lifestyle

Forthcoming attractions

We're now well into spring and the literary daffs are springing up in *Lifestyle.* We are looking forward to late March when Microsoft's Xbox is due to ship in the UK.

For a review (another exclusive) of the Xbox, see page 59, but for now content yourself with the knowledge that birthdays this year will involve at least a passing pleading reference to the Xbox. If you do get an Xbox, get Halo to play on it – it's awesome, and *Lifestyle* lost whole days and nights playing it.

If it's thrills and spills you want, then look out for an upcoming review of The Ultimate Ride, the new rollercoaster construction game from Imagineering. You'll be able to design and build a coaster from scratch and then ride it again and again. Once you have completed your track, you can share it either by email or by uploading it on the the game's site, where you will also be able to download other coasters that you can ride.

There are plenty of different environments and themes to keep you

→↓ Loopy loop: if you love the rollercoaster at the fairground then you'll love The Ultimate Ride

interested, so if you can't stand the endless queues of excitable kids and even more excitable parents you always encounter at amusement parks then keep an eye out for the review.

The much-hyped cartoon Monsters Inc has been a huge hit in the USA and by the

time you read this it should have cut a swathe through British wallets. You can extend this into your home if you wish by playing one of Disney's fabulous Monsters Inc games.

Perhaps the best is Scare Island – an adventure role-playing game, suitable for all ages. As the name suggests it's your role to scare as many robotic children as you can. Your aim is to become a 'top scarer' with Mosters Inc Scare Island promises to have you in stitches. Watch out for it. ■

Historic Rally Trophy

When it's good (on a high-end PC) Historic Rally Trophy is stunning. When it's running on an average PC the graphics are blocky, the action jerky and the physics of the cars shocking.

But we can forgive Historic Rally Trophy for that because if I have to drive another Subaru Impreza, painted up like an Essex girl on the pull, I'll cry. Instead, in Rally Trophy you get the chance to drive such classics as the Ford Lotus Cortina, Mini Cooper (the proper Morris one, not some recycled U-boat powered by profits and advertising), Escort Mark I RS2000 and a Volvo Amazon – probably the last vehicle that Volvo made that looked like a car not a wardrobe on wheels. Hence the 'Historic' epithet.

→ Burn baby: turn those wheels in the wild of Kenya

four-wheel drive, active suspension, electronic fuel injection, ABS brakes

and tyres that grip like rigor mortis. They have back-ends that want to go first and hold the road like a sieve holds water.

Two points to note. Don't play it without a proper game controller: driving wheel, joystick or gamepad – yes; keyboard – no. And don't expect the full glory unless you have a weather-modelling-grade PC. At one point, on my modest 550MHz Pentium III with 128MB of memory and 8MB graphics card, the screen froze just as I became airborne in the Cortina. Next thing, the sky was where the ground should be and the co-driver was shouting 'I don't call this rally driving.' I told him to get out and walk. He still crossed the finish line before me. ■

Rally Trophy isn't about knocking another four-tenths of a second off your latest circuit time. It's about survival. Will the car get round in one piece? Cars from the 60s lacked such refinements as

Andrew Charlesworth

Historic Rally Trophy										
System requirements: 300MHz Pentium, Windows 95/98/2000/Me/XP/NT; 64MB RAM; 600MB hard disk space; minimum 32MB graphics card.										
Jo Wood Productions: 0208 901 7300										
Website: www.jowood.com										
Price: £29.99										
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall rating						7				

Jack Orlando: A Cinematic Adventure, Director's Cut

Though he was once a respected private eye, the end of prohibition turned our hero Jack Orlando into a scruffy, drunken bum with no future and prime suspect in a murder case. Fortunately, a sympathetic chief detective gives Jack 48 hours to gather the evidence and track down the real killer to prove his innocence. This is where you take control of his destiny.

Set in 1933 in America, this highly atmospheric and entertaining old-style graphic adventure game took 80 artists and animators two years to make. The care and attention shows. Over the five episodes in the story there are nearly 100 interesting characters and over 200 locations – from casinos to waterfront bars and fancy hotels. Thousands of lines of synchronised dialogue were recorded by professional actors and the soundtrack, composed by Harold Faltermeyer of *Top Gun* and *Beverley Hills Cop* fame, is in digital stereo.

