ATPM

About This Particular Macintosh™ 2.04: about the **personal** computing experience

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Cover Art

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We need new cover art every month! Write to us!

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NYMUG, New York City
SenseNet, New York City
Tulsa Info Mall BBS, Oklahoma
Raven Net, British Columbia
SpiderNet, Holland
Info-Mac and all its Mirrors
Any others? Let us know!

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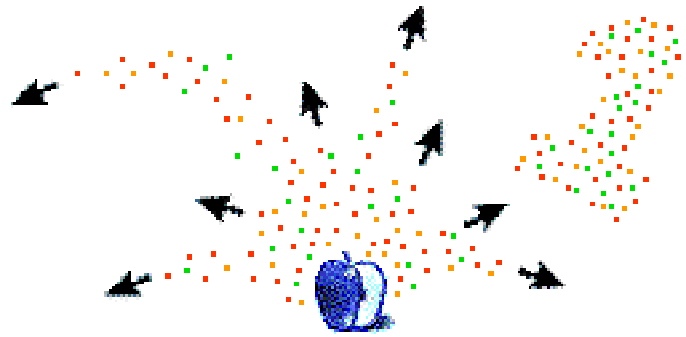© 1996, All Rights Reserved
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The Legal Stuff

Wheee!

Hi there, and welcome to our first anniversary issue! A little over a year ago, ATPM 1.01 hit the stands, as it were. A measly 246k magazine about my Macintosh, my favorite shareware, my favorite game, and so on, it took me two whole days to put together while I ignored my graduate work. I uploaded the finished product to America Online and eWorld and sat back to watch. I think a whole fifty people read that first issue that first month.

We've come a long way since then.

ATPM is now read across the face of the planet, with comments coming to us from as far away as Australia, Hong Kong, and Sweden. We have a loyal and capable (nee brilliant) staff of editors, a dedicated and talented stable of writers, and distribution through AOL, CompuServe, Info-Mac, and at least fifty small BBSes across the globe.

And our readership is growing. This month alone we increased our subscriber base by almost 15%! I'm getting so much mail (last issue not withstanding) that I can hardly keep my head above water.

And yet, our reader contributions are down. It's not because fewer people are reading the magazine. And it's not because there aren't folks out there with stories to tell. ATPM thrives on stories from you, out there in the real world with your Macintosh. Like this month's Segments piece by Lynn Roseborough, in which she writes to the "Dilbertmeisters" about something she bought on their web site. Your anecdotes, art, stories and experiences, with or about your Macs, are what drive this magazine. It's what we offer that makes ATPM unique.

Just as you enjoy reading about other people's experiences, they, too, will enjoy reading about yours. Please consider sending us whatever you want to put down, whether it's a story, an opinion, a review, or a picture. I'm looking forward to it.

Unfortunately, in all the anniversary partying, our web page was delayed. There's some stuff online now, but it's not really ready for prime time. So, the URL is somewhere in this issue. If you can find it, you're welcome to surf our web spot early (but keep in mind it's early). Subscribers will get a note in their mailbox when the site is up and ready. Your patience is anticipated. <grin>

Thanks for reading *ATPM*,

RD Novo
Publisher Guy

Unabashed Praise

ATPM's new artwork is a treat to the eyes. My particular favorites are the February cover art by Romeo Esparrago & the new Finder icon by Marc Robinson. But that's not all. ATPM has acquired a bunch of very talented designers. The artwork continues to be superlative in the March issue. P. Terence Cultra's "Reviews" are right on the money. I know because I have been using some of the software he reviewed, & we are in total agreement <G>. And whoever thought up "Keyword" is brilliant! It's original & unique; I've never before seen a feature with that particular focus. In fact, Mark Starlin got me so interested in railroads, I've followed up on some of his suggestions. ATPM is a terrific e-zine. The entire staff should be justifiably proud of the result of their efforts. Hooray for ATPM. **Toby Moore,** *America Online*

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I was doing my Sunday morning browsing in the MIT HyperArchive when I came accross ATPM and decided to give it a look. Imagine my surprise to find not only a interesting and entertaining e-zine, but one based in my hometown. It's really nice to know I'm not the only Mac enthusiast around here. Being surrounded by a bunch of IBM heads can get pretty lonely! I'm looking forward to the next issue. Keep up the good work! **Ted Leonard,** *Internet*

Thanks to everyone who writes in with good things to say about the magazine, the writers, and the articles we publish. We only hope to give you stuff you want to read.

