



# Phorward into Cyberspace

## The Shamen get wired!

Sean Clark, designer of The Shamen's 'Nemeton' Web site, interviews the group and finds out what motivated one of Britain's most 'wired' bands to get involved in the Internet.

One thing you can certainly say about The Shamen is that they are not your typical 'faceless', anonymous 1990s dance-band. Formed almost ten years ago by a group of Aberdonians that included current band-member Colin Angus, the group started its life as a sixties-influenced guitar band – at the time, developing a dance/rock sound that can be heard on early releases such as the 1986 album 'Drop' and the 'controversial' 1987 single 'Christopher Mayhew Says'.

Then in 1988, following a move down from Scotland to London in the midst of 'acid house' hysteria, The Shamen began their gradual transformation from a guitar-band to a fully-fledged dance-act, releasing the highly-charged 1989 album 'In Gorbachev We Trust' and the seminal 'EnTact' in 1990. This period also saw The Shamen starting to explore how they could use new technologies in their live performances, to create a total experience for their fans. This led to the development of a live 'Synergy' show which incorporated dazzling lighting effects, projected images, strobos, and continuous DJ music to transform the live venue into a 'virtual environment'. In this way, the concerts came alive and the audience were immersed in the total Shamen experience.

The ongoing refinement of the Shamen sound and the development of their live performances was seen to bear fruit in 1990 when they scored their first top 40 hit – 'Hyperreal'. This chart triumph was followed by a string of hit records, including the Number One single 'Ebenezer Goode' and the best-selling album 'Boss Drum' in 1992. Their music took another turn with the release of the remixed 'Different Drum' album in 1993. However, as all Shamen fans will have noticed, since the end of 1993 the band have been strangely quiet, and have released no new musical output.

Still, as you would expect, the band have been using this time profitably to work on new material and their silence is about to be broken with the release of a blistering new single 'Destination Eschaton' due out on 7 August. This will be followed by a double

album in September and a tour throughout the UK and Europe in the autumn. But apart from writing and recording new music, what else have The Shamen been doing to pass the time over the past 18 months?

### The Shamen Get Wired

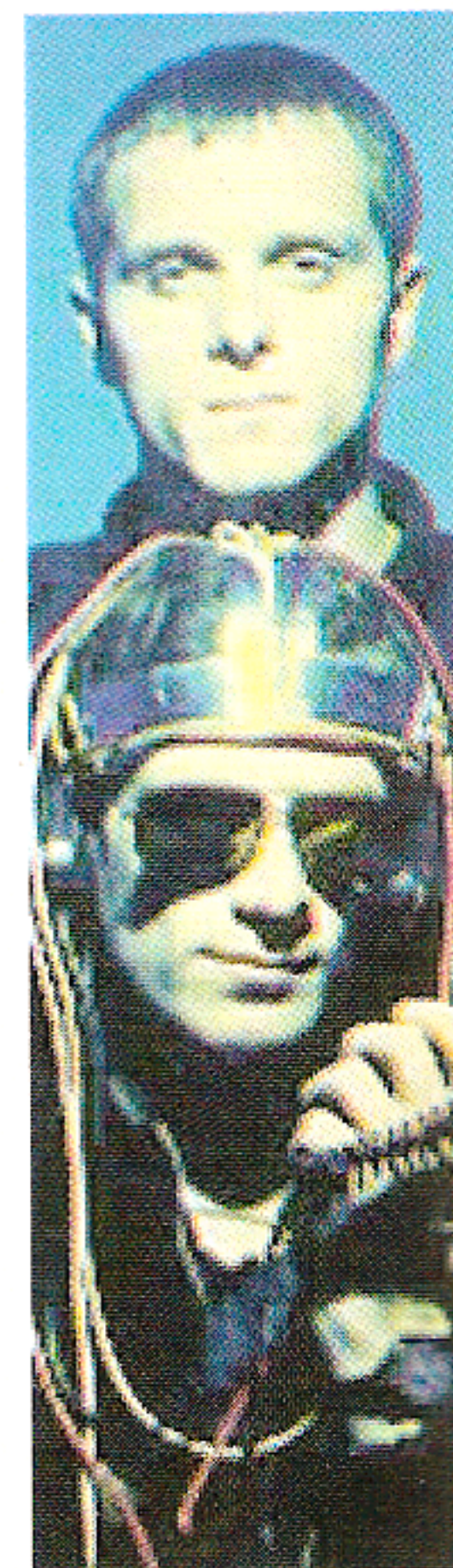
Amongst other things, the group have been continuing to explore the creative potential of new technology and, in particular, have been taking a considerable interest in the Internet. At present the most visible example of this interest is their 'Nemeton' Web site at <http://www.drci.co.uk/drci/shamen/> which has just seen a major upgrade and will be the focus of a number of Shamen Internet activities over the next few months. But the Shamen do not just have a Web site, they are also serious Net users themselves.

