leisure lines

Empires state building

We've just finished playing the beta version of **Age of Empires II**, and it is looking pretty good. Microsoft's follow-up has several improvements over the original. The units have been made smarter and your tactical choices have been increased. There are also alternatives to fighting, such as trading and diplomacy. More civilisations have been added, together with improved controls. Take a look at www.microsoft.com/games.

Take 2 is poised to release **Grand Theft Auto 2** in the coming months. The sequel to one of the most popular games ever will maintain the top-down view and reckless destruction of the original. Developer DMA is very proud of the improved Artificial Intelligence that allows the police and gangs to be operated as an entire unit rather than individuals as in the original. With the promise of 75 missions, GTA2 is looking like a winner. See www.gta2.com.

Indy is, as the adverts will no doubt proclaim, well and truly back, in the latest game from Lucasarts. **Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine** will be a full 3D affair, in which Indy has to stop evil communists from capturing an inter-dimensional gate that could be used as a terrible weapon. See www.lucasarts.com for more action-packed information.
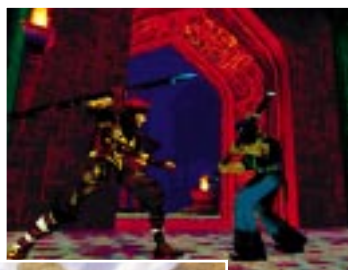
Prince of Persia 3D is finally nearing completion. Continuing the franchise begun in the 1980s, this version looks and feels similar to Tomb Raider. Preview screenshots show that the scenes have been beautifully drawn, with the environment giving away clues – blood on the floor may signify enemies nearby, for example. Visit www.pop3d.com.

Further ahead is **Babylon 5: Into the Fire**, due for release in early 2000. This space simulator will feature the ships, actors and setting of the TV series, with most of the action taking place in a one-man Star Fury. One rumoured feature is the ability to flip your ship 180 degrees while still travelling the same direction, adding a new tactical element to a genre often seen as a flight sim in space. See www.sierrastudios.com.

Enter the dragon

If you're like us and Diablo is one of your favourite games of all time, then the imminent release of Delphine's **Darkstone** will be something to look forward to. It isn't a straight copy of Blizzard's masterpiece though, feeling more like an evolution than a rip off. The main difference is that the game is entirely 3D, allowing the user to control the camera angle.

The goal of the game is for you to defeat Draak, an evil monk who can turn into a dragon, by building a Time Orb. The Orb can only be created by collecting seven crystals from around the Darkstone universe. Thirty-two levels are thrown at you to complete, with the location of the Crystals randomly chosen from 22 possibilities each time the game starts. You can choose to be a male or female thief, wizard, priest or fighter. Early reports suggest that the game is fairly easy for hard core Diablo players until the final few levels, but less experienced players should find it more of a challenge. You also have the option to control two characters at once, with multi-player support promised as well. Keep a look out for a full review in *PCW*.
www.delphinesoft.com
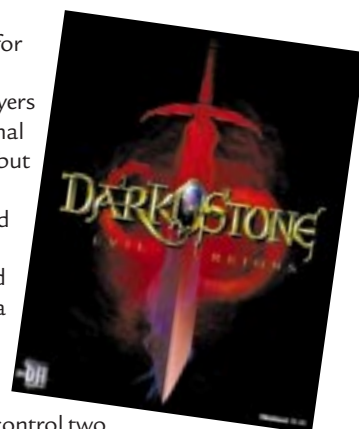
Mad dogs and Englishmen...

... go out in the Tiberian Sun. The heat is on in the third installment of Command and Conquer.

It feels like an eternity since Command and Conquer turned the realtime strategy game into a force to be reckoned with. Prior to C&C, strategy games were about as cool as open-toed sandals. Now, however, they represent one of the most popular PC game genres. This is the third installment in the Command and Conquer series, with the second episode, Red Alert, proving to be one of the biggest selling PC games ever.