Brave Attempt

Greetings, It is a grim man who writes to you now. You see, but a moment ago I was nearing the end of a lengthy expose on my particular mac (Isla Bella) and glibbly reached for the American

Heritage Dictionary, momantarily forgetting that it did not get along with my Aaron extension...seconds later forced quit not an option the mocking restart button had my full if belated attention. I have not the strength now to recreate what alost was, instead I offer only my thanks for a zine well done and immanently readable. I was looking forward to regaling you with an account of scoring 26.5 on your coolness rating system. And then speaking at length about the changes I had witnessed in your zine since day one, and some of the wonder you had shown me a glimpse of, instead I only ask that you please add my name to your subscribers list and continue to do what you have been doing so well. Until such time as I may properly relate the events hinted at herein, I bid you farewell and may you never step on your beard. Sincerely, **S.C. Blake,** *America Online*

We urge you to try, try again. Your writing has already been published once!

Send your e-mail to rdnovo@aol.com. All mail becomes the property of ATPM.

About *This* Particular Mac

by RD Novo

A Sure Thing

So, the other day I get my Apple Citibank VISA bill, and I notice that, lo and behold, I have earned $500 worth of Apple Dollars. I'm maxed out for the year, which ends when I began the program, in April. I'd say my timing was pretty much perfect. So I decide to spend some of it. I call Apple up, and I order the System 7.5 Update 2.0 on CD-ROM. Three weeks, they say. Fine. $13.50, they say. Fine, I'm getting reimbursed, I tell them. That's nice, they say.

So I call Citibank, and once they've asked me for my dog's given name, the license plate of my father's first car, and the street address of the place I bought my Macintosh, they inform me that they'll send me a letter to fill out for reimbursement. Seven to ten days, they say.

The Citibank letter arrives in three days. Inside they let me know that the minimum amount I can reimburse is $20. In other words, my System Update 2.0 doesn't count, unless they charge me $6.50 for shipping. No sign of the update from Apple yet.

So now I've got my eye on a "No money down, no interest accrues for one year!" computer deal at Best Buy. I checked carefully, and you can apply Apple Dollars to stuff from Authorized Apple Resellers.

Tiffany is holding me back.

Forcefully.

After all, I keep saying I want to wait for one of the PPCP machines, so I can… run Windows NT? OS/2? Why would I wait, exactly? So I can buy a Compaq-labeled Mac? (Oh, wait, then I can't use my Apple Dollars…) Like I said, she's struggling mightily to keep me away from Best Buy.

• • •

I signed up for a second account with America Online the other day. I dug through the trash for one of those ubiquitous AOL disks, threw the first two I found back (they were for Windows) and popped the third into the computer. I loaded the software, started it up, and went through the sign-in process. When I entered my credit card information, however, it stopped, told me to call Customer Service, and hung up.

I called, dreading a two hour phone wait. But the AOL customer service people were friendly.

speedy, and apparently from Brooklyn. (I used to live in New York, I can recognize the accent.) She told me that they ask you to call Customer Service because they want to make sure you realize you'll be getting two monthly charges to your credit card. I said yes, and she told me to sign on.

Unfortunately, "ATPM" is still unavailable as a screen name on America Online, and I can't think of another name I want to use as the primary account name.

Oh, and a funny story about AOL (the service I love to hate). Sunday night, I was watching TV and one of those annoying AOL commercials came on. The wholesome guy turns to me and says, "A friend of mine told me I should try America Online, and I said, 'But I already have a computer!'" What does that mean? In any case, at the same time as this commercial was playing, Tiffany was logging on to AOL at the computer, and the service was failing, telling her to please try again in fifteen minutes.

Oh, and I almost forgot. On April 1st I called up AOL on my main account and it wouldn't let me on. It said my password was invalid. Hello? I hadn't changed it, so I was very suspicious. I called the 800 number offered by my AOL software and got a very helpful person who was more than happy to change my password to something else, if I would only give her my name, address, and credit card number…

Hello?

Does anyone else think this shouldn't pass for security? Does anyone else think this is a bit too easy to crack? Another reason to look for a different service.

• • •

My preferred option was to sign up with an Internet Service Provider (ISP) for basic net access. I finally signed with Nfinity here in Omaha, for an unlimited account. They're getting harder and harder to come by these days, unlimited accounts. For the most part you can get a 60 hour a month account, or sometimes a 120 hour a month account. I like knowing that I don't have to worry, even if it turns out I only use 40 hours a month. I get my Web access, my newsgroups, and some e-mail from Nfinity, and would give up AOL sooner. Unfortunately, I'd also be giving up the AOL software libraries, which are what keeps me hooked. There really is no better place to go file browsing.

