

Forthcoming attractions



↑ Board senseless: Let PS2 take you down some mountains at speed

Phew! Here at *PC Advisor* it's been one long whirlwind of socialising since last month's *Lifestyle*, which has cut deeply into our network wargaming. However, in the brief moments we've had free, we've been glued to *Civilisation 3* (see page 196 for a review).

Our editorial assistant's life has been entirely dominated by *Actualize's Rally Championship Xtreme* (page 194), which has made for some honestly exciting views over his shoulder in the last few weeks.

Paul Rincon has been scaring himself witless playing *Alien Versus Predator 2* (page 213) – the first installment was so terrifying, he refused to go any further. Much more relaxing is *Crossword Maestro* (page 213), a must for lateral thinkers.

Next month we'll have another rally title, *Rally Trophy*, and take a look at the 39-disc collection of the *National Geographic* back catalogue. More titles for children are on the way, and hopefully there'll still be time to play the Tom Clancy secret soldier game, *Rogue Spear: Black Thorn*.



Finally, Eidos will soon be bunging out a PlayStation 2 game based on the 2002 Salt Lake Winter Olympics. We had a preview play just before going to press and, though it's not a patch on the much older Winter Olympics on the original PlayStation, it's still pretty tasty. ■



↑ Retro action: the 60s-style Rally Trophy tests 30-year-old cars out around the world

← Barrel of laughs: *Rogue Spear* promises to be most entertaining

Silent Hunter II

Ever wondered what it would be like to command a U-boat deep in the Atlantic during WWII? No, me neither. For those with a penchant, the website, www.subsim.com, should satisfy most needs. Such wannabe underwater skippers – all three of them – probably can't wait to get their paws on this aqua-driven combat simulation. I wish I shared their enthusiasm.

It's not that developer Aeon Electronic Entertainment hasn't made every effort to make this game as realistic and enjoyable as possible for the initiated few. Attention to detail in this

strategy-based sim is excellent. The models and control systems are near perfect replications of WWII subs and there are varying levels of difficulty. Should you wish to enter the advanced level you'll find that the real-time weather systems affect navigation while the AI (artificial intelligence) of opposing forces is unforgiving in the heat of battle. The icons at the bottom of the screen are easy to follow and players are prompted by a comedy German voiceover to keep in line with their missions.

Except for the ham German accent, *Silent Hunter II* is unremittingly realistic – and therein lies the problem. You can only do so much in a submerged hulk stalking various naval forces. It's probably about as good as a submarine simulation can get, but then, it's never going to be the last word in sim excitement. ■

Spencer Dalziel



← Reality bites: is submarine warfare actually something you want to experience?

Silent Hunter II

System requirements: 266MHz Pentium II; Windows 95/98/Me; 64MB RAM; 650MB hard disk space.

Ubi Soft: 01932 838 230

Website: www.silenthunterii.com

Price: £29.99

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

Harry Potter

My opinion of this game, good or bad, will fall on deaf ears as every child under 12 (and probably quite a few above that age) already owns a copy and, if they don't, they're probably suing Father Christmas for failure to deliver.

JK Rowling's poor little magic boy phenomenon has obtained almost blanket coverage worldwide. Consequently, the opening and character introduction of the game are kept to a minimum. This means the game is quicker to start, but could also leave less experienced Potter fans somewhat at a loss.

Your role, as Harry, is to save the Philosopher's stone hidden within Hogwarts School of Wizards and Wizardry from a certain 'evil' teacher. If you haven't read the book then you will have to work out who the thief is in your quest to defend the stone.

You will need to cast spells throughout to open doors, move blocks and reveal hidden passages. But be careful because all is not what it seems within the magical school, with moving staircases, bridges and doors you may get a little lost. Throughout the game there are hundreds of Bertie Botts beans, which you will need to collect during the first level. Don't eat them though, they may come in useful later.

Look, no hands

In the first phase of the game you don't really get to do much. It pretty much plays itself and occasionally allows you the

→ Where ever you may wand-er: Potter brews up magic to help him on his way



privilege of running a few paces to follow one of the characters. But by the time you reach the third level you start interacting on a set that could best be described as *Tomb Raider* in Wonderland.

