Forthcoming attractions

We've got some tasty previews for you this month, in the shape of Sudden Strike II and Divine Divinity. Emma Stroud, our latest team addition, had a look at Divine Divinity, an RTS (real-time strategy) that looks like an RPG (role-playing game) – we throw 'em in at the deep end here at *PC Advisor*. Sudden Strike II is a top-down RTS that looks like an RTS but is actually more like an RPG. Take your pick.

But forget all those acronyms because we don't need them. What we do need is Dungeon Siege (page 243), which has so deeply affected Ursula Seymour that Lifestyle is worried for her sanity – well, slightly more than we were before, anyway.

Simon Easterman normally sits on the subs' desk beetling away on one of those strange little Macs, but he came down from on high recently to have a look at the trucking business sim-cum-driving game King of the Road (page 246).

Of course, by the time you read this the World Cup will be over, but over those long, boring summer months when there's no footie you can always bathe yourself in monitor backwash in a darkened room, pretending to be our man Sven with 2002 FIFA World Cup (page 249).

Life's a game

By the time this magazine plops on the kitchen table the Game On exhibition at the Barbican in London will be well under way. You may have heard of this, either through the press or reports received from your media-savvy children. Whichever it is,

→ Finger pangs: Pong was one of the first computer-based wastes of time

↘ High-spec machines: Atari and Sinclair brought gaming into the home

Game On is worth a punt as long as you don't mind the generous outlay the tickets involve. It's worth remembering that you can get two kids in for less than one adult, so there's always the option of dropping the little tykes off for a couple of hours of virtual mayhem while you nip down the pub.

Lucian King, Game On's curator, has been in the industry for years and has assembled a range of machines and software from as far back as the heady days of the very first computer game, Spacewar. The exhibition journeys from the PDP-1, via classics such as Atari's Pong console, the Nintendos and Segas of 1984 through to the very latest systems, such as Sony's PS2, Microsoft's Xbox and Nintendo's GameCube.

But this isn't just about playing around. A major component of the exhibition is to find out and expand on what games have contributed to popular culture and vice versa, and where they'll go in the future.

In the screening room at the exhibition there'll be showings of classic sci-fi movies such as *The Matrix, Tron* and *Existenz* – a welcome excuse to sit down when you tire of marshalling the wee ones round the

endless course of bleeping, flashing home entertainment paraphernalia. Of course there is some brilliant stuff that Lucian King, Game On's curator, has left out or under-represented in our opinion, such as Sid Meier's Civilisation series (criminally lacking in show-space).

There's also a few things that he has picked to laud as truly awesome and world-changing that we think falls some way short of breathtaking, such as Grand Theft Auto 3. Its inclusion surely has nothing to do with King's employment by the game's publisher.

Nonetheless, it's a first and we think games deserve this level of attention – after all, they're bringing up our children more than TV did for us. ■

←→ The console-ation of home entertainment: whatever happened to knitting and playing board games

PREVIEW Sudden Strike II

Anyone who regularly reads our reviews will know that we like a good war game – what could be more fun than to while away a few hours blowing your enemies to kingdom come? So we were looking forward to trying out Sudden Strike II, the latest incarnation of CDV's World War II RTS (real-time strategy) title.

A lot of thought has gone into the game and its unique selling point is the historical accuracy. Soldiers fight with weapons actually used during WWII and in formations used by the nations in question. Your enemy units react to your attacks in the same way as they would in real life, so if you shoot out the driver of a tank, it becomes a stationary cannon.

There are five missions and four levels of difficulty, which the developer claims change the nature of the game. At the easy level it's all good, clean, waste-your-enemy-with-lots-of-bombs-and-guns fun, but take it up a notch and you need to use complex tactical skills to win the day.