↑ Mac world: standing in unlit corridors wearing a brown mac is all in a day's work

← Show me the money: Jack goes shopping for upholstery

Action adventure

Jack Orlando is a standard point-and-click adventure: movement is performed with the left mouse button, actions with the right. You can walk, talk, examine, pick up, punch and shoot, all with the mouse. The game has two levels – easy for beginners and normal for experienced adventurers.

Initially, I tried the normal version and seemed to progress through the first stages without difficulty, solving the first riddle with the help of the manual. Jack is arrested and thrown into jail but with the innovative combination of a spoon and his fists he is released from police custody and returned to his apartment – this is where the easier version of the game begins.

Naturally, he hasn't got the key to his flat and is forced to seek help next door. Neighbour Alice Stone suggests he takes a shower before she lets him in. I began to wonder whether I needed to search for some deodorant, but quickly worked out that his key was under his doormat allowing him to take a shower and pick up any necessary objects.

However, solving the riddle was not so easy and, after being punched, kicked and finally and killed within 30 minutes of starting the game, I was glad of the quick-save option.

Invariably, the objects that will be the most use to you are the oddest ones. Within the first few stages of the game, I'd managed to collect an interesting assortment of 'useful' items including an apple core, an empty beer can, an oil can and a broom – all of which were placed inside Jack's tardis-like trench coat.

If you are a budding or closet detective, this game will certainly appeal. The attention to detail really draws you into the gripping plot with compelling gameplay. ■

Faith Wardle

↓ Bullet points: Jack's mac has bottomless pockets, as you'll need to collect all sorts of rubbish to help you solve the mystery

Riddle ridicule

Although the manual also helps you through this next stage, I found all the objects and information I needed without any help.

Jack Orlando: A Cinematic Adventure										
System requirements: 200MHz processor; Windows 95/98/Me/2000; 32MB RAM; 200MB hard disk space.										
Jo Wood Productions: 020 8901 7300										
Website: www.jowood.com										
Price: £19.99										
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall rating							8			

Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2002 (DVD edition); Encyclopaedia Britannica 2002; Hutchinson Encyclopedia 2002

As 2002 gets into its stride we thought we'd take a look at the latest updates to three of the main electronic encyclopedias – Microsoft's Encarta, Encyclopaedia Britannica and Hutchinson Encyclopedia. So just what do disc-based references offer, aside from the obvious advantage of saving you the acres of shelf space you'd have to devote to the many tomes they replace?

If you start at the top of the market with Encarta and Britannica 2002 then you get a whole range of extras that make expanding your knowledge a pleasure.

Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2002

Microsoft has deployed all its knowledge of developing software to come up with a truly outstanding product in Encarta. The version we looked at comes on a DVD-ROM, which means all the information has

→ Encarta's content is rich, with plenty of images, multimedia and text to keep things interesting and informative

been squeezed on to a single disc. If you have enough space you can install everything on to your hard drive, but it will eat up a couple of gigabytes of space. Alternatively you can take a slight performance hit and leave most of it on the DVD, but that does mean you'll have to have the disc to hand when you want to use the encyclopedia.

But it's not the convenience of this method that impressed us most about Encarta. We were won over by the intelligent layout of all the content, and the sheer quality of what it had to offer. To tempt today's students away from the internet, Encarta has its work cut out to justify its price tag, but it has plenty of neat touches that are sure to appeal.