Thereafter the game can require a fair bit of skill and patience and you can find yourself yelling at the little fellow as he plummets from a platform for the fifth time.

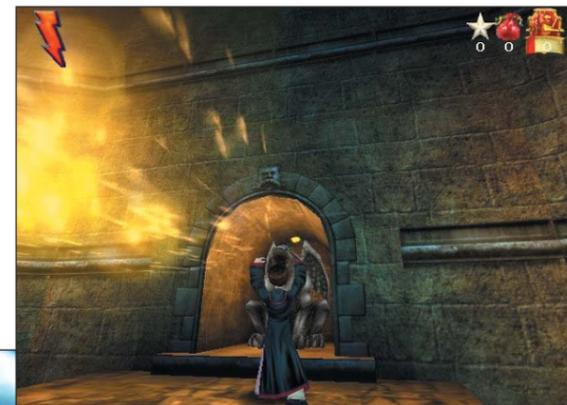
Timed travel

The long stretches of non-interaction, where you cannot control the game, may mean some children will lose concentration. Generally the challenges are good but some are far more complex than others and may need a little adult help. The

controls are kept as easy as possible, but you will need a keyboard and mouse to cast spells and perform certain movements, which could be a little complicated for small fingers.

The game is really good, there's no denying this, but it does feel a little rushed – perhaps to coincide with the launch of the film? The graphics aren't as clear as they could have been and the storyline somehow feels as though it's missing something. But, all in all, it's a magical journey that all children, large and small, will love. ■

Wendy Brewer



↑ Bright spark: help Harry outwit a statue



← Ring of fire: Harry burns through some holes during Quidditch practice

Harry Potter

System requirements: 266MHz Pentium II; Windows 95/98/2000/Me/XP; 32MB RAM; 400MB hard disk space.

Electronics Boutique: 0870 750 2744

Website: www.eagames.ea.com

Price: £27.99

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

Rally Championship Xtreme

don't wish to sound socially irresponsible, but driving fast is good fun, provided it is done in the safety of your own home on your PC.

Rally Championship Xtreme, a game so extreme it's not even spelt correctly, breaks all the rules about driving, and the only way you're going to be any good at it, is by doing the same. Forget everything your driving instructor told you, and don't worry about the mirrors and signals – just manoeuvre, and be quick about it.

Rocky road to success

And there's more. As if trying to keep an incredibly fast and nervous car on a narrow and bumpy track wasn't hard enough, you'll have to listen carefully to the seemingly meaningless tosh your co-driver shouts at you if you want to know what's around the next corner.

But unless you have mastered the art of keeping these cars under control, the pace notes are going to be about as much help to you as a hot cup of coffee between your knees. Then again, at least you have someone to shout at when you barrel roll your vehicle into a loch (even if it isn't their fault as they gave you plenty of warning about the approaching hairpin bend).

Rally Championship Xtreme certainly isn't for learner drivers. It took me longer than an elephant's gestation period to get through the first rally, which is as it should be. If you lose patience easily with a game then you might find this a little frustrating, but this game can be rewarding if you persevere. Watching the action replays is fun, although I'd prefer it if you could choose the camera angle for yourself. You get all sorts of random shots, which will vary between great bumper-cam

↓ Sharp left in 20 miles time: the loneliness of the long-distance diver



← Soft top cold shoulder: travel the world and find new slippery surfaces

→ How green is my valet: your paintwork may suffer on some of the courses

footage to pointless shots of the driver driving and the co-driver staring at his notes, looking disturbingly like a corpse strapped into the passenger seat.

Hide your headlights under a bushel

You can also play this game over a LAN (local area network) or even on the internet, but I personally wouldn't dream of trying to compete against anyone on the web for fear of being shown up by someone half my age who has far too much time on their hands to practice their handbrake turns and Scandinavian flicks. Unlike some of the other rally games on the market, this game only gives you the option to drive the stages against the clock like a real rally, it's not for you if you want bumper to bumper action.