Once again you've been thrown into the thick of battle between the Global Defence Initiative and the Brotherhood of NOD. Who the good guys and the bad guys are depends entirely on your point of view and which side you happen to be fighting for. The action is split across two CDs, with each CD playing the game from opposing sides. Not only does this approach allow you to choose which side to fight for, it also doubles the longevity of the game.

Unless you've been stranded on a desert island for the last few years you'll know how a realtime strategy game works. You take command of an array of different units that you have to deploy and utilise in an attempt to achieve set objectives. Getting to know each unit's strengths and weaknesses is the key to a successful campaign, and after some trial and error you'll know what the best tool for a particular job is.

Don't expect any revolutionary features in Tiberian Sun as the advances are far more subtle, and, in most cases,

▶ WATCH OUT FOR THOSE LASER CANNONS
▼ TROOPS CAN PATROL YOUR BASE

▲ BATTLES CAN BE FOUGHT AT NIGHT AS WELL AS IN THE TIBERIAN SUN
▶ PRE-RENDERED CUT SCENES ARE A JOY TO BEHOLD

are features we've already seen in other games of this genre. One of the best new aspects is the ability to set way points. You can set a way point anywhere on the map and command your units to assemble there. However, you can also string way points together, forming a circle. This allows you to form a perimeter around your base for your troops to patrol.

As well as the usual soldiers and engineers, you also have medics at your disposal. These little guys can heal your troops as they get injured, so be sure to keep them safe. Unfortunately, this is where a major flaw in the computer's artificial intelligence rears its head. While playing one mission, my entire force was wiped out – with the exception of one soldier and a medic. However, these two men then managed to wipe out almost all of the enemy structures, units and troops. Basically, I sent the soldier in to attack each enemy target and used the medic to constantly heal him during each battle. Now, any human player

would have killed the medic, then wiped out the soldier, but the computer only attacked the soldier, allowing the medic to keep him alive. That gripe aside, the AI is pretty good, and your troops will generally take the best route to a location, rather than going around the houses.

The story line is as rich as ever, but Westwood has invested in some A-Grade actors for the cut scenes. Commanding the GDI forces is none other than James Earl Jones, while Michael Bien takes control of the action on the ground. The quality of the full-motion video cut scenes isn't stunning, but the pre-rendered sequences are a joy to behold.

Of course, if you don't want to make your way through the story line, you can play skirmish matches against a number of computer opponents, or take up arms against real players. There are a number of multi-player maps provided, but Tiberian Sun also allows you to quickly create random maps. To do this, you manipulate sliders that dictate how much Tiberian, water, cliffs or cities there are. Once you've set these values, the computer will generate a random map around them. This means you'll never run out of maps to play, and that no player will know where everything is.

C&C: Tiberian Sun is a great game and fans of the series will love it. Just don't expect it to be a major advance in realtime strategy gaming.

RIYAD EMERAN

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price *£34.99*
Contact *Electronic Arts 01753 549 442*
www.tiberiansun.com
System requirements *Windows 95/98/NT, Intel Pentium 166MHz (PII Recommended), 32MB RAM (64MB Recommended), 200MB hard disk space, 4x CD-ROM drive, 2MB graphics card*

Microsoft International Football 2000

If you're after a half-decent footy SIM, then Microsoft's first sports title should play ball.

Microsoft's first sports title features the vocal stylings of Ron Atkinson and Jonathan Pearce in tandem for the first time – what more could the most laddish of footy fans want? Well, excellent gameplay and slick graphics would also go down well – fortunately, the Seattle giant delivers in spades on all counts.

Microsoft has certainly put a lot of thought into the game's design. We particularly liked the simplicity of the controls and responsiveness of the players – it really is a doddle to lace up your boots and paint pretty pictures all over the turf. However, that very turf is part of the problem

with MIF2000. Where are these games held? Microsoft hasn't secured any licensing deals for this release and consequently stadia, teams and players are all essentially anonymous.

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price £34.99
Contact Microsoft 0345 002000
www.microsoft.com/games
System requirements Pentium 133 processor (Pentium 200 recommended), 32MB RAM, Windows 95/98

As any fan will tell you, a large part of the appeal of 'the beautiful game' lies in its tribalism. Who cares if the actual match is as dull as ditchwater, as long as your lot puts one over on theirs? Strip away club and individual personalities and you're left desperately hoping for a game that can stand on its own two feet.