But while I was signing up for Nfinity, I was also signing off of Econet. Econet, one of the IGC Networks, was a staple when I was in graduate school. They have content geared towards environmental topics, including specific action items and headlines, and a number of environmental groups have accounts with them. When I needed to get in touch with the World Wildlife Fund, they had an account right there. But now I don't need their services, and frankly, they charge too much. Next!

eWorld. Don't get me started. I had great hopes for the little online service that thought it could. You could almost hear the whispers every time you logged on, "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can…" Alas, in the end it couldn't. 150,000 active member in two years just wasn't enough to convince Gil Amelio, Apple's new CEO, that the world needed another online service. I humbly present that, while the world does not need another online service (visit the Web recently?) it could just benefit from a real online community, which is what eWorld was shaping up to be.

A moment of silence if you would.

Now I have only three online accounts. One on AOL, one on Nfinity, and my old one on

CompuServe. I feel kind of silly when I open Emailer now. Where I used to have account after account, I don't any longer. I still get a ton of mail, mind you, but it seems very impersonal now.

<sigh>

• • •

In the "We Hate Wintel" world, we love stories like the following. I was at work, working on this column, on a Gateway2000 486 computer with Windows 95 and Word 6.0. The program really is snappy in Windows, y'know? Anyway, I saved the file as a text file on my floppy, took it home, popped it into my IIci, opened the disk, and dragged the file to my hard drive.   Then I opened it with Tex-Edit Plus, a shareware word processor. Just try doing that the other direction. (I did, and you can forget it. Though you can use your Mac to format a floppy as a DOS disk, instead of as a Macintosh disk. That's cool, too.)

• • •

I also did my taxes in March, or rather I tried to. I got paid for some writing I did during 1995, and I was going through the 1040A tax form with speed and relish when Tiffany asked me if I'd read the instructions through from page one. "Nah," I said. "I'm just filling in the form as I go. It's really easy."

"Well, what are you doing about that money IMG paid you," she asked.

"Um. Is that income?" I had a doomed feeling right then. So I start reading the tax code (they call it that because it's so hard to understand) and eventually I figure out that I need form 1040, not 1040A. So I pull out the form (I cleaned out the Post Office) and I start going through it.

This one's not so easy.

So I go to the instruction book for the 1040 and... I don't have one! We must not have picked one up at the Post Office. Now it's the weekend, it's snowing outside, and Tiffany is now speeding through her forms. I think to myself, "This bites."

But I have a computer, and a new internet account! So I booted up the Web and began to search. Yahoo! Liked my search for "tax forms" and yielded several good leads, including the IRS page. I'd read about how confusing and horrible the IRS site was supposed to be, so I looked at the other sites first. www.1040.com was not terribly well organized, and I couldn't figure out what I needed to get, or where. Other sites were for tax preparation graduate students, or for tax professionals. Finally I swallow hard and go for the IRS site...

And I was delighted. They had a well-organized, clean, brightly lit site where you could find just what forms you needed, in three different formats, for easy file transfer to your own computer. In a flash (well, forty minutes of downloading later) I had the forms I needed in Acrobat PDF format. I sat down to work with them and... my file was corrupted.

Tiffany looked up from her nearly completed taxes to see me standing there with a clump of hair in one hand and a sharp pencil in the other. Well, not exactly, but you do understand my frame of mind.

I decided I'd do my taxes later. See you next month.

• • •

The t-shirts have been sent to the designer, producer, and printer person. There will at first only be Only Boy t-shirts, with the lovable lug on the front, and probably on the back, too. Barring any exorbitant pricing, of course. You'll be the first to know when they're available. Other designs will follow, once we get some capital.

Warlords II is still my favorite game. My friend Nancy and I have been playing off and on (mostly on) for the past year now, since I moved away from New York. Yes, by e-mail. Very cool feature, that. We've been downloading some new armies and scenarios from the 'net, too, and using them to add interest to the game. Mostly she wins, though. It's a strong testament to this game's quality that I still like playing it, even if I lose all the time. If you'll look at the first issue of ATPM, from over a year ago, you'll notice that Warlords II was my favorite game then, too. Only the best last that long. (Of course, I only have a IIci. If I had a PowerMac, I might be singing a different tune.)

