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Xbox lives

How the harbingers of doom gathered and the vultures circled when Microsoft recently announced that its Xbox games console had caused a revenue loss to the tune of £112m. No sooner had the facts been made public than the punditry of cynicism kicked in, with many commentators gleefully announcing that the end of the Xbox was nigh, adding in the Queen's best English: "Ner ner de ner ner."

Microsoft justified itself by attributing losses to the high costs incurred from marketing and advertising, not to mention setting up the online gaming zone Xbox Live which will add to the loss. On the back of these statistics, Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer is optimistically claiming that Xbox will outsell Nintendo's GameCube in Europe over Christmas.



Interesting times

Those prematurely sounding the death knell of the Xbox should never underestimate a company that doesn't know what the outside of the Fortunes 100 list looks like. Microsoft has a long-term strategy and a nifty trick up its sleeve. That trick is called £1.27bn and it's enough to make the Xbox losses look like a minor slip-up in accounts.

Sadly an infrastructure for online console gaming can not be conjured from thin air and Microsoft had to instigate from scratch a plan of action with long-term targets. Head of all things Xbox, J Allard, announced that the money will be ploughed into the Xbox Live over the next five years and explained: "Xbox and Xbox Live is a 20-year dream. We're willing to be patient."

Microsoft has been pretty inured to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune because its overall aim was always to create a healthy revenue stream from online services for the Xbox. It won't be replenishing stocks for a few years to come. The company is running a pilot scheme for the Xbox Live service from the end of November and it's due to launch fully this March.

It will be a long time running before Microsoft's Home and Entertainment division can recoup its losses but we don't think Mr Gates is too worried – if the £1.27bn isn't enough to cover costs there's always a top-up fund of £20bn. Xbox is here to stay for some time yet. ■

Spencer Dalziel



PC Advisor treats 'em mean

The PC Advisor Gamesroom has gone down a storm with our online forum members and it's the place to go if you have any gaming questions. Our lovely members generally manage to answer any gaming poser you care to put to them in record time.

Since we appreciate their input so much, it was most heinous of us to drop a clanger on one of them last month – a certain Adam Leach, aka The Ghost of Inept Pig. We had promised some time ago to let a forum member write a review for the Lifestyle section – as long, of course, as their test review was well received by the editorial team. Adam sent in his review, and very good

it was too, yet for some unknown reason we proceeded to ignore him for about four months.

We then gave Adam all but a few days to produce a brilliant games review for this issue of PC Advisor. Were this not enough to panic The Ghost, we gave him Microsoft's Age of Mythology – not so much a nice easy piece of brain candy to get to grips with in a few hours as a sprawling real-time strategy epic. The icing on the cake was that we only had buggy review code to offer him... With no instructions. Did Adam come through under a severe amount of pressure? See page 170 for the answer.

Finally, if you would like to chat with other gamers then visit www.pcadvisor.co.uk/gamesroom. ■

Spencer Dalziel

PC GAMES CHART	
1	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City
2	FIFA 2003
3	WWF Smackdown! Shut Your Mouth
4	Harry Potter: Chamber of Secrets
5	Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers
6	Colin McRae Rally 3
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Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

PlayStation2

The cultural zeitgeist of previous decades are regularly resurrected for irony-drenched enjoyment. It tends to work on a cyclical basis: in the eighties we derided the sixties, in the nineties we scoffed at the seventies and in the noughties we started laughing at the eighties. But never in a million years did I expect to see the eighties depicted as, well, cool. Thank you Rockstar Games for bringing the world Grand Theft Auto: Vice City. All hail big hair, bad music, gaudy neon, rolled-up jacket sleeves and the most important gaming experience of the 21st century bar none.

GTA: Vice City is the semi-sequel to the ground-breaking evolutionary experience that was Grand Theft Auto 3. The free-roaming play that combined third-person action with smash-and-grab driving over a vast cityscape is back and this time we're in Vice City, an alternate 1980s Miami. Prepare to re-enter a world of the most amoral perambulations, but this time pack your hairspray and pink legwarmers.

