

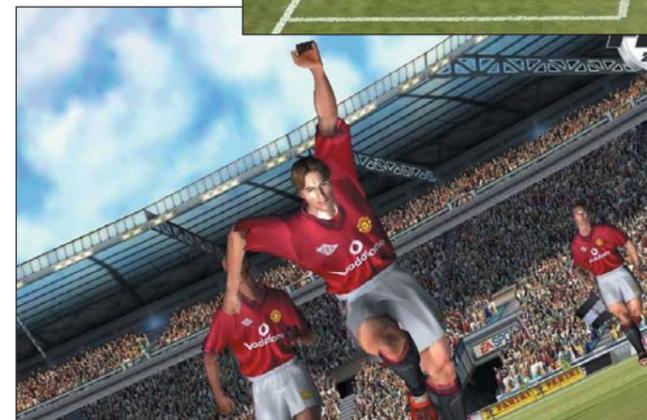


FIFA 2002 is the latest official football release from EA Sports and, to be honest, I was sceptical. I've been happily playing FIFA 1999 for a while, so just how much more impressive could the latest version be? Of course, FIFA 2002 offers you updated team kits (home and away), updated player line-ups reflecting the latest transfers, and more realistic looking players (Beckham sports his latest haircut and Seaman's ponytail is there in all its glory). But as FIFA 1999 has a facility to edit all these things yourself (well, maybe not Seaman's ponytail), is it worth splashing out another £27.99? Oh yes. Absolutely.

Worth every penny of the transfer fee

The improvements in the graphics and playability of FIFA 2002 are impressive. Matches have a far more realistic feel to them, the players can be controlled more effectively and the sheer volume of content on the disc – 450 authentic teams, with every player from 16 national leagues, plus 125 national team line-ups to toy with – is astonishing. New camera angles give play a close-up feel and voiceovers from Mottie and Andy Gray complete the experience. Everything about the game can be edited, from the venue, weather and duration, to the skill levels and refereeing standards.

A great touch is the inclusion of a new mode that allows the recreation of the entire 2002 World Cup Qualification program, with the actual groups and line-ups we've been watching for the past year on the box. Of course, the final qualifiers in this version could be oh so different.



Suitable for keyboards, joysticks and gamepads alike, FIFA 2002 includes players running off the ball (nicely marked out for you by a red glow), better accuracy of passing, ball control and curling of shots. It also has an excellent 'one-two' function that can make those runs into the box far more productive. Users can still create, edit and save customised line-ups and competitions. Van Nistelrooy and Henry up front in the same team? It's all possible with FIFA 2002. You can install and play FIFA 2002 with no prior experience using just four basic commands (with different results for defence and attack). For those that wish to improve their technique with more complex skills, the list of advanced moves seems endless.

He shoots... he scores!

An eye for detail has always positioned the FIFA series as the football games for your PC, and the latest offering doesn't disappoint. Throw in some genuinely useful new functionality and this is the definitive game for beginners and more experienced users alike.

A final word of praise for the instruction manual – it's one of the clearest and most sensibly written that I have seen. If there's only one football game you buy this year, it has to be FIFA 2002. Anyone want an old copy of FIFA 1999 going cheap? ■

David Fernando

↑ They think it's all over: can Man U get the ball past Newcastle's goalie?

← It is now: the Trafford boys celebrate, and so should FIFA as 2002 is a winner

FIFA Football 2002

System requirements: 200MHz MMX Pentium; Windows 9x/2000/Me/XP; 32MB RAM; 80MB hard disk space; 4MB 3D video card.

EA Sports: 01932 450 000

Website: www.uk.ea.com

Price: £27.99



MechCommander 2

I have an admission to make – even after hours of playing MechCommander 2 I'm not entirely sure what the story behind it is. But no matter – even though I remain in the dark as to the intricacies of the feuds between the houses of Liao and Steiner and the fate of Carver V, I still enjoy beating the hell out of enemy mechs. The premise behind MechCommander is simple – you control a brigade of robotic warriors, who are equipped with futuristic weapons. With this band of merry mechs you are sent on a series of missions to destroy buildings and resources, and annihilate as many of your opponent's forces as possible.

Easy come, easy go

So far, so simple. Indeed, simple is a good way to sum up MechCommander 2. Normally with such fighting games, I'm summarily wiped out by the enemy for at least the first few days of play (actually, I'm often still struggling after weeks of practice). However, because much of the decision-making is taken out of your hands – the mechs will automatically go after their foe, unless you specifically tell them not to – I found myself doing pretty well.