The problem we found was that even on the easy level controlling your troops is a tricky business. When you kick off a mission there is no option to choose the troops you take and, once you start playing, the controls aren't that intuitive

↑ Life's a beach: get some realistic battle action as you unleash your forces on the good people of the Far East

– getting your forces to move *en masse* is a challenge in itself.

If you want to put in the time getting to know the game, or if you are already a fan, Sudden Strike II's realistic touches and detailed graphics will prove addictive. But an RTS novice should go for the easier Mech Commander or even Cossacks. ■

Ursula Seymour

Sudden Strike II

System requirements: 300MHz Pentium II; Windows 95/98/2000/Me/NT 4.0/XP; 64MB RAM; 200MB hard disk space; Direct X 7 or higher; 3D 8MB video card.

CDV: www.suddenstrike2.de/english/index1.htm
Price: £34.99

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

PREVIEW Divine Divinity

The plot of Divine Divinity will come as no surprise to anyone who has seen *Lord of the Rings* recently, and certainly if you enjoyed the film you'll be glad of a chance to spend some time in this fantasy world. The ingredients of this easily recognisable formula include a Lord of Chaos, whose evil forces threaten to overcome the land, and a magical sword which has the power to seduce its guardian to the dark side.

Your journey takes you through castles, forests, swamps and dungeons and, as divine saviour, it is your duty to purge the land of monsters and restore peace.

You control one of six main characters who talk, fight and have the power to recruit other creatures. For example, you may wish to enlist the help of the dwarves, who are traders and crafters of useful weapons and gems. Initially you choose how you will develop your character and whether to follow the path of the warrior, mage or survivor. Each category possesses different skills which you can use to your advantage – survivor skills, for example, teach you things like how to set traps for your enemies and get past guards.

There are some formidable enemies to outwit along the way, including the ferocious Black Knights who, in true Darth Vader style, have sold their souls to the dark side and are in the thrall of the Black Zombie. If you meet the Black Zombie

↑ Bored of the Rings: sell your soul to the Black Zombie for a bit of light relief

himself, beware – he is equipped with lethal iron thorns and a particularly nasty poison cloud which transforms the enemy into a deadly toxic vapour.

Divine Divinity combines all the elements of an interactive fantasy novel with over 100 different monsters and a huge variety of skills to learn. If you fancy a spell of black magic and intrigue, this game will not disappoint. ■

Emma Stroud

Divine Divinity

System requirements: 233MHz Pentium II; Windows 95/98/2000/Me/XP; 64MB RAM; 300MB hard disk space; 3D 8MB video card.

CDV: 020 8880 4144
Website: www.divinedivinity.com
Price: £34.99

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

Dungeon Siege

My name is Ursula and I am an addict. Dungeon Siege is my drug of choice, or at least it has been over the past few weeks since I got my hands on the game.

What's so addictive about this RPG (role-playing game)? Well, for a start it has managed to strike that essential balance between being easy enough to enjoy, while not being so simple as to be boring.

It's set in the Kingdom of Ehb, where 300 years of peace have been shattered by the re-emergence of a long-dormant evil force. By some twist of fate, your character is charged with restoring order. This is the usual Dungeons and Dragons-style hokum, a loose plot upon which to hang the gameplay.

← Bit of a per-lava: plumming the depths of hell is one way to teach your mage some spells

↓ Ice magic: the intrepid band find cold comfort in the frozen caves of Bargar

Back to the old school

You kick off with a single character, which you can tailor-make to some extent, choosing sex, clothing and hairstyle. The character is a novice, and you can decide how to build up their skills, picking up objects to help you enhance their fighting prowess.

There are three pillars of wisdom in Ehb: archery, armed combat and casting spells, which lead to characters becoming archers, warriors or mages. It is a good idea to build a balance of strengths in the beginning of the game, so alternate the three disciplines to build up knowledge, dexterity and strength. In the end you can pick a band of up to 10 fighters, so you can create a balanced force with mages practised in combat and nature magic, archers and weapons experts.