Young upwardly mobile gangster

Controlling small-time mobster Tommy Vercetti (brilliantly voiced by Ray Liotta), it's your job to work your way up through the underworld from monkey to organ grinder. You ascend the slippery ladder by running a wild array of jobs using any vehicle or weapon you can get your hands on. Rockstar was kind enough to include the occasional seaplane and helicopter

↓ Bags of charisma: our hero swaggers back from another dodgy deal and is home in time for Miami Vice



alongside the multitude of 1980s cars, bikes and boats so it's possible to explore every crevice Vice City has to offer.

If you need extra cash in between missions you can steal a taxi, police car, ambulance or even a pizza moped to run some side jobs. Failing that, explore back alleys and rooftops for rampages or complete impossible jumps for insane stunt bonuses. The jumps are filmed with balletic polish and were only let down by the lack of the Puccini score that graced the same scenario in GTA3. Kate Bush singing *Wow* doesn't have quite the same impact.

Radio daze

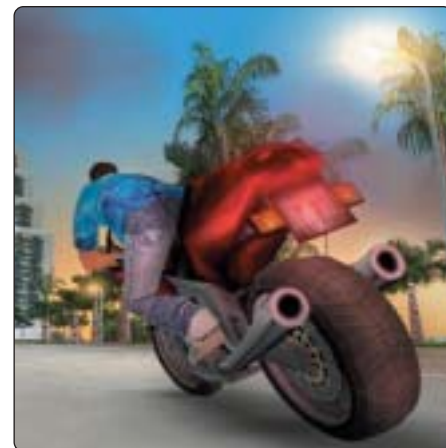
The denizens of Vice City are nasty pieces of work, going out of their way to thwart your efforts, and the gameplay always offers a myriad of options to choose from. All the while a back story unfolds as you try and find out who set you up when a dodgy deal went wrong in the first scene.

Vice City looks beautiful and the gameplay is hugely involving. I thought I was past the point where I'd stay up 'til five in the morning playing computer games but Vice City is taking its toll on my normal routine. It helps that it is one of the few games available that creates a living breathing world that exists independently of your presence or its existence on a CD-ROM. I wouldn't be surprised if I took a wrong turn off the A128 near Romford and came across a sign saying 'Welcome to Vice City'.

This is the sharpest game I have ever played and the wit it displays is dry as a bone. It may well cause endless discussions on the nature of violence in video games but listen out for the interesting self-referential monologues pumping out of one of the many radio stations you can choose. The commentary could have been pilfered from *The Simpson's* scripts and I often found myself forgetting to play, just sitting in the cars listening to these pearls of console game comedy.

There are a host of filmic references for the anoraks out there and you could be forgiven for thinking Rockstar put a gun to Martin Scorsese's head while asking politely if he wouldn't mind directing it for them. It can't be long before big directors wake up to the potential displayed by such games as GTA: Vice City. ■

Spencer Dalziel



↑ Rubber features (top): you'll be straining tyres of all sizes in Vice City

↑ Driving in the wrong gear (bottom): our hero is pulled over for a minor fashion offence

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

□ Rockstar Games: 01268 531 245
□ Website: www.rockstargames.com
□ Price: £39.99

System requirements

PlayStation2

Overall rating





Combat Flight Sim 3

Combat Flight Sim 2 used to be the game of choice for discerning flight-simmers who wanted to combine great dogfighting with involving gameplay. Now it seems rather old hat because Microsoft has released Combat Flight Sim 3 and it is a phenomenally good fly.

Microsoft's new flight simulator starts in 1943, the turning point of the war for the allies. You can join the battle at this fortuitous point as either a fighter or a bomber pilot. The previous incarnation was just a big fighter melee with the odd objective here and there. This time around it's more structured: you command the whole theatre and choose your own destiny.