At a recent encounter I asked band-member Colin Angus for just how long had he been using the Net.

"For more than a year now. I'm with Demon, who might not be the most hyper-efficient provider [we all recognise their engaged tone!], but they do allow the use of both 'Talk' and 'CUSeeMe', two of my favourite communications applications – I was 'encouraged' to subscribe by Martin Kavanagh of the VirtualiTea Room."

Similarly, Charles Cosh, The Shamen's manager, is an active user. He was attracted to the Net believing, "It's the coolest and fastest way of checking out what other artists, businesses and 'wired' society has to say. From the artists' point of view it gives them the ability to communicate directly with the public, and to inform people of their philosophy or attitude to a greater extent than is generally possible via the established, opinionated and packaged media."

And The Shamen's exploration of the Net has already gone beyond simple 'netsurfing' and email. Colin has been using it as a way of participating in live events without being physically 'present' at the venue. Last October he took part in the 'Soundworks' event in Glasgow via a live audio/visual/data



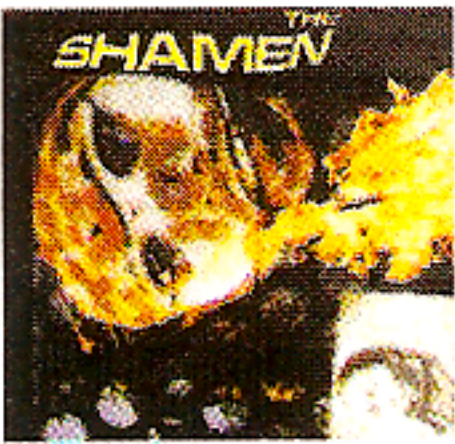
The Shamen's  
Colin Angus and  
Mr. C.







Internet link-up which coincided with the display of new Shamen visuals and an exclusive preview of two new Shamen tracks. More recently, in February, he joined 'Feed Your Head' in Derby from his London flat via a CUSeeMe video link for an interactive 'chat' session.



### Enter Nemeton

It is, though, the Nemeton Web site that most Shamen fans on the Net will be familiar with. Running as a trial service since the end of last year, it has just been redesigned and relaunched to reflect the new look of the band's graphics - with 3-D logos, groovy backgrounds and William Latham's computer artwork all combining to produce Web pages that aim to reflect the richness of The Shamen's music.

One goal in building Nemeton was to use the Internet to spread information about The Shamen and their interests. As Colin says, "We've always seen ourselves as an 'information' band, so it was a natural step to connect to the Internet. The development of Nemeton has given us added scope for communicating that information. Unlike many musicians' Web pages which are often seen simply as an ad for the band and their records, Nemeton includes a bibliography of shamanic literature resources, a 'form' for reading and writing to a shamanic discussion group, links to other worthwhile Web sites and a prototype 'bar' to enable people to link-up and chat online".

And why is the site called Nemeton?

Colin explains, "Nemeton is an old Celtic term meaning sacred grove or meeting place."

It's this 'meeting place' aspect of Nemeton that has seen the most development recently with the introduction of the Nemeton MOO at <telnet://dougal.derby.ac.uk:7777>. The MOO is the latest incarnation of the Nemeton 'bar' idea and provides a text-based discussion space where people can meet on the Net and share ideas. Earlier versions of the Nemeton Bar proved unreliable due to the conferencing software used. But it's hoped that by using standard MOO software the system will be more robust - and, of course, people can now access it via dedicated MOO software as well as their standard Telnet client.

