readers' writes

In our postbag this month we find a reader who politely informs our star reviewer that the force is not with him, while another has come a cropper buying a PC over the web only to find the operating system was unlicensed. Also speaking out is a hearing-impaired reader struggling to obtain technical help and the man who couldn't read the table headings that weren't there…

I sense much anger in you

I read Spencer Dalziel's review of Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast (Lifestyle, July 02) with interest. I was just wondering why it had it taken *PC Advisor* so long to review this great game when I came across a grave error. Let me explain.

In the review you said, "You get to fight on a Death Star, go to the Cloud City and even fight a light sabre battle alongside Luke Skywalker." My point is you don't fight on a Death Star! I think you have misinterpreted the Cairn Installation which is a large Imperial docking outpost and shipyard built within an asteroid in the Lenico System (it's the level where you have to find Dessan's Doomgiver). Because it is so vast it may have seemed like a Death Star to you.

Look at the facts: Jedi Knight II is set after *Return of the Jedi*, so how could the Imperial remnant have the means to build this alleged third Death Star? "A Jedi's strength flows from the force, but beware of the dark side" – Yoda.
Luke Sowerby, via email

Spencer Dalziel replies: I wrote the review back in March, but we couldn't put it online any earlier because it's shared content with the magazine. Working on a monthly makes it harder to get things out exactly when we want to because of the long production cycle.

As for the Death Star comment, shame on me. But have you noticed how the decor of Death Stars and Cairn Installations is just so samey this year? I was fooled. May I be frozen in carbonite and shipped straight to Tatooine.

Fast and loose

I recently bought a computer from a dealer via an online auction. It had Windows XP Pro and Office XP preloaded, but when the PC arrived there was no licence, no certificate of authenticity and no discs for the software. I contacted the vendor and he told me the software is legal and can be used on his licence, and I should make a copy of it from the hard drive. After a few further emails the vendor started getting abusive and told me to stop wasting his time. Certainly no chance of getting my money back.

I was not happy with this so I contacted Microsoft. They told me it was not a licensed copy and I should stop using it. They also said I should send all the details to them and they would deal with it.

So to report this I have to do a lot of work and I can't use the new computer to do it! I end up with a very expensive computer with no software. Where do I go from here? There doesn't seem to be any incentive to report software piracy as you end up loosing out.
Martin Carter, via email

Emma Northam replies: we're afraid there's little you can do. If the software is suspect, then you'll have to 'fess up to Microsoft and buy yourself a legal copy – £160 for XP Home edition – and then, at least, your PC will work. The best way

to stop this happening to someone else is to report it to Fast (Federation Against Software Theft) either online via the Fast website (www.fast.org.uk) or by calling Fast on 01628 622 121.

Help needed hear

It was not until very recently that I fully realised the problems of deaf/hard of hearing people when trying to obtain technical help. Approximately four weeks ago I developed a hearing problem, which means that I can no longer use a telephone. Needing technical assistance a couple of weeks ago really brought it home to me – how could I obtain it?

I either have to try to get help via email or get somebody else to use the phone for me – in this instance, there was nobody I could call on to do that so I have had to put my faith in email. The result? Despite explaining why I could not ring I am still waiting for a reply. It does, however, raise the question of just what do the deaf and hard of hearing do? Of course, this applies to all kinds of situations, not just computers. I would be very interested in yours, and others', thoughts on this.
Brian Lewis, via email

Emma Northam replies: companies are often criticised for their lack of response to email correspondence; sadly, writing a letter or sending a fax is frequently more likely to get you some sort of answer. If you're deaf or hard of hearing and can't make a phone call, try the manufacturer's tech support pages on its site instead – that is, of course, assuming your internet connection isn't the problem.

But really, the web and email should make life easier, not harder, for those with disabilities. As Tim Berners-Lee, father of the internet and director of the W3C (World Wide Web Consortium), says, "The power of the web is in its universality. Access by everyone regardless of disability

is an essential aspect." The W3C is pushing for the implementation of its guidelines for how such things as keyboard navigation and communication with specialised software can benefit people with visual, hearing, physical, cognitive and neurological disabilities.