One feature that made us particularly jealous was the Researcher, which will really take the pain out of homework – and certainly beats the hours we had to spend in the library. It allows you to create a project, drag and drop all the information you want to include, and then at the click of a button it will collate it all into a coherent text or HTML report, complete with full listings of source material and a bibliography.
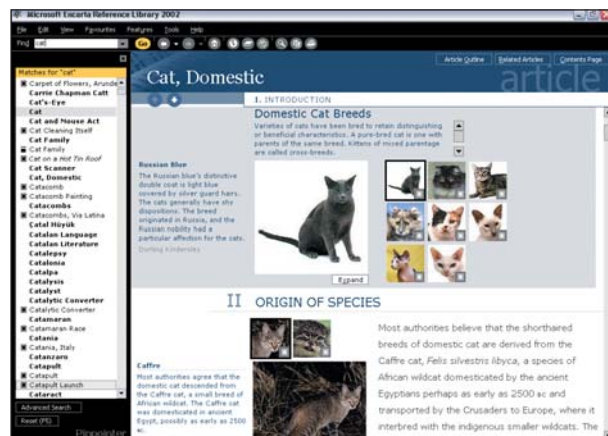
The interface owes much to Internet Explorer – you navigate with back and forward buttons and you can build up a favourites menu. It will allow you to pull down a whole range of complementary information from specially selected websites, and you can benefit from the free update service until 31 October.
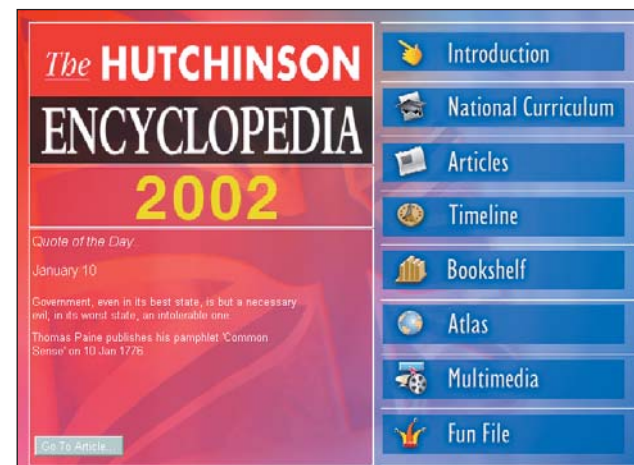
Encyclopaedia Britannica

Encyclopaedia Britannica is a familiar name and its CD comes closest to Encarta in quality. It has a fresh clear interface, but we didn't find it quite as intuitive as its rival. But that's not to say it doesn't offer some innovative features, such as the Knowledge Navigator, which allows you to search around a topic, drilling down until you find something to interest you. However, we didn't like the way the Navigator window was left in front obscuring the article you'd chosen to read.

Britannica also offers a similar feature called Organizer, but we found this tricky to use, making it much harder to pull together content into a slick report. There is a DVD version of this package which costs the same as Encarta, but we looked at the CD version
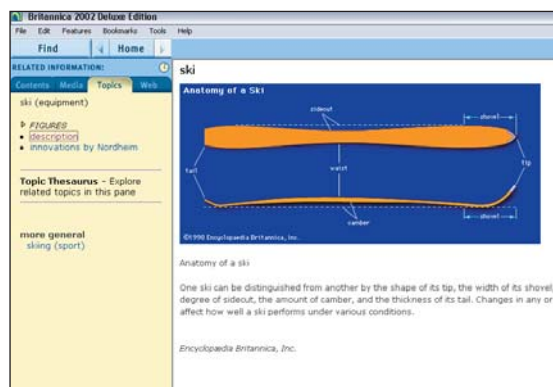
← Click on an image in Encyclopedia Britannica and the application automatically magnifies it so you can get a better look

Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2002

System requirements: 200MHz processor; Windows 98/2000/Me/XP; 64MB RAM; 330MB hard disk space; DVD-ROM drive.

Microsoft: 0870 601 0100
Website: www.microsoft.com/uk/encarta/
Price: £69.99

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall rating									**9**	

Encyclopaedia Britannica 2002

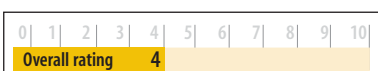**System requirements:** 166MHz processor; Windows 95/98/2000/NT 4.0/Me/XP; 96MB RAM; 140MB hard disk space.

Britannia: 020 7500 7800
Website: www.britannica.co.uk
Price: £49.99

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall rating						**7**				

Hutchinson Encyclopedia 2002

System requirements: Pentium processor; Windows 95/98/2000/Me/NT; 16MB RAM; 20MB hard disk space.