That's not to say that you have no input into how things pan out. When you accept a mission you must pick the mechs and pilots you want to take. As a novice the choice is limited, but the more you play the more options you have. You have to match up the weaponry on each mech to the strengths of the various pilots, which you build up as they are promoted from green through to elite. For example, you should match up a pilot who is a laser specialist with a mech that has laser weapons onboard.

Many a mech runs amok: destroying strategic enemy buildings is key to success



Top gun: action can move to the sky with helicopters and air strikes

Home sweet home: mechs can overcome even the most forbidding of structures

He ain't heavy, he's my mech

When you start a mission you have a weight limit, which determines how many mechs you can take. There are three weight categories: heavy, medium and light. Each has its benefits – heavy mechs tend to be more robust, while the light ones can move a bit faster. A mix of weights is always a good idea, but be warned – the disparity in speeds means that your mechs get scattered as heavy models lumber after their more agile counterparts.

In fact the slow speed at which all the mechs move is one of the most frustrating things about MechCommander 2. You spend most of your time waiting for mechs to shift from one area to another, which is interminably dull. Another niggle we had was that you can only save the game at the end of a mission, so you can't stop halfway through and return to the same point later. This can mean you end up playing the same mission time and time again, unless you can play for a good few hours at a time.

MechCommander kept me absorbed, but perhaps that was just because it was so easy to win and I like being the victor. However, this is probably a common human trait, so it's bound to find many more fans. Equally, there is a multiplayer option which should hot up the action if you're not so keen on an easy victory.

Ursula Tolaini

MechCommander 2
System requirements: 266MHz processor; Windows 98/Me/2000; 64MB RAM; 400MB hard disk space.
Microsoft: 0870 601 0100
Website: www.microsoft.com/uk/games/
Price: £24.99

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
OVERALL RATING										7

Double Top



I'm not one to boast, but I've thrown a few darts in my time – both 'professionally' in the Paddy Powers World Darts Grand Prix Championship Media Challenge, and virtually, courtesy of various darts software. Experience therefore made me initially sceptical of how good a £4.99 package like Double Top would be, but my cynicism proved unfounded.

Whereas most darts programs use the mouse to control the throwing action, DT uses the cursor keys or a gamepad to control the computer-generated hand and the spacebar to throw. This makes aiming more accurate and closer to the real thing.



Up to two people can play a regular 501 pub game, where each attempts to reduce their total to zero before their opponent or, for a twist on the standard knock-out match, choose Tournament and pit your wits against any of the 31 computerised players. Virtual opponents of eight standards are available, from intrepid rookie to beer-gutted pro.

A final option, Round the Clock, requires you to hit each segment sequentially in a clockwise direction, starting at double one and finishing at double 20. The game also includes sound effects from virtual spectators watching the match.

Electronic darts can never replace the real thing, but Double Top has a pretty good go. However, big darts fans might find this package lacking, with only three game choices and no sign of perennial pub favourites such as Killer. That said, DT offers beginners a good introduction and is a value-for-money package.

Faith Wardle

Oche doche: at £4.99, Double Top is super, smashing, great

Double Top
System requirements: 200MHz Pentium II PC; Windows 9x/Me/2000; 32MB RAM; 25MB hard disk space.
Guildhall Leisure: 01302 314 000
Website: www.guildhalleisure.com
Price: £4.99

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
OVERALL RATING										6

Scrabble

With its eye on the Christmas season, Ubi Soft released the latest interactive version of the nation's favourite word-based board game at the end of November. So what's new in this edition? Er... not a lot, actually, but with a reasonable price tag and the spirit of giving in the air, it's sure to sell well enough.

The update adds a choice of 3D spinning boards, and the ability to zoom in and out for a better look. Plus, players no

longer have just the computer to pit their wits against – now they can hook up and challenge friends over a LAN (local area network). There's no internet option though, which seems an oversight.

The Anagram and Conundrum alternatives provide a bit of variety, not to mention a certain *Countdown* flavour. But we found some of the anagrams could be one of several words and, with no clues to suggest the right answer, we invariably chose the wrong one.

Configuration preferences are sparse, but then Scrabble's hardly in need of a carefully considered post-play options strategy. The animations, which depict your computer opponent, are played between each

Red-letter day: what should our reviewer put down next?

move. Eeerily soundless, these are very irritating, but fortunately they can be turned off.

Depending on the level you've chosen, the character could be a dungaree-wearing country hick (levels 1-2) or, at the other end of the scale, a white-coated scientist in his lab (levels 9-10). Depictions of intelligent life don't come much more politically incorrect than this. But then Scrabble players always did fancy themselves a cut above.