The problem, as ever, is the cost and time involved in restructuring sites to incorporate these elements. Section 21 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995

requires 'service providers' to make information about their services accessible for blind and partially sighted people. But so far there hasn't been a UK test case and companies cannot be forced by law to code sites for the disabled.*

Star letter

Some time ago I wrote an article concerning possible charges for using email and several of my friends scoffed at the idea that big names like MSN would introduce such charges for fear of losing customers to its rivals. My answer to this was that MSN would bank on the fact that people with well-established accounts would submit to a small fee rather than undergo massive reorganisation on the understanding that it's better the devil you know.

I have now received an email from MSN telling me that it is soon to scrap its free POP retrieval service and that, unless I pay £19.99 a year, I will be unable to retrieve any mail from other ISPs. This surely is round one of the plans to charge for email services. I have no doubt that if customers go elsewhere, as I intend to do, then these service providers may have a rethink. However, if people pay up then how long before we are charged for all email services. For all those who doubted my foresight, I can only say you were warned.
J Shingler, Shropshire

Wendy Brewer replies: the 2MB of space MSN offers its Hotmail users is simply not enough for most of us in this age of Mpeg and Jpeg file-swapping. MSN director, Geoff Sutton, has promised that services which are free today will remain free tomorrow, but the charges already imposed mean his words hold little reassurance. Microsoft has blamed this charge on its huge number of clients (around 210 million), perhaps something it should have considered before trying to sign every internet user up to its services. Moving to other services such as Lycos, which offers 15MB of space free of charge, would encourage Microsoft to rethink its charges. But be careful, if Lycos gets too many customers it may begin reasoning like Microsoft and start charging too.

Our star letter writer wins an IBC Pontis SP600 MP3 player worth £129 inc VAT. This ultra-portable device offers 4GB memory capacity, so you can enjoy up to 66 hours of CD-quality music. For more details, see www.ibc-ltd.co.uk or call 01344 752 700.

If you want to air your views in these pages, please write to PC Advisor, FREEPOST 20 LON87018, London W1E 4AN, fax us on 020 7580 1935, or email us at pcadvisor_letters@idg.com. Please mark emails 'Readers' writes' in the subject heading.

Virus complacency: don't do it

I'm writing to urge your readers to use antivirus software. I know you do so in your magazine but I'm sure many readers, like me, just read the articles and do nothing about it. Perhaps hearing another reader's view will change their minds.

In the past couple of months two of my friends have had problems with viruses from incoming emails. One had no virus software installed and the other had it installed but never updated it (same as me). Personally I'd never seen the effect a virus can have until now. Imagine your email and favourite website addresses are gone, along with all your letters and software you've accumulated over the years.

Have I got your attention? Install antivirus software, ensure it's set to check emails before you open them and update your virus list frequently. It only takes about 10 minutes a week and you can easily go and make a coffee while it's updating. Have I learned my lesson? At the moment I update my antivirus software every week, recalling as I do the look on my friend's face when he lost everything and had to start again from scratch. I've got so much on my PC that the thought of reinstalling everything fills me with horror.
Paul Milne via email

Losing our headings

In the July 02 issue we had the psychic writers predicting the sale of Comet to DSG (Dixons Stores Group); in the August 02 issue you seem to be encouraging readers to test their own psychic powers. Page 81 included half of the comparison table from the digital projectors Technofile. Unfortunately it didn't include the headings for the information in the table. This proves to be particularly difficult when it's a Y/N answer. Any chance you could throw some light on the missing headings?

Aileen O'Donnell replies: over the past few issues we've changed the magazine's production process to an all-digital system. As with any new technology there are bound to be teething problems and you spotted the only one we've had so far. Apologies for leaving you in the dark. We've reproduced the top bar of our digital projectors comparison table below. ■

Dimensions (width x depth x height)	Maximum screen size/distance	Contrast ratio	Economy mode	PC Card/ Memory Stick	DVI/ RGB	S-Video	Speakers	Noise (decibels)	Short throw lens