

This month we take you into the lands of Thyrion and Nosgoth to fight against evil. We also try out a great driving game, go Greek with Hercules and find out all about pregnancy

Home & Entertainment



HEXEN II

15

Best described as Diablo meets Doom, Hexen II is a dark and foreboding tale of swords, sorcery and sheep. Set in the land of Thyrion, it casts you as a would-be hero on a quest to free your world from the evil Eidolon, last of the Serpent Riders.



be liberated before the final showdown with Eidolon. It won't be easy though, as all the realms have their own unique collection of things aiming to make your game a short one. Among the inhabitants of Blackmarsh are demon archers, giant poisonous spiders, flying fire imps and goat-like sorcerers. Get to the rain forest of Mezarea and you'll face

Good news for fans of the Myst – **Riven**, the long-awaited sequel to the best-selling CD-ROM game ever, should be in the shops by the time you



read this. It will be supplied on no fewer than five CDs, packed with even better graphics and more devious puzzles than before.

Riven starts where the previous game left off, with Artus searching for his missing wife Catherine. It's up to you to

Contd opposite...

You can take on the role of Paladin, Crusader, Necromancer or Assassin in an attempt to complete your mission and save the day.

Each character has his or her own set of attributes (which develop as you progress) and weapons designed to suit their particular pastimes. For example, an experienced Assassin is an expert with the cross-bow and has the ability to blend in with the shadows, becoming virtually invisible. A Necromancer, on the other hand, can use powerful magic spells to help with the task ahead. The more you play, the more experience you get, and the more likely you are to survive.

Thyrion is split into four continents: Blackmarsh, Mazaera, Thysis and Septimus, each of which must



Were-Jaguars, while Septimus is home to the Medusa. As if that wasn't enough, at the end of each level you must also face one of the legendary horsemen of the apocalypse: War, Famine, Pestilence or Death.

As well as providing plenty of things to shoot at, Hexen II offers a number of puzzles to keep you on your toes. These range from simply collecting keys to open doors, through to negotiating hidden traps and mixing and casting spells.

Graphically, Hexen II is superb and if you ever needed a good reason to buy a 3D acceleration card then this is it. Played on systems using Orchid's Righteous 3D and Videologic's Apocalypse cards, the world of Thyrion really comes to life. In fact, with the latter you can play at a resolution of 800x600

pixels with no noticeable loss of speed on a Pentium MMX PC.

The audio department is also well stocked, and the game can be played over a network for added enjoyment. Best of all is a spell that can turn other players into defenceless lambs, ready for the chop.

Definitely a contender for an action adventure game of the year award, Hexen II has it all.

● £29.99 (inc VAT)
● Activision: 01895 456700

Chris Cain

Hexen II
Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: 90MHz Pentium, 16Mb of RAM, 16-bit sound card, and Windows 95.



Continued...
explore this new world and help him find her.
Broderbund Europe:
01429 855000

Sega is continuing its drive into the PC world with seven new titles this autumn. Perhaps the most eagerly awaited is **Virtua Cop 2**, a conversion of the smash hit 3D shooting game that took both the arcade and Sega Saturn owners by storm. The original version did well on the PC, so it will be interesting to see how this version improves on it.

Other new titles due soon include **Last Bronx** and **Sega Touring Car Rally**, and a new MMX-enhanced version of **Sega Rally**. A PC version of the outstanding beat-'em-up **Virtua Fighter 2** should be available by the time you read this – see next month's issue for a full review. Sega: 0181 995 3399



Seven Kingdoms is the latest title from Interactive Magic. Set in the time when men, monsters and gods were intertwined, it tells the story of the battle for supremacy between seven great powers – the kingdoms of the Greeks, Chinese, Japanese, Persians, Mayans, Normans and Vikings. Definitely one for the strategy buffs, **Seven Kingdoms** will hit the shelves this November. Interactive Magic: 01344 409399

AGE RATINGS

Age ratings: We have assigned viewing suitability ratings for each game.