For example, you can gather prestige points to command more of the war effort and launch a ground offensive while you're helping out with the air support. You can take part in historical missions, such as the battle of the Bulge or the allied invasion of Normandy in 1944, piloting a range of planes including Mustang, Spitfire and Messerschmidt.

As well as the all-out campaign, you can undertake single missions and quick combat, as

well as taking part in 'what if' missions, which allow you to see what could have happened if the Germans had got more jets into the air.

If you thought the graphics were good in the last version of Combat Flight Sim then you'll be amazed with CFS3. While it's good to see improvements to the planes, the amount of attention to detail that has been paid to the scenery is especially impressive.

To get the ultimate graphics you need a high-spec PC, so if you haven't got one then don't strain your system by playing at the full-graphics setting. That said, even on the lowest setting, it still looks extremely good. ■

David O'Conner

→ High as a kite: just about as much fun as you can have without a joystick

PC CD-ROM

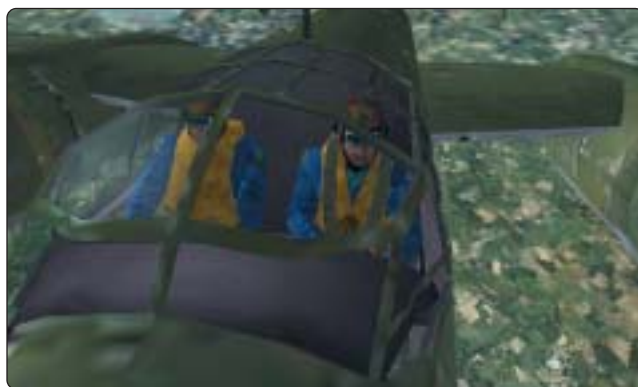
Combat Flight Sim 3

- ☐ Microsoft: 0870 601 0100
- ☐ Website: www.microsoft.com/games
- ☐ Price: £34.99

System requirements

400MHz Pentium II; Windows 98/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 1.5GB hard disk space.

Overall rating



Age of Mythology

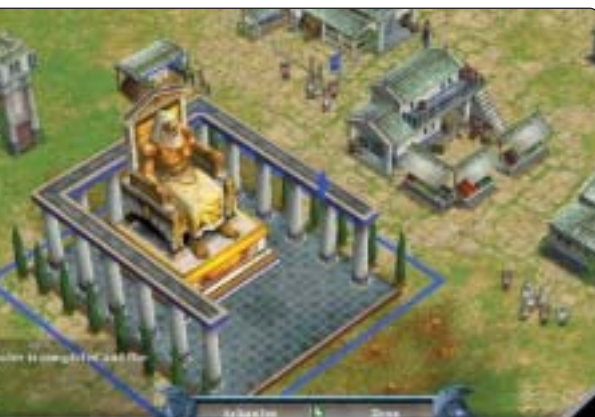
Age of Mythology

- ☐ Microsoft: 0870 601 0100
- ☐ Website: www.microsoft.com/games/ageofmythology/
- ☐ Price: £34.99

System requirements

450MHz Pentium II; Windows 98/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 1GB hard disk space.

Overall rating



Developer Ensemble's latest effort, Age of Mythology, breathes new life into the tired RTS (real-time strategy) genre with absolute gusto. You follow the exploits of Arkantos, an Atlantean hero who is forced to engage in the Trojan War to appease Poseidon. This task becomes more complicated when a sinister plot is unveiled. Arkantos travels through both Greece and Egypt then on to the frozen lands of the Norse, experiencing each civilisation and its major and minor Gods in one campaign.

Unfortunately, although campaign missions occasionally start differently, the majority follow the same rigid formula: build up and defend a base until you've enough resources to amass an army then destroy your opponent. This can get quite repetitive after a while. That said, an honourable mention must go to

the Tug of war level, in which you have to try to return a piece of the God Osiris to your town centre. This is made difficult by the incredibly slow speed of the cart that is carrying the piece and your resolute foe. The game plays much like previous Ensemble games but is presented in glorious 3D. Now when you advance to the next age you are presented with a choice of which minor deity you would like the benefits of – for example, the aggressive Ares or the more cautious Athena.