If you're after a decent footy SIM, this one should suffice, but be prepared to take on the likes of Skonta Skegness at London Stadium.

J MARK LYTLE

Dungeon Keeper 2

Tired of being a goody? This will bring out the evil in you.

Sometimes it's good to take a break from saving the world, releasing the prisoners and generally doing good deeds for everyone. It's at times like these you should tell Dr Jekyll to put his feet up, reach for Dungeon Keeper 2 and usher in Mr Hyde.

This game will bring out the evil streak in anyone. Your task is to run a dungeon that will attract suitably nasty characters to help you in your quest to wipe out all the goodness that exists in the world above. You control the events in the dungeon with the

'hand of evil'. With this hand you can instruct your imps to expand your dungeon, dig for gold or, if you don't think they are working hard enough, give them a good slapping.

For those who like to get more involved, there is an option to cast a spell and enter the body of one of your minions. This gives you a first-person view of the action, enabling you to wander around your dungeon or lead others into attack.

The game is very easy to get into, with an all-commanding voice guiding you through the initial stages. This allows you to jump straight in without having to read the manual first.

The multi-player option is something of a disappointment, but if you stick to single-player mode, Dungeon Keeper 2 provides a rare combination of great gameplay and well-executed 3D graphics.

WILL HEAD

PCW DETAILS

RECOMMENDED
PERSONAL COMPUTER WORLD

★★★★★

Price £34.99
Contact Electronic Arts 01753 549442
www.dungeonkeeper2.com
System requirements Pentium 166 (Pentium II 266 recommended), 32MB of memory (64MB recommended), 2MB DirectX-compatible graphics card (4MB recommended), DirectX-compatible sound card, 285MB hard drive space, Windows 95/98

Descent 3

Although it has its downsides, Descent 3 will provide you with some challenging missions.

If negotiating tiny access tunnels and sabotaging space stations is your thing, then this latest version of the popular Descent series is for you.

The enemy in this game is a monolithic organisation, the PTMC. Not only has it released a virus that turns harmless robots into deranged killing machines, but it also owes you money.

To undermine this organisation, you are given a series of missions to complete that generally involve sneaking into a small installation through very narrow tunnels, killing all the insane robots, solving a few puzzles, rescuing a scientist and downloading some vital secret data.

An excellent training mission lets you get to grips with your ship's controls before you enter the game proper. The enemy robots can manoeuvre very quickly in the 3D environment, making them tricky to destroy. You are helped by your 'guidebot', a tiny robot that focuses the vague mission guidelines by finding the next point you need to reach in the maze of tunnels.

Unfortunately, the fun gameplay is marred by the very low frame-rate that tends to accompany entrance into a new section of the maze, as all the textures load into the memory. While the graphics jerk around you are often left swearing at the screen, while being shot by a trio of ruthless robots.

However, the cut sequences are great, made all the better by the music that accompanies them. You can also play against others online through PXO, and a level editor is available for download.

JASON JENKINS

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price *£34.99*
Contact *Interplay 0171 551 0000*
www.interplay.com
System requirements *Pentium 200 (Pentium 300 recommended), 32MB RAM (64MB recommended), 4MB open GL or DirectX-compatible graphics card, DirectX6-compatible sound card, 210MB hard-disk space, Windows 95/98/NT*

Braveheart

It's deep and complex and may take time to appreciate.

Braveheart started life as a 13th-century war simulation with the working title of Tartan Army, evolving into its current form after a licensing deal. This definitely puts Braveheart a step above other film-to-game conversions and as a result it is extremely rich. The entire landscape of the UK has been faithfully recreated from Russian satellite data to an accuracy of 50m.

The game itself is very deep and complex, which – on the downside – means that a significant amount of time must be invested before you can actually start playing. If you are willing to put that effort in, though, Braveheart becomes a rewarding experience. Most features have an automatic option allowing you to concentrate on strategy, action or both, and this gives you a lot of control over gameplay. If you don't feel like getting your hands dirty in a scrap then you can let the game decide the result. If you are not so interested in managing the economy and politics of your clan, then you can hand that aspect over to the computer. As you gain more experience, you can take control back.