U = Universal;
PG = Parental Guidance;
15 = suitable for viewing by 15-year-olds and above;
18 = suitable for viewing by 18-year-olds and above.

PG

15

U

18



INTERNATIONAL RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP



The insanity of ploughing through crowds of spectators as they swarm on the track. The embarrassment of getting firmly wedged in a roadside ditch.



The frustration of having your co-driver mistakenly say 'slow left' instead of 'sharp right'. None of these things feature in International Rally Championship, so how it can hope to recreate the 'pure, gut-wrenching thrills of world-class motorsport' is anyone's guess.

Actually, these vital rally-related items turn out to be not that important after all and International Rally Championship is a cracking driving game without them. The formula is a stale one - nine cars, 15 countries, and so on. What's exciting is the sheer variety Europress has crammed into the game. 'Arcade' mode gets you in a one-off race straight away in cars that handle like a go-cart. 'Championship' is pretty much the same except that you must fight your way up the league against other drivers. Finally, 'Simulation' offers the full monty - components you can tweak, realistic handling and bits that fall off if you're not careful.



The game supports DirectX 5 and can make good use of a 3D accelerator card if you have one installed in your PC. With the Orchid Righteous 3D, the graphics are particularly impressive but the game is just as playable on a non-accelerated

system if its specification is high enough.

International Rally Championship pitches its level of difficulty just right too. Both arcade and simulation modes are easy enough to get a handle on and the tracks are varied enough to keep things interesting. The inclusion of a 'manager' mode where you have to worry about car specification and running repairs boosts the lasting appeal still further. Finally, the inclusion of a track designer is a welcome one. Here, you can specify everything from the road surface to the prevailing weather conditions, or just get the computer to generate everything randomly. Tracks also have a unique creation code that can be passed on to other players so that they can try them out too.

Europress has produced a real winner in this game. If you like your driving, then it's another 'must have'. Julian Prokaza

- £44.99 (inc VAT)
- Europress: 01625 859333

International Rally Championship

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: 100MHz Pentium, 16Mb of RAM, Windows 95, CD-ROM drive. Supports MMX and DirectX 5.



BLOOD OMEN - LEGACY OF KAIN

15

When most people wake up with a splitting headache and a thought for flesh, it's because they've got a stinking hangover and a craving for a bacon sandwich. Kain is different, though. Once an innocent young noble, Kain's migrainous state was brought on by the nasty brigands who fatally thwacked his skull and, now resurrected as a vampire, his hunger for flesh is altogether more disturbing.

Why was Kain slain? And why was he brought back to life with vampiric qualities? To be quite honest, we don't really know. Either our boxed review copy was missing something or the supplied instructions are rather short on the background information. But, fortunately, it matters little because Blood Omen is an enjoyable and reasonably accessible role-playing romp.

Naturally enough you take the sword of Kain - he with the elongated incisors and box of Alka Seltzer - and you must lead him through the unpredictable hinterlands of Nosgoth to stop the crumbling Nine Pillars from, well, crumbling (though we've no idea why). Along the way, and for a similarly mysterious reason, you must kill several members of 'the Circle'. And then, we think, you're reborn. Or something along those lines.

The hack-and-slash-and-cast-a-spell style of Blood Omen will be instantly familiar to anyone who has ever played last year's popular role-playing game, Diablo. Viewed from a forced 3D perspective, the smoothly-animated Kain



wanders through Nosgoth vengefully picking off the brigands, sucking their blood in order to survive. From time to time buildings and temples are encountered, and these can be explored and pillaged. Within them you will find yet more nasties along with a varied but typical spattering of spells and weapons. These need to be collected in order to progress through Nosgoth, and to aid you in your battles with the various Circle fellows.