The stone points system has made way for favour, which is earned in different ways from civilisation to civilisation. It is used to generate figures from mythology such as Minotaurs, Hydras and the huge Colossus. These myths are countered by heroes, such as Odysseus, Achilles and Hercules. When it all becomes too much, you can use your god's powers, which range from a rain shower to an almighty meteor storm, to settle some scores.

A notable improvement over its predecessors with a growing online community, Age of Mythology is a must-have for any RTS fan. ■

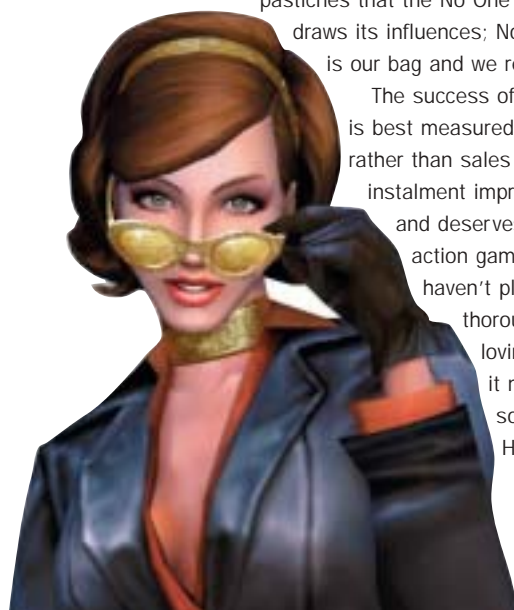
Adam Leach, forum member

← For the love of god: the last thing any decent deity would do is favour peace



No One Lives Forever 2: A Spy in Harm's Way

PC CD-ROM



Cold war paranoia in the 1950s might have spread fear and loathing around the world but it also spawned a slew of seriously groovy 1960s spy shows. It's from these enjoyable pastiches that the No One Lives Forever series draws its influences; No One Lives Forever 2 is our bag and we really, really dig it.

The success of the original NOLF is best measured by critical acclaim rather than sales figures. This second instalment improves on the original and deserves to be the stealth action game of the year. We haven't played a game as thoroughly enjoyable or lovingly crafted as NOLF2; it might even cheer up some of those sombre Hitman 2 players.

← Green-eyed spy: cartwheel out of Harm's way as the courageous, curvaceous Cate Archer

You play the catsuited Cate Archer, trying to foil the latest plans of the evil Harm: Project Omega. Your quest takes you to some stunning locations and involves some camp gadgets, such as an exploding cat, and even camper enemies – for example, the gun-toting mime artists. There's humour that mainly works (a rare achievement in gaming), bold technicoloured-level designs and some brilliant music with that John Barry orchestrated feel.

Imagine one of the more psychedelic episodes of *The Avengers* twinned with *Austin Powers* and you get an idea of the game's high calibre. But don't think for one second that NOLF2 is an easy game to play. The AI (artificial intelligence) is cruelly enhanced and you're an easy target to track down if you don't cover your tracks.

What we didn't expect was the co-operative multiplayer mode, but we think it's the way forward for online FPS (first-person shooter) action games. It's limited to only four players, but those bored of deathmatch modes should check it out. ■

Spencer Dalziel

No One Lives Forever 2

- Vivendi: 01268 531 245
- Website: www.vivendi-universal-interactive.co.uk
- Price: £29.99

System requirements

500MHz Pentium III; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 1.4GB hard disk space.

Overall rating



Knight Rider: The Game

PC CD-ROM

Knight Rider: The Game

- Davilex: www.davilex.com
- Price: £16.99

System requirements

350MHz Pentium III; Windows 95/98/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 690MB hard drive space.