The campaign part of the game is in 2D and the graphical splendour only becomes apparent when a battle kicks off. The 3D animation here is superb, but you will need a well-specified PC to view it at a reasonable frame rate.

WILL HEAD

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price *£39.99*
Contact *Eidos Interactive 0181 636 3000*
www.eidosinteractive.com/braveheart/
System requirements *Pentium 200 (Pentium 233 recommended), 32MB RAM, Glide or Open GL-compatible graphics card, DirectX-compatible sound card, 200MB hard drive space, Windows 95/98*

Ultima Online

This one is seriously addictive and a voyage could last years.

Multi-playing capacity is rapidly becoming standard for all new games. Linking to other terminals to play your favourite shoot-'em-up or driving sim is great fun, for the simple reason that you are pitting yourself against another human, rather than a more predictable machine.

Origin pushed the multi-player concept one step further in the first

Ultima Online game, creating a fantasy world on the Internet that allowed thousands of players to exist simultaneously. This sequel pushes the envelope even further.

The goal of Ultima Online is to survive in a virtual world among thousands of other real players who are trying to do the same. You live in Britannia, a mystical world where you can craft your own sword, tame animals, build a house, run a shop, escort

merchants from city to city, delve deep into perilous dungeons, or just chat with friends. Whatever profession you want to follow or reputation you want to gain is entirely up to you.

The Second Age now hosts a larger playable area, revised 3D landscapes, lost villages, underground caverns to explore, new monsters and non-human races. For novices, a pop-up help function has been added, which gives a short tip for virtually every object.

You are also given unprecedented amounts of freedom to seek your own destiny and compete against real people. Be warned, however. This game is seriously addictive and, once signed up, your virtual voyage could last years.

LUKE PETERS

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price £33.99
Contact Electronic Arts 01753 549442
www.owo.com
System requirements Pentium 166 (Pentium II 233MHz recommended), 16MB of memory (32MB recommended), DirectX-compatible graphic and sound cards, 383MB hard-disk space, 28.8Kbit/sec modem, Windows 95/98

International Cricket Captain 2

ICC2 is detailed without being stifling and any cricket fanatic will love the wealth of statistics.

Following England's dismal exit from the Cricket World Cup and the test loss to the Kiwis, comes this cricket simulation from Empire Interactive, International Cricket Captain 2. It's a bit late to put things right, but it might heal a few cricket fans' broken hearts.

Unlike other recent releases – such as Brian Lara Cricket and Cricket World Cup 99, where you actually don the whites and get cracking with the batting and bowling – ICC2 is a management simulation. This involves you achieving the utterly impossible – working your way up from captain of a county side to captaining England in the World Cup. The task is unenviable. As captain, you are not just expected to have a good innings and rally the

despondent troops. You must also trawl through the reams of statistics, buy new players, train them, act as board of selectors – the list goes on.

Being endorsed by Wisden, publisher of *Cricketing Monthly* and the *Cricketers' Almanack*, doesn't just lend an air of respectability to the game, it also supplies you with every morsel of info you could ever need.

But the culmination of your hard

work is the match itself, during which you can opt to watch the highlights in almost-realistic 3D and change batting styles, bowlers and the outfield with each over that passes.

ICC2 is detailed without being stifling, and committed cricket fans will love the stats behind the game's façade. With commentary by Jonathan Agnew and some decent graphics, you can't go far wrong. If you succeed, drop a line to the board of selectors at Lords. You might just be needed.