Though it plays fluidly, Blood Omen

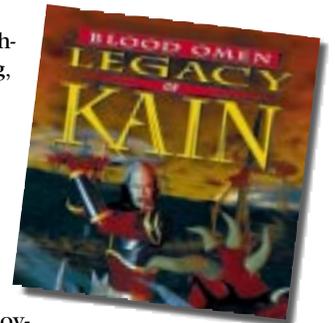
does have a few problems. Graphically it's lacking, with a top resolution of just 640x480 pixels and an unimaginative use of colours. Furthermore, it's slow. Not to the point of annoyance, but given that the year-old Diablo fairly zoomed along on the same test machine, and at a higher resolution, there's really little excuse for it.

At first confusing, Blood Omen - Legacy of Kain gets much better if you persevere. The graphical shortcomings have not (as yet) provoked us into launching the uninstaller, but they do prevent us from heralding this game as a classic.

Scott Colvey

● £39.99 (inc VAT)

● Activision: 01895 456700



HMV GAMES CHART



	Title	Manufacturer	HMV price
1	Aftermath Red Alert data disk	Virgin	£14.99
2	Quake Replay	GT Interactive	£14.99
3	Total Annihilation	GT Interactive	£39.99
4	Flight Simulator 98	Microsoft	£49.99
5	Hexen II	Activision	£44.99
6	Broken Sword II	Virgin	£39.99
7	Dark Rain	Activision	£44.99
8	Worms United Powerplus	Microprose	£12.99
9	Constructor	Acclaim	£39.99
10	International Rally Championship	Europress	£39.99

This chart is based on the latest available figures at the time of going to press.

Blood Omen - Legacy of Kain

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: Pentium 100MHz (166MHz recommended), 16Mb of RAM, 12Mb of hard disk space (minimum install) and a 4x CD-ROM drive.





Asterix comes to your PC with the latest two-disc sets from EuroTalk. The indomitable Gaul's mission isn't just to throw the Romans out of his homeland though; these discs can help you learn six languages including French, Italian and even Latin. The set for each target language costs £29.99 and should be available by the beginning of November.

EuroTalk:
0800 0182551



The full range of Fisher Price CD-ROMs is being localised for British children. Based on the famous toys, discs like **Play Family** and **Kidstown** teach basic skills like counting and drawing but are also fun to use.

CUC Software: 01189 209100
www.sierra-online.co.uk

The **Marvel Super Heroes Print Studio** lets children from eight years old print out scenes featuring their favourite cartoon characters, including the Incredible Hulk and Spider Man.

Meanwhile, the **Super Heroes Creativity Centre** has lessons from Stan Lee and other Marvel artists to teach children aged from 10 to draw their heroes. There's even a mystery to solve to catch the Super-Villain. Both disks cost £24.99.

Zablac Entertainment:
01626 332233

Disney's Hercules - Animated StoryBook

Multimedia PCs offer the perfect platform for animated software, and Disney has been quick to realise their potential. Its latest title is Hercules, an interactive Animated StoryBook aimed at four- to eight-year-olds.

This disc allows you to relive your favourite parts of the latest Disney blockbuster starring the legendary Greek hero Hercules. The age-old story is told over a series of roughly 20 screens, each with point-and-click characters, who will perform stunts and make witty comments.

Each screen has a scroll which unravels and tells the story. As each word is spoken, that word on the scroll is highlighted, making it easier for children to recognise and associate words. The story is a classic, rewritten for an American audience, and includes such statements as 'Hercules was out flying at altitude, when he spotted a centaur - half horse, half mean dude!'

As well as animated sequences, you can interact by listening to one of three songs, or even joining in yourself karaoke-style. Some of the scenes involve more interaction than others. For example, when Hercules needs to climb Mount Olympus from cloud to cloud a certain amount of skill with a mouse is needed, and this may be tricky for a four-year-old.

Megara, the peripheral female charac-

ter, admirably does her bit, but never looks like being able to save herself. So, as usual, it's up to our hero to save his lady in true Disney style.

Hercules is very entertaining, and to a lesser degree educational. As well as teaching a young child to use a PC, it is a useful tool to make reading more fun.