Overall rating



The year is 1982 and quaffed hair, tight trousers and leather jackets are hot property. Enter a talk, dark, handsome man (well, my mother thought so) with a robotic, talking car. His name is Michael Knight and the series is, of course, *Knight Rider*. Thanks to Davilex, one of the best programmes of the 1980s (at least after *The A-Team* and *AirWolf*) can now be enjoyed all over again.

Fans of the series will love this reincarnation, if not merely because it will give them the chance to see the opening credits and hear the fantastic theme tune. Thanks to a couple of weeks playing this game, that famous beat is now lodged firmly in my brain.

← Retro jets: Kitt pays as much attention to the laws of physics as it did on TV (just like David Hasselhoff's hairdo)

This is a driving game – nothing more, nothing less. You are Kitt (The Knight Industry Two Thousand), perhaps the most advanced car ever to hit our TV screens, and it is your role to help Michael in his quest to uphold law and order. You are equipped with a series of turbo boosts, scan modes, micro-jammers and an all-important cup holder, just so you won't spill Michael's coffee on a tight bend.

The jumps are pretty impressive, once you've mastered them, and you can use special features such as infrared scanning to locate your enemies. Best of all, you get to stop Karr (Kitt's evil alter-ego) and Garth (Michael's evil twin) from taking over the city.

Overall the game is very good, the driving experience is realistic and you need a very careful hand to swerve round the tight corners at high speeds. However, it could have offered so much more. Perhaps a little Bond-style shooting and more action out of the car would have made it more than a normal racing game. Nonetheless it's a must for any fan of the original series. ■

Spencer Dalziel



Driving Test Pass 2002/2003

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2

PC CD-ROM

Okay, it's confession time. Despite the fact that my 17th birthday is very much a dim and distant memory for me (although I'm sure my local constabulary will remember it for some time to come) I still do not have a driving licence. The best excuse I can come up with for this sorry state of affairs is that I think I'd be a danger to other road users. As the *PC Advisor* editor will tell you, I have the attention span of a particularly lackadaisical goldfish and am prone to moments of utter stupidity and recklessness.

Straight and narrow

I decided, then, that it was high time to pull myself together and make an effort to get on the road, learning not only the art of car control but the Highway Code as well. GSP's Driving Test Pass 2002/2003 edition contains all the questions that are in the Driving Standards Agency theory test. If, like me, you thought that the DVLA was a paramilitary organisation you'd be well advised to have a good look at this program. If you're learning to drive or about to take your test it really does provide everything you need to know.

The hazard perception test has recently been introduced to the theory test and GSP has included some video clips to help you identify

↓ Hard drive: hammer the speediest cars as fast as you can, but beware of the nifty coppers

hazards on the road. You'll not have too much difficulty in spotting them – in fact, most of the questions aren't a great challenge. At only £9.99 the CD's less than the cost of an hour-long driving lesson so it's a sound investment for anyone about to take their test.

Flooring it

Having mastered the theory, I decided to move on to the practice. However, I soon found out that sticking to the speed limit and regularly checking my rear view mirror wasn't going to get me very far in *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2*. As the title suggests this game is about driving very, very fast. There are dozens of expensive cars to drive, but there's a catch – there are also scores of cops about trying to stop you having fun.

What's more, the police have much faster cars than you do. Imagine my surprise when the rozzers drew smoothly alongside me as I was tearing up the tarmac at 170mph in a McLaren F1. Realising that I ought to slow down and pull over, I slammed on the brakes, got straight back on the throttle and bumped his rear side panel, spinning him around. I drove away into the sunset laughing my head off and, as I went over the crest of a hill, smacked head-on into a lorry.

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2 looks fantastic and plays well. If you enjoy driving games where you rarely have to take your foot off the accelerator (or finger off the go faster button in this case), you'll love it. The cars are gorgeous and you can really feel the handling differences between them – some will stick to the road around the tightest bends whereas others you just point in the right direction, bury the throttle and prepare to crash when you need to make even the slightest change in direction.