JIM HARYOTT

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price £34.99
Contact Empire Interactive 0181 343 7337
www.empire.co.uk
System requirements Pentium 75 (Pentium 133 recommended), 16MB of RAM, 1MB DirectX-compatible graphics card (4MB recommended), DirectX-compatible sound card, 80MB hard disk space, Windows 95/98
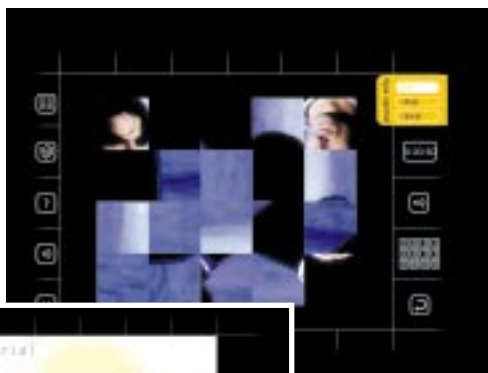
Backstreet Boys: Moving Puzzle

It's called Moving Puzzle and it's a bit of a puzzle why anyone should find it a challenge.

If you haven't heard of the **Backstreet Boys** then I congratulate you and seriously advise you not to read this review any further. They are one of the many 'boy bands' popular with teenage girls at present and this CD-ROM is one fans will buy simply due to the branding.

The developer claims that this is a 'must have' item for every fan.

It consists of clips from 12 different videos that the group has made. It also includes musical accompaniments from six of their recent hits, including *We've Got it Goin' On*, *Anywhere For You*, *I'll Never Break Your Heart*, *Everybody*, *All I Have To Give* and *I Wanna Be With You*. The video clips have been scrambled and the aim is to unscramble them, in order to see the darlings singing and dancing in their original state. There are three stages of difficulty to the puzzles and the user can choose exactly how many pieces they would like their puzzle split into. We're afraid that's as challenging as it gets. The band is launching Moving Puzzle to coincide with their album *Millennium*, and a European tour, but no information about the band or tour was on the CD.

At the end of the day, we feel that Moving Puzzle is purely a money-making gimmick and has little or no educational value – or any other kind for that matter. There could have been more variety to the puzzles and it's likely that only die-hard fans will really appreciate it.

ETELKA CLARK

PCW DETAILS

★★

Price £12.99
Contact *Knowledge Adventure*
0118 920 9100
www.sierra-online.co.uk
System requirements *Windows 3.1x or Windows 95/98, 486/66MHz, 8MB RAM, 42MB hard disk space.*

The Hutchinson History Reference Suite

Reasonably priced and easy to use History Reference Suite proves to be a handy tool.

Encompassing no fewer than seven reference packages, the History Reference Suite can not only be used by the diligent student, but also teachers and budding historians.

Thanks to the incredibly user-friendly navigation system, based on Microsoft Internet Explorer, historical facts and dates are easy to locate. The main control panel allows you to search for keywords across all seven 'books', which increases the chance of finding what you're looking for.

You'll find even the most obscure historical event gets at least a mention among the 30,000 facts and figures.

Like most CD-ROM encyclopaedias, the History Reference Suite employs not only text, but also a vast array of extras, which makes the learning process that little bit more enjoyable.

Over 500 illustrations and maps are included and there's a historical quiz if you fancy it.

Perhaps the most useful tool for those in education is the essay feature, which provides excellent web links to past compositions.

Another handy characteristic is the 'trail tab', which follows and records the articles you've looked at, so you can return to them at any time.

As well as historical events, the suite provides comprehensive biographies on major historical figures, and within each biography are highlighted hyperlinks to relevant subject areas and famous quotes from that period. The package is well priced and can offer a real insight for anyone interested in past world events.

LUKE PETERS

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price £25.52 (£29.99 inc VAT)
Contact *Helicon 01865 204204*
www.helicon.co.uk
System requirements *Windows 95/98, 486DX 66MHz or higher processor, 16MB RAM, 20MB free hard disk space, 4x CD-ROM*
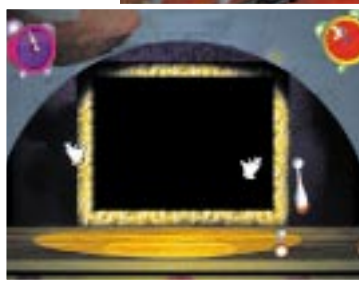
Masters of the Elements

Education and entertainment may appear unlikely bedfellows but this one's a genuine surprise.