All characters have an easy-to-use inventory, which holds health and mana potions – health keeps them alive, while mana is used to cast spells. You pick up bits and pieces to add to your inventory and beef up armour, weapons and magic along the way by smashing containers, which hide such goodies, killing enemies who drop them and stopping in town to shop for them. You can buy pack mules to help you carry your booty, although they can be a liability when combat gets tough.

When a character loses all their health, instead of dying, they pass out. And even if they do die a skilled mage can resurrect them, which some might find too easy.

Magic vision

What really makes Dungeon Siege stand out, though, is the absolutely breathtaking graphics – okay, we have to admit we played this on a powerful PC with a 128MB Chaintech GeForce4 Ti 4600 graphics card. But even on a less cutting-edge system, you couldn't fail to be impressed by the rich, realistic gaming environment.

Your quest takes you through castles, dungeons, forests, villages, ice and lava caves, pitting you against a range of enemies from dragons to wolves and goblins – all of which look fantastic and have enough detail to keep your interest in the game alive.

Once you have finished the single-player game, you can take your Siege skills online with the multiplayer option. However, this is the only way to lengthen the life of the game, as there is just the one single-player quest to complete. ■

Ursula Seymour

↓ Don't lose your temple: you may feel the need for a votive offering later
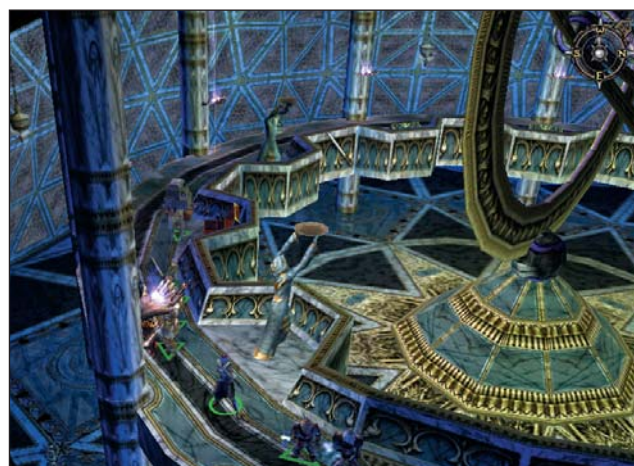
Dungeon Siege
System requirements: 333MHz Pentium III; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 64MB RAM (98, Me) 128MB RAM (2000 and XP); 1GB hard disk space.
Microsoft: 0870 601 0100
Website: www.microsoft.com/uk/games/dungeonsiege/
Price: £32.99

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

PREVIEW King of the Road

It was with gleeful anticipation that I agreed to preview King of the Road. I love lightning-speed driving games: barrelling along the streets of a virtual capital city or powersliding round dirt-track bends at a supposed 110mph – there's nothing better. So I wasn't quite prepared for the more stately pace that characterises this HGV trucking game.

Like Destroyer Command (reviewed May 02), King of the Road is a bit of a lamb in wolf's clothing. While it doesn't quite evoke the tedium of long-distance haulage, the brass tacks of this trade are the game's focus. Your aim is to build up a trucking business by picking goods up, driving them to different towns and selling them. You have unlimited time in the game, so you can develop a client base, expand your fleet of lorries and ultimately, if you are half the road freighter you think you are, gain supremacy in the business.

So it's a strategy game – more or less. You still spend all your playing time behind the wheel, it's just it happens to be a 16 tonner instead of a Subaru Impreza. Rather than straining the laws of physics in a headlong race against the clock, you try to keep your motor road worthy by, well, keeping it on the road. Knock down a small road sign and a couple of trees and your steering's finished and you can't get out of first gear. Then your

↑ Two hours' pushing broom broom: you won't get lost, but you won't ever reach the end of the road, either

livelihood's gone and you're back to building up the business from nothing.