Emma Northam



Scrabble
System requirements: 300MHz PII; Windows 9x/2000/Me; 16MB RAM; 400MB hard disk space.
Amazon.co.uk: 0800 279 6620
Website: www.amazon.co.uk
Price: £18.99

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
OVERALL RATING										8

Deep Space Explorer

Deep Space Explorer is one of the latest in a line of products from Space.com, allowing computer users to discover more about astronomy. But to call this program a simple cosmological tool would not do it justice.

DSE brings the universe to life, letting you explore any galaxy or star you care to click on. You can zoom in to the surface of the sun or any planet, or zoom out from our system, star cluster and galaxy into the realms of supergalactic clusters.

As Deep Space Explorer is based on actual observations, you can only zoom out as far as current astrological methods will allow. That said, this volume would take several lifetimes to

explore – but should you feel the need to extend your investigations further than present day limits allow, DSE plunges you into the distant past and towards the beginnings of the universe.

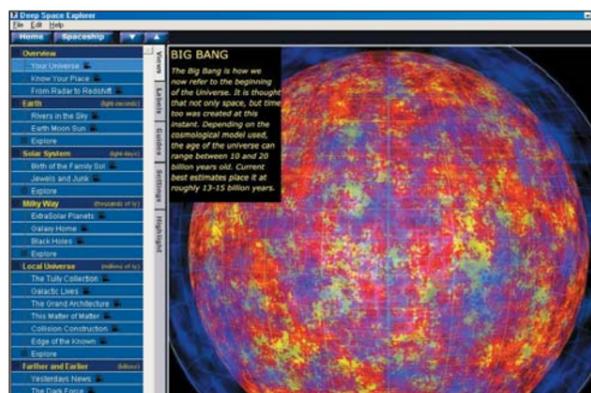
Complementing this superb exploratory tool is a large selection of compelling and substantial audio-visual files that explain many aspects of the universe's structure. These short movies put some of the information gleaned from your explorations into perspective.

All in all DSE is a splendid tool for everyone, from the interstellar virgin to the seasoned astronomer. Coupled with its online information facility this program puts the universe at your fingertips, allowing you to soar God-like through the firmament, and all from the comfort of your chair.

A definite must for anyone who has ever looked up with wonder on a starry night. ■

Simon Alveranga

← Reach for the stars: explore the sun, planets or travel into the galaxy



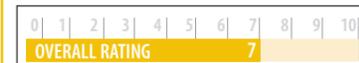
Deep Space Explorer

System requirements: Pentium or higher processor; Windows 9x/Me/XP/2000/NT 4.0; 32MB RAM; 150MB hard disk space.

Space.com: 0800 289 041

Website: www.starrynight.com

Price: \$39.95



PREVIEW Battle Realms

RTS (real-time strategy) games owe their success to the desire in all of us to play God. Let's face it, having minions obey your every whim is fun. Doling out punishment, working your charges into an early grave, or sending them to certain death is satisfying to those with a streak of control-freakery. However, the genre has become a victim of its own popularity, as developers seem to be running out of new ideas. In this highly conventional

environment, Battle Realms tries to be different, but escaping the threadbare clichés of this well-worn format is no easy task.

The plot is a martial arts staple – the dispossessed noble fighting to win back the fiefdom that is rightly his. You are Kenji, a warrior who returns to his homeland after being wrongly accused of his father's murder. Since your father's death, the local warlords have carved up

his vast empire for themselves. You must take back the territories and unite them under your leadership, through gathering resources and amassing a huge army. Graphics and animation are excellent and the range of sound

← Fight fire with fire: reclaim your rightful territory using brute force and your brains



effects is impressive. You can use combinations of specialist troops and the landscape to your advantage – the contoured maps are a welcome innovation, giving a tactical advantage.

These imaginative features come at the expense of the production and management elements, which are pretty basic. However, this is a preview version and the final game promises a number of extra features. We'll temper our optimism with a hint of caution until we see the final code. ■

Paul Rincon

Battle Realms

System requirements: 400MHz Celeron processor; Windows 98/2000/Me/XP; 64MB RAM; 600MB hard disk space.

Ubi Soft: 01932 838 230

Website: www.battlerealmms.ubi.com

Price: £34.99



ViaMichelin travel guide

It's the kids' Easter holiday and you want to take the Volvo-drawn caravan from London to Cornwall with enough equipment to mount a polar expedition. My advice: don't do it. I don't want to be stuck behind you on a single-track stretch of the A303.