A good combination of education and entertainment is so rare to find that Masters of the Elements is a genuine surprise. With a balanced emphasis on both the gaming and educational aspects, this CD-ROM presents a fun and intellectually engaging adventure in a well-presented format.

The fairy-tale surroundings set the scene as you embark on your journey to help the Masters of the Elements re-balance the forces of nature. To accomplish this task you enter five different rooms, where science-based skill games await your expertise. The game is advertised as suitable for people within the wide age bracket of eight to 102, although a more appropriate age group would be 12 upwards, since the tasks are not easy. The Room of Electricity, for example, presents a lesson on the conduction of electricity where the player is expected to set a train and lift in motion by connecting electrical circuits.

Carrying through the theme of elements, the Room of Light offers players the chance to learn about the reflection of light and linear multiplications of light beams, whereas the Room of Gravity explores gravity with the aid of a seesaw, a crane that lifts heavy balls and a plane powered by an elastic band. Although many of the tasks feature an educational element, the CD-ROM fails to consolidate this by explaining the task you have just accomplished. It therefore misses out on the opportunity to enlighten its players further about the mysteries of science.

CLAIRE MORLEY

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price £19.99
Contact Tivola 0181 233 2860
www.tivola.co.uk
System requirements Windows 95/98, 16 MB RAM (8MB free) 2x CD-ROM drive

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Thumbs Plus 4.0

Constantly short-changed by the amount of images you can hold on your hard drive? You won't be after installing this...

If you have any more than a handful of images on your hard drive, then keeping them in any sort of manageable order can be a nightmare.

That's where Thumbs Plus comes in handy. Now up to revision 4, this has been a popular shareware utility for many years now, and it's easy to see why. The simple, uncluttered interface presents a tree view of your drives in a left-hand window while the larger window on the right shows thumbnails of the images and fonts in the current directory.
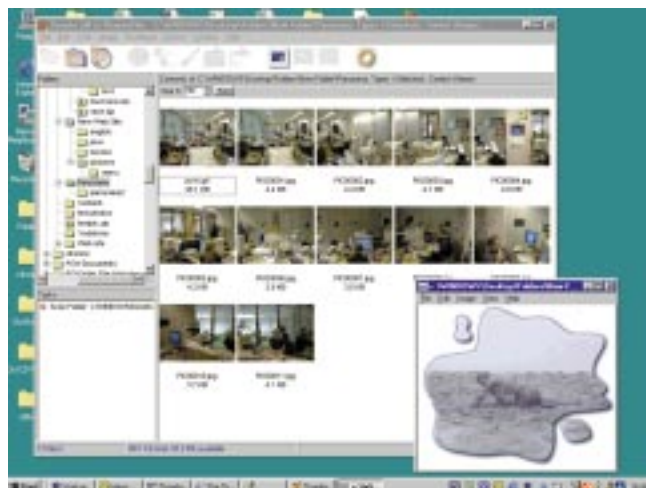
As a directory is selected, Thumbs Plus immediately starts to scan every image it contains, even if they are compressed into a Zip file. Images can be sorted on the basis of orientation, size or even similarity and a single button on the toolbar displays every image in the open directory as a looping slideshow. Although locations such as the Recycle Bin and Network Neighbourhood appear on the top level of the directory tree view alongside My Computer, Thumbs Plus does not recognise this as the desktop – instead you have to click through to C:\Windows\Desktop (or wherever appropriate on your own PC), which is a shame considering this is a Windows 95-and-upwards application.

If you're planning on building any sort of electronic picture library, or you own a scanner or digital camera, then Thumbs Plus really is a must.

Once installed, you'll never again find yourself trawling through your hard drive wondering what file 034267b.jpg refers to.