Jim Haryott

● £34.99 (inc VAT)

● Disney Interactive: 0181 222 1571

www.disney.co.uk/disneyinteractive

Disney's Hercules - Animated StoryBook

Overall



Minimum requirements: 486/66MHz, Windows 3.1/95, 8Mb of RAM and 30Mb of hard disk space, 2x CD-ROM drive, 256-colour VESA, PCI or other local bus video, 8-bit sound card, Microsoft-compatible mouse.



Girlfriends' Interactive Guide to Pregnancy

It's strange, but CD-ROMs are like buses: you wait ages for one and then several come along together. We'd not seen one on pregnancy before, and then within a week we were sent two – one even came with a testing kit so we could check if anyone in the office would find the disc useful in the immediate future.

The Girlfriends' Interactive Guide to Pregnancy arrived first, its launch timed to coincide with National Pregnancy Week. It's very firmly an American product, developed by publishers Simon and Schuster.

Despite the title, those who are legally married needn't feel left out. The Girlfriends are friends rather than partners and they dispense advice on your baby, body and mind from the windows of an attractive-looking house.

If you're looking for written advice, then you follow a bonny babe bouncing up and down stairs, and there's a good selection of videos. The information's pretty wide-ranging. If you're looking for a bit of light relief, there's the Gene Genie, a kind of fairground slot-machine that purports to show how your child

might turn out. The CD-ROM also has a whole section on dressing well in pregnancy.

Unfortunately, it's the more serious subjects that are most affected by the disc's American origins. It's intended to be a reassuring source of advice, but it's based on American childbirth practice rather than British and is more likely to mislead than help.

There's a risk of confusion – irritating but minor – from the use of American drug names and terms like C-section, while in the UK midwives and nurses play a much more active role than in the States, where there is more reliance on doctors. More seriously though, it's alarmist in the way it advises you to seek an epidural anaesthetic as soon as possible and then to stay in hospital as long as your insurance allows.

It's not fair to slate the Girlfriends'



Guide just because it's American. It's actually quite good, just inappropriate for a UK audience.

John Sabine

- £24.99 (inc VAT)
- Zablac: 01626 332233

Girlfriends' Interactive Guide to Pregnancy

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements:
PC – 486DX-33, Windows 3., 4Mb of RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, sound card.
Mac – 68040, System 7.1 or later, 8Mb of RAM.

9 Month Miracle

Like the Girlfriends' Guide (above), 9 Month Miracle is an American product and makes no attempt to hide the fact. However, it's a bit lighter on the advice it offers – and a lot heavier on the facts, tracking the foetus from conception to birth. As the said facts are pretty universal, the disc is a lot more suitable for a UK audience.

The content is in three parts. The main one is a month-by-month look at the foetus. It's surprisingly detailed but combines this with being very accessible. It's laid out as a book, so navigation is just a matter of clicking the pages, although there is an index if you want to look up a particular topic rather than going through chronologically.

There are lots of videos, shown on a TV set in the corner of a darkened room, and a high-tech scanner that shows each stage of the baby's development. Animations explain a number of concepts and really make them clear.

Second is a child's look at pregnancy, presented by a little cartoon girl called Emily. Although it's a

separate part of the CD-ROM, there are links to it from the main book and it's very informative.

Finally, there's an illustrated guide to both male and female anatomy. Fig leaves are optional.

If you want information about the growth of your baby, 9 Month Miracle could be helpful. It can't replace personal advice and ante-natal care, but it's got a lot of information – and we liked Emily.

John Sabine

- £19.99 (inc VAT)
- Mindscape: 01444 246333
www.mindscapeuk.com

9 Month Miracle

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements:
PC – 486DX-33, Windows 3.1 or later, 8Mb of RAM, 7Mb of hard disk space, 2x CD-ROM drive, SVGA display, sound card.
Mac – 68030, System 7.1 or higher, 8Mb of RAM, 6Mb of hard disk space, 2x CD-ROM drive, 256 colour display.
Thanks to Nurse Frances Donnelly and Midwife Rhiannon Williams for their comments and help evaluating these products.