Great bodywork

Crashes can be pretty spectacular and the realistic car damage gives this game an edge over many other games in this genre. There are some nice touches in Rally Championship Xtreme too – the backgrounds are superbly detailed and, if you have time to look at the sky or if you

accidentally point your car in that direction, you might notice a hang glider or two as well. If you want to pretend to be Richard Burns you will have a job finding a game you'll enjoy more than this one. ■

Ben Camm-Jones

Rally Championship Xtreme

System requirements: 450MHz Pentium II; Windows 98/2000/Me; 64MB RAM; 645MB hard disk space.

Actualize: 01480 357 184

Website: www.rallychampionshipxtreme.com

Price: £25.99



Civilisation 3

Years ago, in a time before *PC Advisor*, people did not have computer games. We pity these people now, and rightly so: it's only their place in history that allows them to get away with this terrible legacy. We can compare ourselves with them, the Romans, the Ancient Greeks and the other great human societies and think how wonderful our lives are now. Okay, perhaps I've been playing a little too much *Civilisation 3*, but it's an easy trap to fall in to.

Act hard to follow

If you're a Civ devotee, you'll have the game already. If you're not, or you used to play *Civilisation* once upon a time and have forgotten how good it is, you should buy this game now.

It's a turn-based God game that looks like a real-time strategy game. In recent years there have been some paltry, pathetic excuses for sequels to the original all-conquering king of games, *Civilisation 2 – Call to Power*. These shall live forever in the annals of gaming as hubristic attempts at greatness. Alpha Centauri was good, but it didn't have the looks and ultimately felt a bit pointless. Who wants to rule over a barren rock whose strange topography is inhabited by bizarre mind-worms? Not us. We want this world, and we want it now.

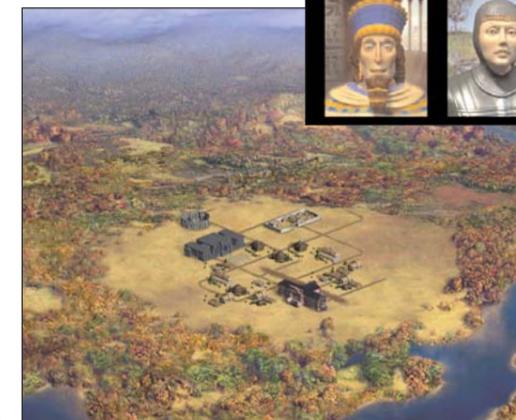
Gift from the gods

Civ3 is different. It's almost exactly what players of Civ2 had asked for – in essence the same game with new elements, improvements and a few fundamental building blocks totally overhauled.

Two main elements have been ported almost directly from Alpha Centauri. First, you play against a host of computer opponents who have discrete cultural characteristics. Different historical nationalities have different outlooks – scientific and

→ Rogue's gallery: as choices of earthly representatives go, you could do worse

↓ Heaven is a place on earth: create the perfect civilisation, see how far it gets you



expansionist, for example, or religious and militaristic. They'll treat you differently and react accordingly to your breaking treaties with them... which of course is great fun, as long as you have a bigger stick than they do.

The second is the idea of a national border. This is

linked to a major change in Civ – the notion of your 'culture'. For example, you get more culture by erecting buildings and wonders, and your borders extend beyond the squares in the world map. This means that you can 'own' land that you haven't yet built on – something radically different to Civ2. This also means that, if a nearby city belongs to a civilisation that isn't as cultured as yours, there's a chance it will join your civilisation.

Deceit will out

As has always been the case on the world stage, there's lots of room for scheming and duplicity. Chatting with people you're later going to stab in the back while manoeuvring troops round their borders, planting nuke-filled submarines off their coasts and doing realpolitik deals with your enemies is, let's face it, good fun.

There are some drawbacks, of course. Use of bombers is just not as fun as it was, while automating workers is still as infuriating. Sometimes one just cannot be as unreasonable with other world leaders as one might like. Also you must download several new patches because some bugs are still there.

But, basically, this game is the business. *Civilisation 2* was, and I'll fight anyone who says otherwise, the best game in the world. Until they made this one. ■

Rupert Collins-White

← King of the hill: all gods have to start somewhere

Civilisation 3

System requirements: 300MHz Pentium; Windows 95/98/2000/Me; 32MB RAM; 100MB hard disk space.