It doesn't take long to work out that this is a little more cerebral than your average rally-fest. Careful driving and planning substantially ahead are the tactics that'll win you this game, and the weird thing is, I soon began to enjoy it. Once I'd learnt how not to crash. ■

Simon Easterman

King of the Road											
System requirements: TBA											
JoWood: 020 8901 7300											
Website: www.jowood.com											
Price: TBA											
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Overall rating							7				

Thunderbirds – Vault of Doom

In this, the latest game spawned from the cult TV show, Lady Penelope and Parker attempt to break into the vaults of the Bank of England in order to check the security system. Once they've proven that the security can be breached a new system is installed, but an employee gets trapped in the vault and his oxygen supply is running dangerously low. It's a race against time, so you must take control of the Rolls Royce, navigate your way around London and find out as much information as you can in order to aid the operation.

Thunderbirds – Vault of Doom is aimed at children and combines timing with problem solving, such as sums and memory puzzles, in line with the National Curriculum. Despite the game's assertion that it's easy to get lost in the Bank of England, it's pretty simple to negotiate your way to the vault, even on the expert level. It's hard to imagine it'll hold kids' attention for very long.

Once you get to the vault, you must release the trapped employee by tapping on the right keys and breaking the safe's code: it's basically a typing test in disguise. On completion of this level, you're treated to a sequence from the programme – the puppets bob about as the employee is rescued.

Far more interesting is the next level, where you join Scott Tracey in

→ Don't get strung out: take the wheel as Parker and learn to deal with difficult choices

Thunderbirds 2 and attempt to steer the plane to an airport and land it safely. This mission is good fun, but it's much more difficult than the first level, so kids may need adult help here.

Overall, Vault of Doom gives you just enough incentive to want to solve the puzzles and graduate to the next level. Graphics are rather blocky but the theme music allows you to enter into the spirit. ■

Emma Stroud

Thunderbirds – Vault of Doom											
System requirements: 400MHz Pentium processor; Windows 9x/Me/XP; 64MB RAM; 50MB hard disk space.											
Europress: 01625 855 000											
Website: www.europress.co.uk											
Price: £19.99											
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Overall rating						6					

Mr Men and Little Miss multimedia packages

← Title role: make your own Mr Man or Little Miss, then maybe let your kids have a go

↓ Sing-a-long: for the sake of your sanity, you may want to invest in some ear plugs
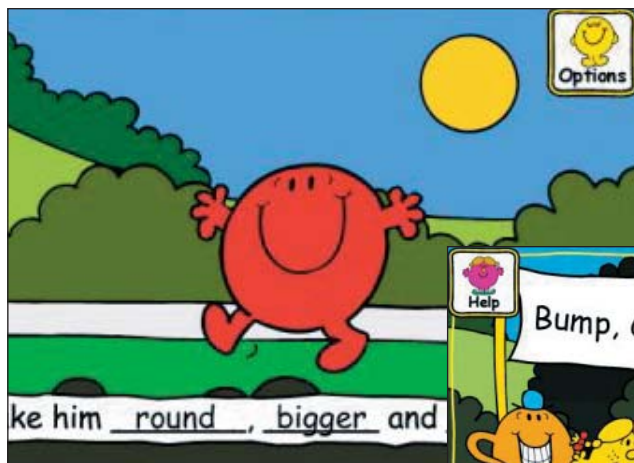
Computers are a wonderful invention because they allow you to do so many things you can't do any other way: calculate Pi to a million decimal places; send a message to someone the other side of the world in seconds; doctor a photograph to make it look as if you're shaking hands with Nelson Mandela.

The people who make children's software, however, seem to have decided that the best way to use the immense processing power of the modern PC is to replicate the kind of activity you can already carry out with a pencil and a pad that costs £1.50 from Woolworths. Perhaps the thinking is that children don't know any better, while parents are seduced by the idea that doing something on a computer is intrinsically more worthwhile than doing it with a pen and paper.