NIK RAWLINSON

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price £62.26
(£49.99 + £3 shipping ex VAT)
**Contact** Thompson Partnership 01889 564601
www.ttp.co.uk
System requirements Pentium 90, 16MB memory, 20MB hard disk space, 256-colour display, Windows 95/98 or NT4

Designing with JavaScript: Creating Dynamic Web Pages

Nick Heinle is a JavaScript guru, having contributed to professional sites for CNN, *Star Wars*, Digital and IBM, and he has authored top JavaScript tutorial sites that have proved useful for many up and coming web programmers. Web developer David Siegel, author of the acclaimed *Creating Killer Web Sites* series of books, is quoted on the back of this title saying: 'We use Nick's scripts all the time', so for starters you know it is full of expertise.

The accompanying CD-ROM, for both Macintosh and Windows, contains all the code and demos featured in the book, along with demo software. The problem with JavaScript
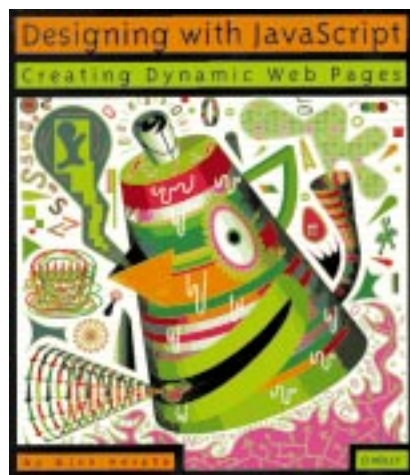
is that, while it greatly improves dynamism for web developers who want bells and whistles on their sites, it is based essentially on computer programming languages – even if they are supposed to be easy. Therefore, designers and marketers can find learning JavaScript a daunting prospect.

Heinle breaks down the barrier

between programming and design by looking first at the effects you want to achieve and then simply providing a detailed explanation of how to achieve them. Therefore, you can become a master with the language without having to learn it inside out. You can let Heinle lead you, feeding you nuggets of his creativity and experience.

The book shows you how to implement and use cookies, detect browser types, platforms and plug-ins, create image rollovers and other events and insert variables. Essentially a text-based book, blocks of script are highlighted in green boxes, with numbered references that link to their relevant explanations in the body text.

Throughout the book, Heinle assumes not only a complete lack of knowledge but also a lack of understanding of the processes of JavaScripting, so he's careful to explain in places why things need including.

STEVE MASTERS

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

DESIGNING WITH JAVASCRIPT: CREATING DYNAMIC WEB PAGES
Author *Nick Heinle*
Publisher *O'Reilly*
ISBN *1565923006*
Price *£21.95*


Cutting Edge Web Audio

If there's anything Ron Simpson doesn't know about web audio, then I'm guessing that you could fit it on the back of a matchbox.

Taking a hands-on approach, *Cutting Edge Web Audio* certainly lives up to its title and guides you through the very latest developments in Internet audio technology.

Starting with an overview of the growth of audio over the Internet, Simpson takes an in-depth look at sound editing, converting, encoding, uploading, streaming and budgeting, as well as providing invaluable information on copyright issues. The result is that you will be armed with enough knowledge to suit your needs.

Aimed at anyone who is interested in utilising sound as a component of their web presentations – be it playing a .WAV file from a
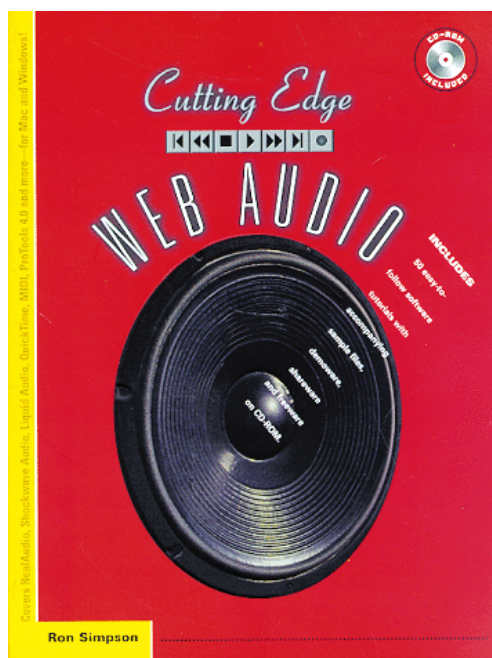
homepage or creating a fully-fledged radio site – Simpson's opening chapters cover all the angles.