### Destination Eschaton

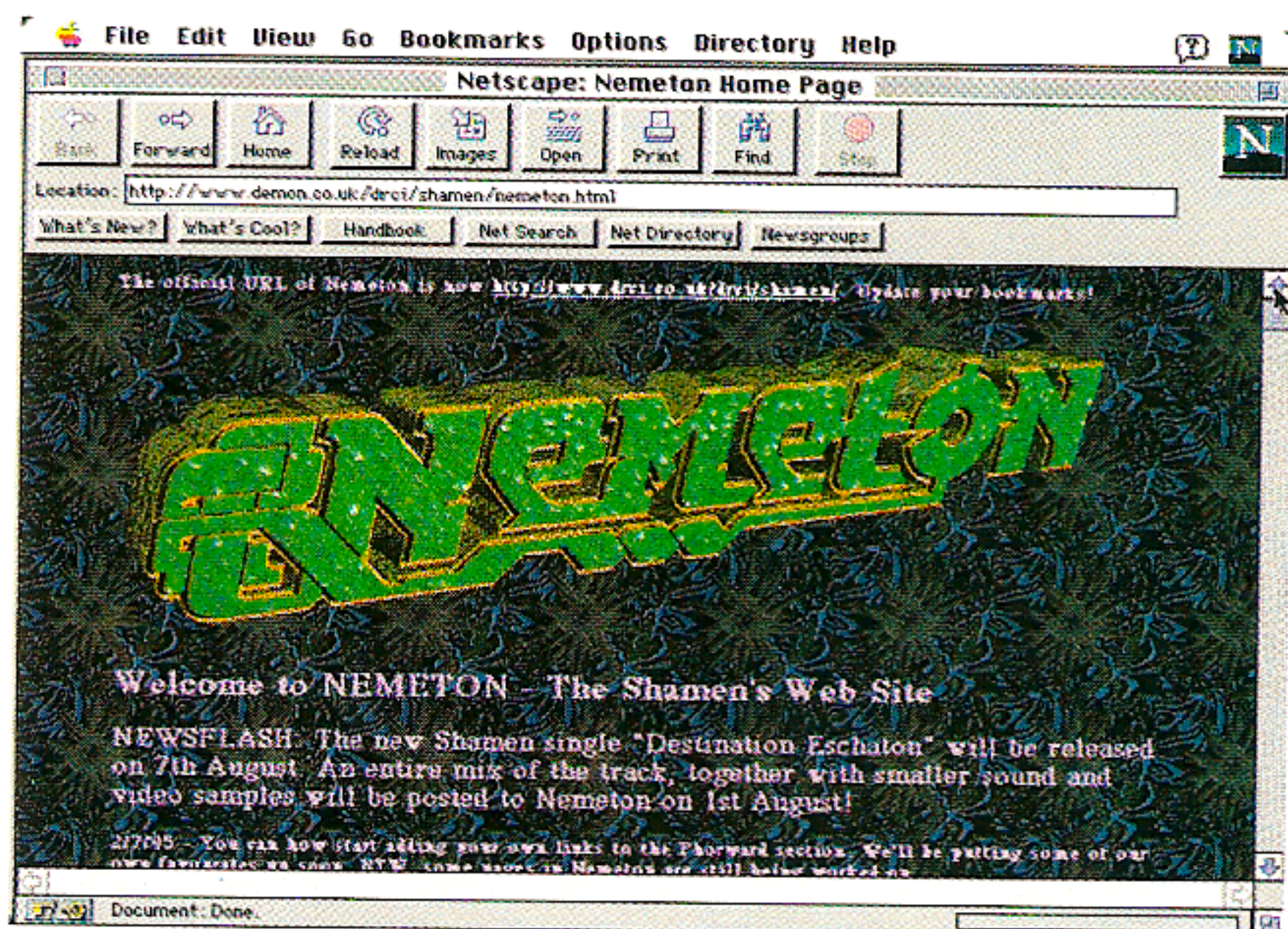
With the release of 'Destination Eschaton' imminent what are The Shamen's plans for promoting their new music on the Net? Colin says, "We intend to preview the single with a special presentation on our Web site a week in advance of the actual release." Charles Cosh adds, "We are also developing some Internet-only releases, to be made available around the time of the LP release."