These Mr Men and Little Miss CD-ROMs epitomise this attitude. There is almost nothing here that a child couldn't do better, more cheaply and more enjoyably with some books, pads and crayons.

Activity time

Each of these three sets has two CDs. One of the sets – Mr Silly's Box of Fun and Mr Busy's Box of Fun – claims to be 'packed with things to do and make', and doesn't pretend to have any educational value. The other two sets supposedly support key stages one and two of the National Curriculum.

In reality, there is a lot of overlap in content between the six CDs: each has a story to listen to (with some animation), and each has 'activities' consisting of a few join-the-dots puzzles, some pictures to print out and colour in, and an excruciating section where the child can 'sing along with the Mr Men'.

In an age where doctors are increasingly seeing young children with RSI (repetitive strain injury) symptoms, it seems mildly scandalous that anyone would prefer their child to be joining the dots with a mouse rather than a pencil. And the idea that a PC telling a story is any replacement for mum or dad telling it is just plain sad.

Here are the eggs, Granny

The two 'educational' CDs are even worse. Learning is all about curiosity and discovery, but the activities here are more likely to deaden curiosity than to stimulate it, consisting as they mainly do of a series of dull multiple choice questions such as, 'Mr Tickle wants to know how many biscuits there are in the tin. Can you count them for him?' (Mr Tickle Teaches Maths) and, 'Can you tell me if Mr Happy is behind the tree, in front of the tree or next to the tree' (Mr Happy Teaches English). I can't comment on Little Miss Sunshine Teaches English, as the application crashed every time I tried to run it, but it's probably safe to say it wasn't any better.

It would cost you £30 to buy all three of these CD sets. Our advice is to save your money: nip down to WHSmith, buy some good children's books, a colouring pad and some crayons and spend an hour or two reading and drawing with your child. You won't regret it. ■

Kim Thomas

↓ Little Miss Cleverclogs: nobody likes a Smart Alice

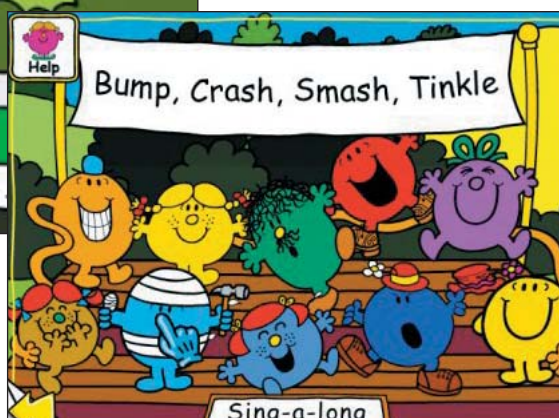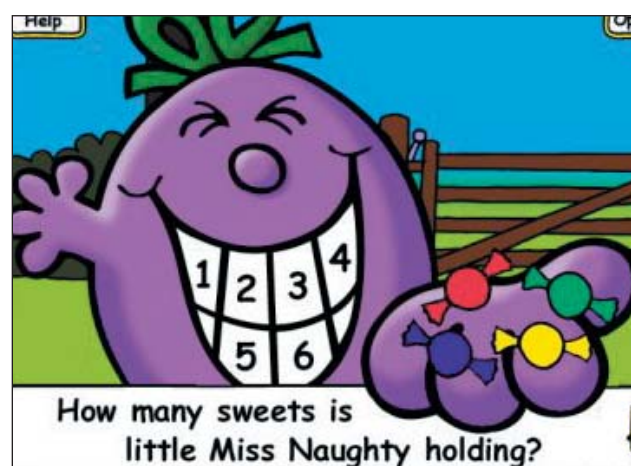| Mr Men and Little Miss multimedia packages |
| --- |
| **System requirements:** 120MHz Pentium processor; Windows 95/98/Me/XP Home; 16MB RAM. |
| **Europress:** 01625 855 000 |
| **Website:** www.europress.co.uk |
| **Price:** £9.99 per CD set |

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Overall rating 2

2002 FIFA World Cup

← Keane to make an impression: the Irish lads are yours to win the tournament with

↓ Midfield madness: don't let the Swedes' silky skills get the better of you

As this review was written some time before England's glorious victory/ humiliating early exit in the group stages in this summer's World Cup, I won't dwell on England running rings round/being routed by the Argentinians. I'll concentrate instead on 2002 FIFA World Cup, a game that aims to bring the thrills and spills of Korea and Japan to your PC.