Focus Multimedia: 01889 570 156
Website: www.focusmm.co.uk
Price: £19.99

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall rating			**4**							

which comes on three discs, although again you can install most of the content on to your hard drive.

Hutchinson Encyclopedia 2002

The final contender for encyclopedia of the year was from Hutchinson, but it's in a different league from our first two candidates. Priced at a penny under £20, this is definitely the budget option, and it shows. It can only be displayed full screen at a fuzzy resolution of 800x600 and content is very sparse; many topics attract just a couple of lines of explanation. You also have to have the disc to use this tool, as you cannot install content on to your hard drive.

There is the option to link to selected websites, but we couldn't get this to work on our review copy, as each time we went online the site stopped responding. That said, Hutchinson Encyclopedia is a cheap option, and it does have a section devoted to the National Curriculum, which makes it handy for those with school-age children. ■

Ursula Tolaini

↑ The Hutchinson home page gives you access to the entire encyclopedia's content, plus historical and general knowledge information pertinent to the day you access it

National Geographic Trivia Trek 2002

To my mother's lasting disappointment, my first form geography teacher was so unpleasant that I dropped the subject as soon as I could. Perhaps I would have shared her enthusiasm for geography if, instead of the aptly named Mr Hyde, I had been treated to a weekly double lesson from Trivia Trek. This single or multiplayer world geography quiz is the nearest thing to making learning fun for children, and it certainly won't give you lines for not having your tie straight.

The game takes the form of an animated gameshow hosted by an irreverent honey bee, Buzz, and the disembodied voice of a mildy obsessed academic, Reginald, who finds "nothing quite so satisfying as a correctly answered geography question". So boundless is the quizmaster's enthusiasm for his subject, he can't help but supply an extra titbit of information about each question. In this way, players absorb a generous

→ Buzzin' to answer: Reginald's assistant is nothing if not enthusiastic

← Choose your weapon: will you be Kung-fu Stickman or Trout Mummy?

helping of knowledge almost without realising it and enjoy themselves at the same time.

Each round consists of 10 or 20 multiple-choice questions, with a handful of extra challenges that pop up along the way. These include picture rounds, odd-one-out and true-or-false questions, and keep the quiz varied enough to maintain interest. However, there's only one question per round in each of these extra challenges, so older players may feel a bit cheated.

One other small problem is that the game is obviously aimed at American children, and this is reflected in the

knowledge base of the questions. Thus contestants can be expected to know which mid-western states produce the most alfalfa, and be challenged by posers such as, "England, Scotland and Wales are all located on which island?"

But this is no great downfall, and the game is, in Reginald's words, "world-class geography excitement". The questions are, for the most part, challenging and the entertaining format will reach out to any child, get them interested in the subject and teach them a few things along the way. And, unlike Mr Hyde, it almost certainly won't make them cry. ■

Simon Easterman

National Geographic Trivia Trek 2002

System requirements: 266MHz processor; Windows 95/98/2000/Me; 32MB RAM; 100MB hard disk space.

Encore: 001 310 768 1800
Website: www.encoresoftware.com
Price: £19.99

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall rating					**6**					

Secret Agent Barbie

Hankies at the ready, this is a sad story. When I was five, I desperately wanted a Barbie, but my parents couldn't afford one (are those violins I hear?). In the end, I had to make do with a cheap fake from the corner shop.

Of course, this scarred me for life. It also started my obsession with everything related to the fantastic, plastic, blonde bombshell, including this game in which our heroine's hush-hush mission is to stop the creation of a special suit that renders the wearer invisible. Teresa is the friend who has called in the team to help catch the thief who has stolen some of her fashions made of the top-secret fabric.

Babs and her intrepid spy team travel the world in their secret intelligence jumbo jet, taking in five top couture locations including New York, Paris and Tokyo. To complete their action-packed mini-missions, Barbie and her entourage must interact with various characters to help decode clues and use secret agent gadgets to solve puzzles.