Being a relatively new area, the book is targeted primarily at the novice – although there is still plenty of meat

here for the professional who thinks they know everything – and it is all explained in a way that is never patronising, as Simpson keeps things clean and practical.

The book is attractively laid out, taking a tutorial approach to most of the knowledge building.

The author also makes a pretty good stab at covering both Mac and PC platforms, without disrupting the flow of the text.

As with most books of this type, the obligatory free CD turns out to be a real gem. It provides both Mac and PC users with a comprehensive set of the best audio editors, players and converters, as well as a wealth of sound files to play around with and include in presentations.

With the constant changes and innovations in current Internet technologies (just look at the 'browser wars'), Simpson will no doubt be kept busy making revisions to what is likely to become the 'web audio bible'.

MATT HONEYBALL

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

CUTTING EDGE WEB AUDIO
Author *Ron Simpson*
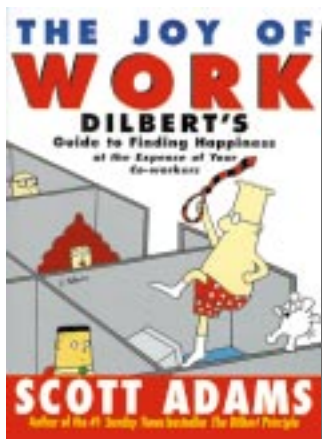**Publisher** *Prentice Hall*
ISBN *0130807532*
Price *£37.49*

Dilbert: The Joy of Work

Is it possible to manage your bosses to hide the fact that you're not working? Or so that they don't trouble you with meddlesome things like meetings? Scott Adams, the creator of cubicle inhabitant Dilbert – and once a cubicle inhabitant himself – is not only a source of sarcastic amusement but also an expert in boss management.

This collection of writings and cartoons takes a humorous look at life in the office, by pointing out some everyday practices that we all know. He also offers some useful insights into how you can actually gain control of those around you without them realising it.

What backs this up is Scott's inclusion of emails from anonymous fans who have sent him details of their own experiences. One we are tempted to try is this: 'My boss and I were asked to audit a branch office. She wrote the first draft of the audit, which was pretty scathing. Her boss, the vice-president, sent it back and asked us to edit it for tone. So we took the report printed single-sided, recopied it double-sided, bound it and submitted it. The VP expressed his complete satisfaction with the new, thinner version.'

This is an excellent book that is both funny and educational.

STEVE MASTERS

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

DILBERT: THE JOY OF WORK
Author Scott Adams
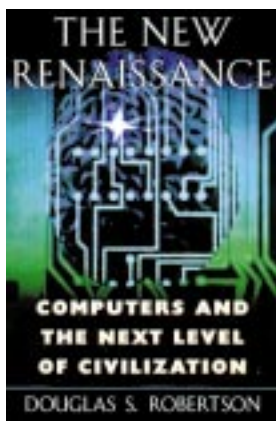**Publisher** Boxtree
ISBN 0752211994
Price £14.99

The New Renaissance

This book reiterates the well-worn theme that the computer revolution is the most important event in the history of mankind. But Douglas Robertson goes further than most, telling us: 'The revolutions sparked by computer theory and technology have brought about changes so vast that they represent nothing less than the dawn of the next level of civilisation.'

Further chapters interpret what the revolutionary process will do in practical terms to education, the English language, arithmetic and the arts.

In the author's view, the computer makes the necessity for academic examinations obsolete. Instead, he suggests that a student's computer should be used to monitor and assess progress.

He goes further in suggesting that, of the traditional three Rs, 'only reading is going to survive unscathed'. Writing is less important than the keyboard. In a statement that is calculated to send traditional educationalists incandescent with rage, Robertson argues that 'students should be taught the effective use of calculators, spreadsheets and symbolic algebra software as soon as they learn to read'.

Predicting the future is never easy, and few, Arthur C Clarke being one, have done so successfully. If Robertson is right, then in 20 years' time he will be lauded. If he is wrong no-one will notice.

SEAN HALLAHAN

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