Infogrames: 020 8222 9700

Website: www.infogrames.com

Price: £25-30 depending on stockist



→ Turn to page 213 to continue...

Aliens Versus Predator 2



Though they've yet to meet on the big screen, the subjects of the Alien and Predator franchises make perfect bedfellows in the gaming world. They might not share the same taste in clothes, but they both love chasing sissy-boy earthlings down long, poorly lit corridors filled with steam.

Like its predecessor, this sequel is a first-person shooter which provides you with the option of playing as a marine, a predator or an alien – each with its own style and weapons.

We found playing as an Alien by far the most satisfying. You can scuttle up walls and hang upside down from the ceiling, ready to pounce on petrified military recruits headed your way.



The Predator has the most impressive array of weaponry and tools available, sporting such exotic and deadly paraphernalia as plasmacasters, wrist blades, a net gun and a cloaking device. If you choose to play as a marine, you'll have to accept that you're at the bottom of the food chain.

While most games like this concentrate on satisfying your bloodlust, the gameplay here is complex and challenging, ensuring that your grey matter is tested as well as your trigger finger. The maps are complex to navigate and the game leaves some crucial details – like how to escape from sealed rooms – for you to figure out for yourself. However, battle sequences are blood-soaked and frenetic enough to please the most bug-eyed of action gamers.

If you have the patience to master the weaponry and the challenging gameplay, this game will keep you coming back for more. ■

Paul Rincon

← Friend or foe: become a good judge of character, quickly

Aliens Versus Predator 2

System requirements: 450MHz Pentium III; Windows 98/2000/Me; 128MB RAM; 750MB hard disk space.

Sierra: 01268 531 245

Website: www.sierra-online.co.uk

Price: £34.99

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

Crossword Maestro

Crossword Maestro is a natty little puzzle compiler from the maker of the renowned word generator Anagram Genius (www.genius2000.com/ag.html). I use the word 'little' loosely because its £65 price tag is no frivolity, effectively marking out Maestro as a program for serious crossword addicts.

If you are a passionate and not too poor crossworder, you might find Maestro worth the money. There are 60 puzzles on

the CD-ROM for you to solve, with more available for download from the Genius 2000 website. Alternatively, you can use the software to create grids from scratch – either compile your own grid and clues or simply recreate someone else's grid onscreen to get some help solving it.

The twin-dialog-box interface is simple, and there's a quick reference help file to explain things such as choosing different grid styles and how to define multiword or hyphenated clues.

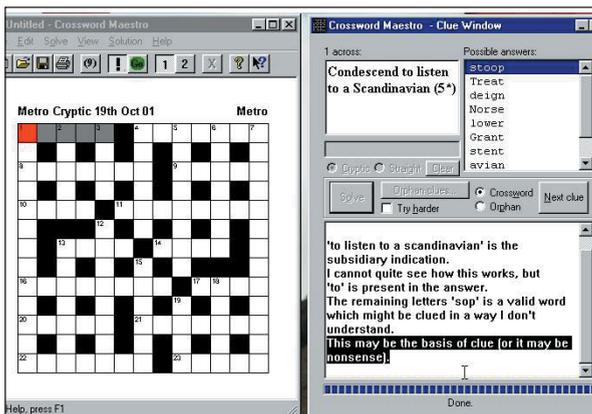
Clicking the Solve button generates a list of possible answers, though you need more than a passing knowledge of cryptic crosswords to have a hope of choosing the right word.

← Blank look: Maestro is good, but can't always solve your problems

The AI (artificial intelligence) engine rates answers in terms of its confidence of their accuracy. However, solutions with reasoning such as "This may be the basis of the clue (or it may be nonsense)" aren't exactly convincing. And remember, the right answer doesn't always get the highest confidence percentage.

While Crossword Maestro is fun, and can be very useful, it's no substitute for the real thing (you). We advise you to start with the trial on our cover CD before parting with your cash. ■

Emma Northam



Crossword Maestro

System requirements: Pentium PC; Windows 95/98; 16MB RAM; 5MB hard disk space.

Genius 2000: 0870 842 2000

Website: www.genius2000.com

Price: £64.95

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