True to Barbie's politically correct pink world, agent Christie pilots the plane while Barbie's long-term boyfriend Ken is kept well and truly in his place as co-pilot. With the flying taken care of, Barbie can sneak off to the onboard VR Training Centre to hone her secret agent skills.

Cybersleuth Becky can be summoned at any point with the Help button to coach Barbie or assist with breaking codes and analysing data. She also offers overviews of all the hi-tech gadgets and provides general mission support throughout the game.

A Barbie girl in a Barbie world

Among Barbie's arsenal of special secret agent hi-tech gadgets is a variety of cosmetic weapons, including a compact from which she blows pink powder in to the faces of guards so she can slip past undetected, a lipstick recorder for taping private conversations and a perfume bottle for tracking people by scent.

Pink-vision glasses give x-ray sight for solving puzzles, and a variety of other gizmos, from a camera to a PDA (personal digital assistant), can be used to collect clues and play games.

↑ Blonde ambition: this is no time for cookery, there's some important fabric to find
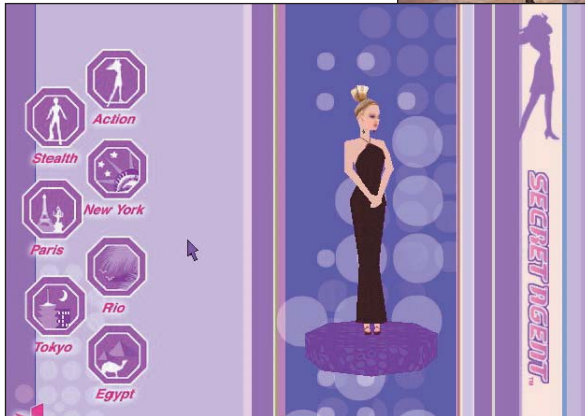
← Haughty couture: the international girl of mystery has to look her best in the evening

Dressed to kill

My favourite gadget, however, is a remote-control robot spy-puppy that distracts guards and gets into small places where even super-waif Barbie can't fit. You can also choose from a variety of different outfits for each mission, although the options are a little disappointing.

There are three activity modes – Adventure, Stealth and Action – each combining different outfits with special moves enabling Barbie to run, jump, tumble and even blend into the environment as you guide her on each adventure. Barbie is easily moved around onscreen by using the arrow keys, with the spacebar enabling the special moves.

At the end of her mission, Barbie performs a daredevil skydive from her customised jet to her final destination: the perfect ending to a very enjoyable adventure with the queen of pink and her band of manicured, coiffured friends. Ideal for the Barbie-fixated, whether five or 35 years old. ■

Faith Wardle

↓ Airheadset: from mission central, Barbie prepares to save the world

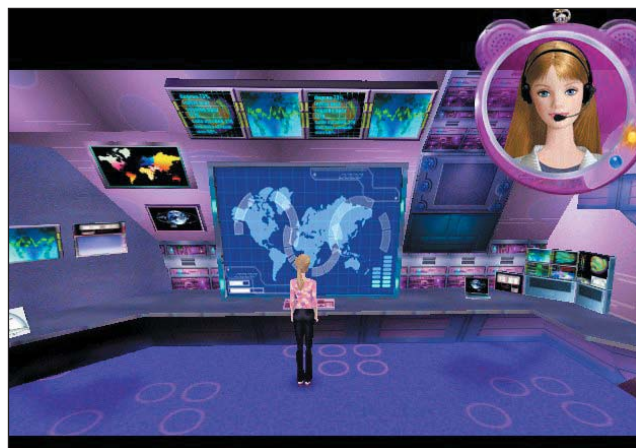| Secret Agent Barbie											
System requirements: 233MHz Pentium II; Windows 95/98/Me; 32MB RAM; 150MB hard disk space.											
Vivendi: 0118 920 9100											
Website: www.vivendi-universal-interactive.co.uk											
Price: £19.99											
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Overall rating							7				

The Weakest Link

Given the enormous success of *The Weakest Link*, it's little surprise to find the Beeb cashing in on viewers' predilections for watching a leather-clad dominatrix humiliate contestants. So, given that we all appear to enjoy a bit of verbal abuse, just how well does Ms Robinson deliver her insults on CD-ROM?