Here's your call-up

EA Sports churns out football games on a pretty regular basis and they always seem to sell well, although the core of the games remains pretty much the same as it ever was. There are always new tweaks, of course, but this is essentially the same old FIFA game that we know and love. What makes it different from the other FIFA offerings is that the teams are all international sides – there's no club football to be played here.

EA Sports has attempted to capture the atmosphere of the World Cup in this game – so you'll find even more outrageous celebrations and posturing from the players when they score or win a match than in previous FIFA games. But just because you're playing with the world's best doesn't mean you have to be some gaming whizz to play FIFA – the beauty of this game is that a beginner can quickly get to grips with it.

Most of the players bear an uncanny resemblance to their real-life counterparts – Paul Scholes and Alessandro Del Piero are particularly life-like. Beckham, on the other hand, looks more like Shane McGowan in this game, as he and all the other players have oddly gappy teeth. It doesn't make any difference to the game whatsoever, but it might give small children nightmares. As the

skin tones also seem a touch on the pale side, you might in fact get the feeling that you're taking control of the Undead XI rather than the England football team.

There are four skill levels and, though the easiest of these is so weak that you could win the World Cup with the Slovenian team while standing on your head facing away from the monitor, the other three levels should provide a slightly tougher test.

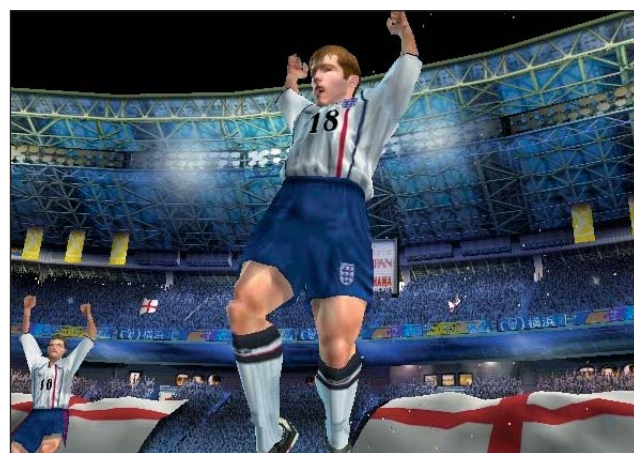## You're not singing any more

As you play the game more, though, certain things will begin to annoy you, a good example being the action replays – they look good, but take up valuable time, especially if you're losing. Another is the commentary – you'll hear the same phrases over and over again and Andy Gray's half-time analysis will have you banging your head against the nearest wall.

Being able to take on other players over a LAN (local area network) or the internet is a good thing, as the multiplayer aspect has always been a big factor in the success of the FIFA series of games. However, I personally feel that FIFA games work better on consoles rather than a PC – it's much more fun if you're sat in the same room as your adversary, watching the same screen. But all in all, if you couldn't make it to Japan and Korea and you want a game that will keep you amused for the summer while you recover from a broken metatarsal, then 2002 FIFA World Cup should hit the target. ■

Ben Camm-Jones

↓ Dream team comes through: fulfil your fantasies the only way possible

2002 FIFA World Cup

System requirements: 233MHz Pentium; Windows 9x/2000/Me/XP; 32MB RAM; 65MB hard disk space.

EA Sports: 01932 450 000
Website: www.ea.com/fifaworldcup
Price: £34.99

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