I'm no closer to getting my driving licence, but when the day comes that I have to outrun the boys in blue down a busy dual carriageway I'll be prepared. Mirror, signal, pedal to the metal. ■

Ben Camm-Jones



↑ Easy street: the questions have to be simple, or how would half the idiots out there have passed their tests?



Driving Test Pass 2002/2003

- ☐ GSP: 01480 497 050
- ☐ Website: www.gsp.cc
- ☐ Price: £9.99

System requirements

100MHz Pentium; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 16MB RAM; 10MB hard disk space.

Overall rating



Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2

- ☐ Electronic Arts: 01932 450 000
- ☐ Website: www.uk.ea.com
- ☐ Price: £26.99

System requirements

450MHz Pentium II; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 1.2GB hard disk space.

Overall rating



The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring PC CD-ROM

The Fellowship of the Ring is a single-player, action-adventure game based on the book and features Frodo, Gandalf and Aragorn. It begins with Frodo and Gandalf discussing the One Ring in the peaceful lands of the Shire. You follow their adventures through the darkness of Moria to the river of Anduin while gathering the Fellowship and protecting the One Ring from the Dark Lord Sauron.

You can play as one of the three central characters: the hobbit Frodo Baggins, the wizard Gandalf or the ranger Aragorn. In your quest to bring the One Ring to Mordor and destroy it, you will encounter 28 types of enemies including orcs, monsters and 'boss' creatures that possess varying degrees of intelligence and behaviour. Using simple controls you can sneak and tiptoe past the Dark Riders to avoid making any sound and distract them by throwing stones. As Gandalf you can use magic spells to defeat your enemies and, as Aragorn, slash and stun your opponents with sword strokes and kicks.

The entire gameplay is based on simple quests and fighting sequences with a few

additional mini-quests. Considering the length of the book, it all feels quite truncated. Saving and loading the game is quite fast, but there doesn't appear to be an autosave feature.

The game generally looks and sounds impressive, with the soundtrack evoking the mystery and fantasy of Middle Earth and Rivendell. The environments are large and well crafted, with running water, beautiful skies and day and night cycles.

I would have expected a more faithful adaptation of the book here and unfortunately, due to the limited gameplay, I suspect that only loyal Tolkien fans will want to play it again and again. ■

Faith Wardle

→ Beard prepared: unfortunately, the game isn't quite as long as Gandalf's facial hair

Fellowship of the Ring

- Vivendi: 0118 920 9100
- Website: www.lotr.com
- Price: £34.99

System requirements

600MHz Pentium III; Windows 98/2000/Me/XP; 64MB RAM; 800MB hard disk space.

Overall rating



Rally Fusion: Race of Champions Xbox

Rally Fusion: Race of Champions

- Activision: 01753 756 100
- Website: www.activision.co.uk
- Price: £29.99

System requirements

Xbox

Overall rating



Colin McRae Rally 3 currently rules the roost as far as rally games go on the Xbox, but this is as much to do with a lack of serious competition than the brilliance of the game itself. Rallisport Challenge, the only one to come near so far, was a pretty naff attempt, rushed out to coincide with the launch of the Xbox way back in March 02. Now Activision has come up with a new contender to challenge Colin

McRae's dominance in this area in the shape of Rally Fusion: Race of Champions.

The one thing that Xbox games generally have in common is that they're visually stunning. Rally Fusion: Race of Champions, while far from ugly, doesn't quite match up to other offerings on this platform. It looks okay, but not good enough to outdo Colin McRae in this respect.

← Master race: you'll find all the big winners rallying round in this latest stab at the off-road challenge

Where it does excel is in terms of playability – the driving experience is fun and not too complicated, though it still provides a challenge for those of you who want to do more than just put your foot to the floor. You have to pass certain tests to open up new tracks and gain access to the better cars, which certainly keeps you interested.

What I most enjoyed about this game, though, was the co-driver, who really doesn't seem to want you to win. "Slow down," he kept telling me, also calling me an idiot when I hit a wall. It's like having a nagging wife for a co-driver, and what makes it worse is that he can't read the pace notes properly – I want to know when there's a hairpin bend so I've got time to slow down first rather than find out about it when it's already too late.