But if you must, where can you get maps, route-planners, up-to-the-minute traffic news, the address of a local hotel, a list of tourist attractions and a regional weather forecast all under one roof? Answer: the latest motoring website from Michelin, www.viamichelin.co.uk. Michelin, famous for its cellulite-suffering tyre logo, produces one of the oldest hotel and restaurant guides

in the world, *Guide Rouge* which was first published in 1900 and was instrumental in making the French road system what it is today. Deadly, but logically signposted.

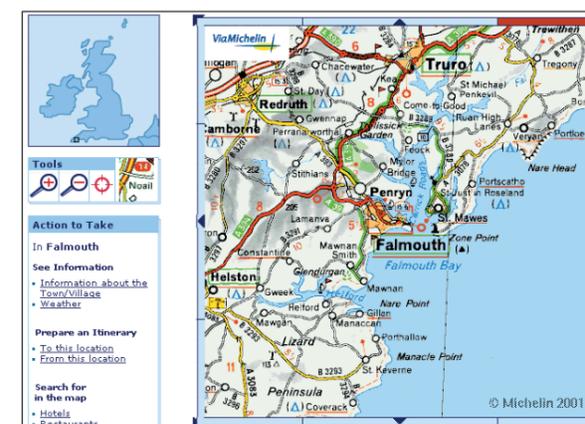
ViaMichelin provides similar data for 43 European countries, so you can also plan a pootle down the N-roads to the Dordogne, taking in regular stops at Le Routier and winding up some gallic Renault drivers as you go.

Considering the site is free – you don't even have to register – it offers a useful depth of info. The search engines enable you to plan routes and gather material by entering a town, region or even a postcode. Hotel and restaurant data is taken from Michelin's Red Guide and tourist attractions from the Green Guide, while news on roadworks and hazards is fed in from TrafficMaster.

Michelin is hoping the site will tempt motorists into buying its maps, printed editions of the Red and Green Guides, an onboard navigation CD and the Red Guide for Palm, all of which are available to order from the site. ■

Andrew Charlesworth

← Terra incognita: get all the info on unexplored territory at ViaMichelin



ViaMichelin travel guide

System requirements: Internet connection; Internet Explorer 4.0/Netscape 4.08 or later.

ViaMichelin: www.viamichelin.co.uk

Price: free of charge



Oz Clarke's Wine Guide 2002

If you have never ventured beyond Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cotes du Rhone, Oz Clarke's Wine Guide will give you a nudge in more interesting directions. The guide encourages you to try new grape varieties, offers appropriate food and wine combinations and will give confidence to those of us baffled by the plethora of wines available at Sainsbury's.

The interface serves either as a tutorial about selecting, tasting and talking about

wine or for dipping into specific areas. The guide is comprehensive, even detailing the best glasses to use to maximise taste, texture and smell. There is also a terrific section that suggests which wines best accompany a range of food dishes, including some I hadn't thought of such as white wine with goat's cheese.

The wine selector is searchable by grape, wine style, star rating and food matches, and a gazetteer of world wines

teaches you about individual vineyards and wine producers. And it's all printable, so you can pop to the supermarket with a discreet list of wines to try.

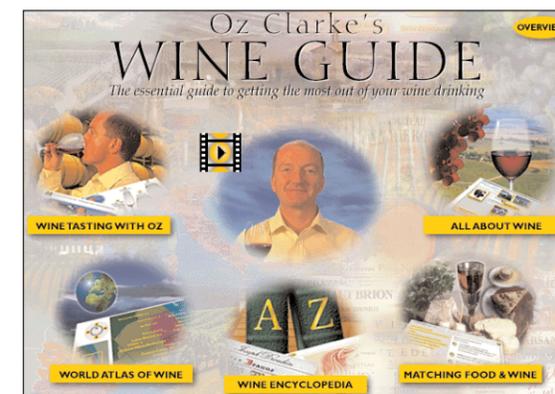
Oz Clarke pops up to give advice on colour and taste, exuding his

← The expert nose: tell your Rioja from your Riesling with Oz Clarke's helpful guide

characteristic bonhomie as he offers tidbits of information on each country and region's wine. He is reassuring about exploring the world of wine, which will give confidence to beginners.

Our only quibbles are that there's no option to display the guide full screen, so the interface sits in a smallish window on your desktop, and the video clips of Oz are not synchronised. However, these are minor details – Oz Clarke's wine guide is detailed, informative and interesting. ■

Jonathan Berry



Oz Clarke's Wine Guide 2002

System requirements: Pentium PC; Windows 9x/Me/NT/2000; 16MB RAM; 20MB hard disk space.

Focus Multimedia: 01889 570 156

Website: www.focusmm.co.uk

Price: £9.99