These documents are already under development, with the Destination Eschaton Internet promo taking the form of a Web page of sound samples, video clips and background material about the new single. The page is due to go live on 1 August.

The album is being accompanied by something more







**Above: The Nemeton home page at: <http://www.drci.co.uk/drci/shamen/>**



elaborate – an 'explorable' multimedia version of the new release that will allow people to listen to sound samples and get information about the various tracks on the record.

### Nemeton Live Events

With a history of innovative live shows, as seen on the Synergy and the Progeny tours, it's not surprising that The Shamen are also looking at the Net to enhance their concerts. A number of ideas are being discussed, including using ISDN communication lines to feed images, sounds and other types of data from the live concert venue on to the Internet in order to allow Net users to 'experience' a Shamen gig from afar.

Clearly, if this is to work for the typical Internet user then the bandwidth needed to 'view' the concert via the Net must not be too high. So, rather than using video feeds (such as the Rolling Stones Internet video broadcast during their Voodoo Lounge tour) the band may use still video cameras to repeatedly capture images from the venue for inclusion in a 'dynamic' Web site – with microphones being used to sample short 'sound-bites'. Viewers will then be able to look at the current 'snapshot' of the gig or browse through earlier snapshots. This, combined with an ability for the Internet viewers to remotely influence some aspect of the performance – such as some aspects of the light show – via World Wide Web 'forms' should lead to a unique way for Shamen fans around the Internet to participate in a Shamen concert.

### And the Future?

One of the biggest challenges facing any artist when presented with a new medium is to find ways of using the technology that goes beyond what is available with current media. And, typically, the discovery of these new techniques often comes as the result of experimentation.

This experimental approach is how the music industry seems to be engaging with the Internet. For example, The Stones' video broadcast, ISDN transmissions by bands such as Orbital, and numerous band's Web pages – including The Shamen's – all point to a future where the distribution and performance channels available to musicians are much more varied than those available now. It's also interesting to note that many of the bands that are most (not all) of the bands active on the Net are artists who already use computer technology to generate their music.



## Jargon

**RealAudio:** A propriety system, with a freeware player, that delivers reasonable real-time audio over almost any Internet connection – including 14.4k modems. For more information connect to <http://www.realaudio.com/>.

**MOO:** Allows numerous users to enter a text-based 'virtual world' and interact via their keyboards. See Chris Hand's MOO page at <http://www.cms.dmu.ac.uk/~cph/moos.html>.

**CUSEE Me:** Cornell University's freeware videoconferencing system for Macintoshes and PCs. It allows greyscale video images to be sent across the Internet at variable frame rates.