Although this is a good game, Colin McRae's crown is safe. Rally Fusion: Race of Champions just isn't good enough to be the best. If you enjoy rally games you'll love this as you'll need to be quite technically accomplished to do really well. The £29.99 price tag is also quite acceptable, considering it's a console game. ■

Ben Camm-Jones



Tony Hawks Pro Skater 4

PlayStation2

Publishers tend to bring out the big guns at this time of year and the Tony Hawks Pro Skater series is becoming a regular feature on teenagers' Christmas lists. It's set to be a surefire hit and, though it's essentially the same game as the previous three, developer Neversoft has implemented several changes that Tony Hawks anoraks will be drooling over.

The basic run of the Tony Hawks games has you performing stunts using all the buttons on the console. Combinations of buttons perform harder tricks and well-timed moves are rewarded with points that unlock levels.

This time the gameplay has a freeroaming feel, with much larger levels and no time limit. It gives players the chance to explore all the well-designed levels thoroughly and those who look hard enough will come across hidden mini-games, such as playing tennis.

Face animation is clearer and much more realistic, but it's still funny to see the ageing Tony Hawks drawn like a teenage boy – a bit like the picture of a youthful Queen we used to have on coins of the realm, despite the fact she was

→ Get rad, Dad: try out the latest skater stunts without inconveniencing any pedestrians

about 56 at the time. The graphics aren't pushing the PS2 to the limits but the joy of Pro Skater 4 is in the fluid body animations. These are excellently executed and, though it's not a game I'd personally spend much time on, I can understand why anyone half my age would want to learn these bodacious moves.

Tony Hawks Pro Skater 4 is one of the best skating games around. Neversoft has bundled sufficient extra goodies, such as the revamped Park Creator level editor, to give the title a new lease of life. ■



Tony Hawks Pro Skater 4

- ☐ Activision: 01753 756 100
- ☐ Website: www.activision.com
- ☐ Price: £39.99

System requirements

PlayStation2

Overall rating



Spencer Dalziel

Syberia

PC CD-ROM

Syberia

- ☐ Microids: +33 146 015 401
- ☐ Website: www.microids.com
- ☐ Price: £24.99

System requirements

500MHz Pentium II; Windows 95/98/Me/2000/SP; 128MB RAM; 800MB hard disk space.

Overall rating



Syberia has to be the strangest game I have ever played. In fact, it's more of an interactive graphic novel, which should come as no surprise given that it was developed by French graphic novelist, Benoit Soaks.

You play New York lawyer Kate Walker sent to a remote town in the French Alps to wrap up the sale of an automaton factory to a US toy manufacturer. This seemingly simple task soon escalates into an epic journey across Europe, although the plot remains fairly

humdrum throughout.

The graphics are exquisite, evoking art nouveau architecture and the period of its popularity in loving detail. This makes the mobile

phone you carry to keep in touch with friends and family a bit incongruous, but you just have to bear that.

Another feature that Syberia owes to its literary heritage is its verbosity. It centres on long and often superfluous conversations. But, beware: no matter how dull and irrelevant a chat may seem it could hold the key to the next stage of the game, so you do have to listen.

I have to say that I really didn't enjoy Syberia, as I felt that it was slow and confusing. You don't want a game to be so easy that you can just walk it, but equally there should be some logic or you just end up frustrated. After several hours of false turns I gave up and printed out a walkthrough from the web.

Some of the tasks you have to complete are so arbitrary that I don't think I ever would have worked them out for myself. It may be that if you were more in tune with the game, or cleverer than me, you wouldn't find it quite so odd or infuriating. If so, you will benefit from its sumptuous graphics and freaky-but-apt soundtrack. Hats off to you if you finish it without any help. ■

Ursula Seymour



← Underground movement: like a piece of surrealist performance art, Syberia may leave you cold