First impressions are less than favourable: I had to install the game on three different high-specification PCs before getting the video footage to run smoothly. Further frustrations involved the default game settings. There seemed to be no volume control and, to avoid bleeding eardrums, you need to sort this before starting to play. Also, to see your rivals you must remember to go into the Bend the Rules menu, scroll up and select Computer Answers Shown.

You can play against up to six computer-controlled contestants; multiplayer mode lets you choose more than one human-controlled player, so you can pit your wits against your friends. They'll have to crowd around your PC, though, as there doesn't seem to be any support for playing over a network.

The Weakest Link has its flaws, but it is at least a realistic recreation of the TV gameshow and is infinitely more fun than the spin-off from *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* Its best feature is a generous 100,000-strong cache of questions. Let's face it: we're all resigned to never hearing a good word from Anne Robinson, but at least you can be assured a decent general knowledge challenge while you endure hours of abuse and humiliation at her hands. ■

Rosemary Haworth

↑ On the chain gang: our Anne is a stern taskmaster

The Weakest Link											
System requirements: 200MHz Pentium; Windows 95/98/2000/Me; 32MB RAM; 130MB hard disk space.											
Amazon: 0800 279 6620											
Website: www.activision.com											
Price: £18.99											
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Overall rating							7				

Pingu & Friends

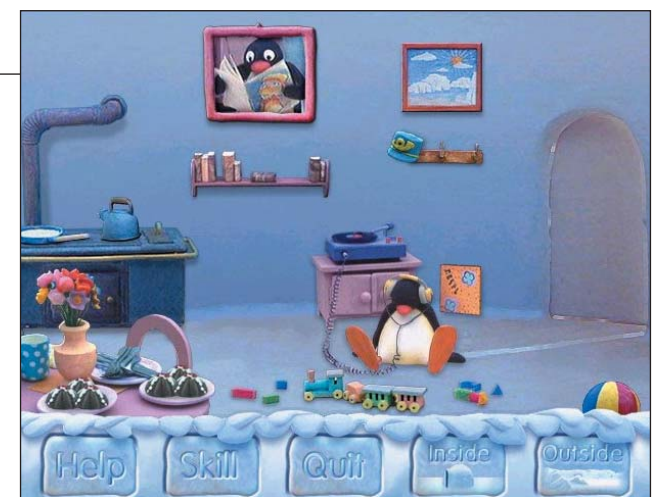**I** love Pingu. The way he spoke in that completely unintelligible manner endeared him to me, especially when he got shirty. I always imagined him swearing his socks off in Penguin. The neat counterpoint provided by the dulcet narrative tones of Felicity Kendall made the series a solid classic. Softkey's new release faithfully reproduces all these elements in a series of 10 games and activities for three- to six-year-olds.

Once I'd installed the disc, my five-year-old was away without any need of further assistance. The interface is extremely clear and Felicity has a way of asking you to do things that makes you happy to oblige.

We put the characters through their paces in a series of indoor and outdoor situations. Indoors we get pancake making, cake counting and drawing, while outside we can go bowling, fishing, skating, snowballing and much more.

The emphasis is on fun more than learning, but our various adventures are nonetheless loosely based around science, geography, maths, language skills and creative learning and at one point or another they exercise numeracy, literacy and co-ordination. Also, there are three different skill levels.

My five-year-old loved it while it lasted. The graphics and sound are excellent, and it is an exact replica of the animation style used in the TV series. Actually, it's this overall look and feel that makes Pingu & Friends such good fun, as the games themselves are all pretty ordinary (except the snowball fight, which is extremely satisfying). However, having played it once, even though it takes a few hours, my five-year-old feels she's been there, done that and is unlikely to return. ■

David Fernando

→ Chilling out: Pingu relaxes at home

Pingu & Friends											
System requirements: 133MHz Pentium; Windows 95/98/Me; 64MB RAM; 2.7MB hard disk space.											
Amazon: 0800 279 6620											
Website: www.amazon.co.uk											
Price: £9.99											
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Overall rating							7				