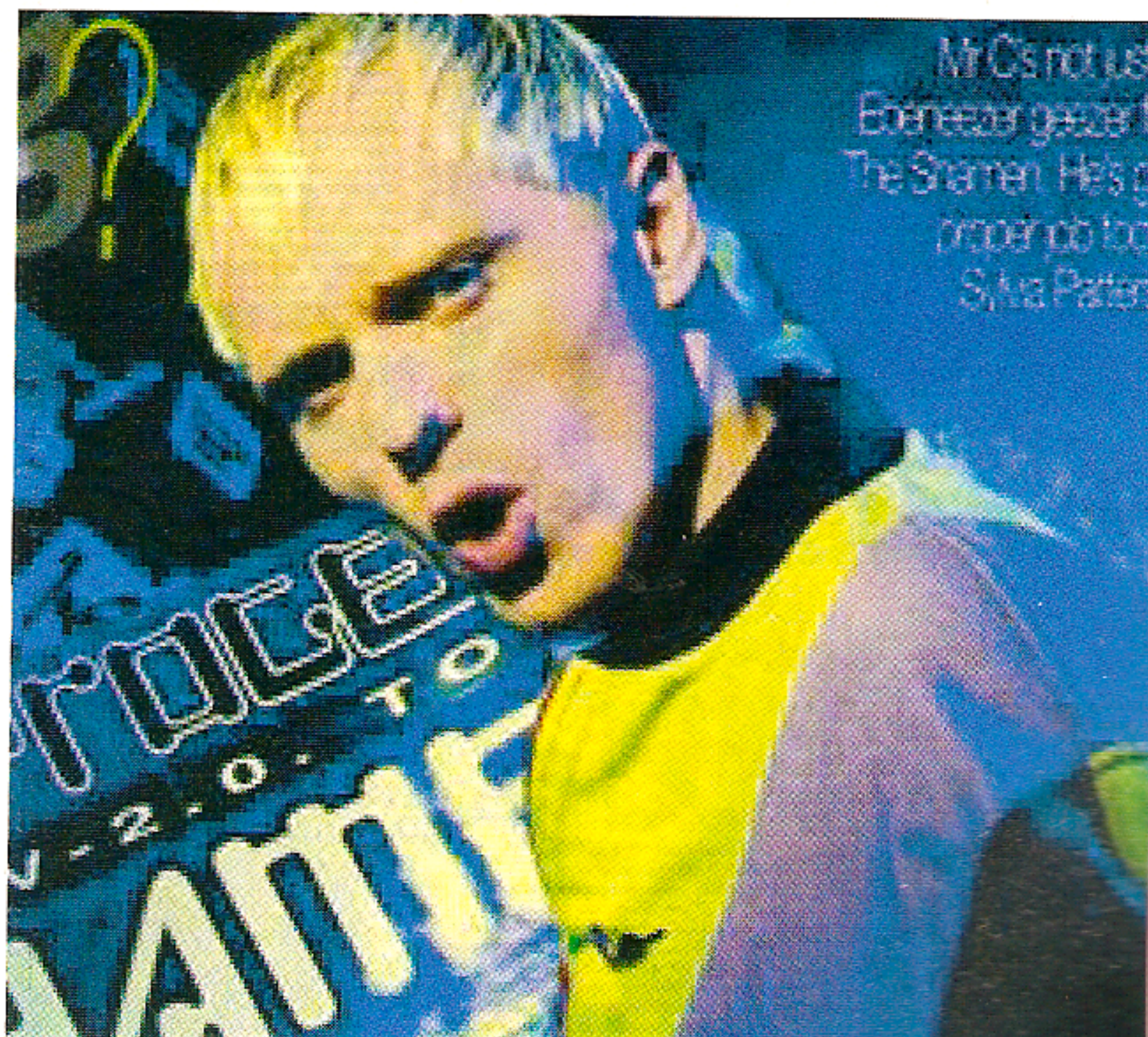
**Talk:** A UNIX protocol for terminal-to-terminal 'chat' sessions. Uses much less bandwidth than audio-based systems, whilst still allowing private person-to-person communication. Clients are available for Macs and PCs.

**ISDN or Integrated Services Digital Network:** A world-wide standard for higher-speed (64K and above) dial-up digital communications. Although more expensive than traditional telephone lines, ISDN is proving popular for people who need to connect their computers to the Internet (or to each other) at higher speeds than available with conventional modems.

Another important idea under experimentation is 'music-on-demand'. As Colin Angus says, "The Internet has the potential, now that real-time audio transfer is here [see boxout], to circumvent the record companies completely, with consumers buying music from the artist on a pay-as-you-play basis."

Charles Cosh but is cautious about the likely timescales of this development, "Things won't change much until very high-speed modems and secure data-transfer mechanisms are available. Also, compared to cassette or CD players, there aren't that many computers installed in UK homes, and even less of these are on the Net." He sees Internet use increasing with the arrival of the 'set-top box' and a reduction in telephone charges.

"If someone decides to market an 'Internet computer' with 'RealAudio' at full CD-quality stereo for £200 and if local call charges all but disappear, then we could see a far greater impact as the computer takes over from the TV/radio as the main audio/visual source in the home." As we know, this technology is coming, with everyone from BT to Apple running trials of interactive 'media boxes'. And when these devices reach the home one thing is for sure, The Shamen will be ready and waiting to take full advantage of them...



**Sean Clark spends much of his time building Web sites for the Internet company DRC Internet, as well as writing for various Internet magazines. His e-mail address is [seanc@drci.co.uk](mailto:seanc@drci.co.uk).**