And finally, nobody's sent me any Free Stuff to play with lately. I'm waiting. A drawing tablet would be really nice right now. (So would a PowerMac, for the above reason. But I'm not holding my breath.)

A Very Bright Man

This first anniversary of ATPM also marks my ten years of Mac ownership. Believe it or not, I'm one of the few people that can say they actually inherited their first Mac. Due to my father's untimely death in 1986 I became a Mac owner.

My father was a depression era, first generation American. He was a hard working senior executive of a fast-growing Fortune 500 company. And he liked his Macintosh. It was seemingly uncharacteristic of his personality but he enjoyed buying it and using it. Something about it said "gee, whiz!"

In the ten years since I've either owned or used extensively seven different Macintosh models. I currently use a 7500/100. I like it very much. The more I use my Mac, the more the Mac makes sense.

I now have two children of my own. Jessica will soon be five and Matthew just turned three. For quite some time Jessica has wanted her own computer. The other day while I was in the office supply store with my kids, Jessica asked to look at the computers. She stood in front of the Performa that was on display. Maybe it was the logo that was familiar to her. But maybe it wasn't. She's learned her alphabet and she knows a "Barbie" from a cheap imitation.

This is why there will always be a Mac. It brings to life the child in all of us. It made my Dad smile and sometimes it makes me giggle. It's what Wall Street may soon understand—the fun doesn't have to stop. It just has to be delivered on time and on budget.

Reports are that the personal computer market, in the short-term, will find growth mostly in sales to repeat customers and in the sale of computer-like devices for specific purposes. This is why there is not a Windows '96 but there will be a "Copland." This is why there is a Newton 130 and a Pippin.

Apple's real value is the loyalty of its customers. Mr. Amelio knows this. He is a very smart man. Chances are he will be a very wealthy man, too. He will protect Mac customers like a mama bear protects her cubs.

My advice to potential computer buyers is this: The Mac is better. The Mac is more fun. Please do your analysis. Compare the microprocessors. Evaluate the performance. Look at the software. I'm confident you'll buy a Mac. But before you buy anything take along a five-year old who

instinctively knows the difference between a rip-off and the real thing.

My advice to those of you who already have invested in a new Mac is this: Buy a few shares of Apple stock. Within two years it may be Wall Street that says "gee whiz!"

My Dad was a very bright man. I think his granddaughter's pretty bright, too. Take my advice. Mr. Amelio won't mind sharing the wealth.
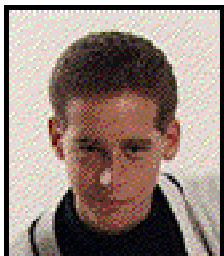
On the
Front Lines
by Adam Junkroski

The Hullabaloo in Cupertino

It's amazing, isn't it? Human nature, that is. The fact that when a group of people has something good, those who have not want to band together and destroy it utterly. Call it jealousy, call it immaturity, call it evil. Whatever it is, it's what has driven critics of the Macintosh platform for more than a decade. And this past year has been no exception.

"The Fall of an American Icon," proclaimed an alarmist headline from what used to be a reputa ble news magazine. Stock downgrades from Merril Lynch, among other major investment firms. Allegations that Windoze '95 has leveled the playing field. Let me take these one at a time for you, and show you just why these familiar stabs at Apple are so unfair, incorrect, and just plain cruelty without cause.

"The Fall of an American Icon." This was proclaimed after Apple announced a loss of $60 million. That's sixty million. A six, followed by seven zeros. Apple is a company worth roughly eleven BILLION. That's the number eleven, followed by NINE ZEROS. Those of you who know even basic math are aware of what a HUGE difference that is. More importantly, Apple had, at the time, close to one BILLION dollars in CASH on the ledgers. That means they had more than enough to absorb that loss, and yes, even the $700 million one they just announced recently. I hate to annoy the BusinessWeeks of the world, but Apple isn't going anywhere soon. Slam them all you want to in the headlines.

One thing about the alarmist headlines that really gets to me is how the same media that naysays Apple refuses to acknowledge crisis when companies like Compaq lose more than eighteen points in one day on the stock market. Or when IBM took a hit a few years back for several BILLION dollars, laying off more than 10,000 people. Or when other major computer manufacturers like Packard Bell say that things aren't as good as they used to be, and scale back production and lay off workers. But have a bad day in Cupertino, and man oh man, it's the end of the world.

If I sound mad here, it's because I am.

What about the stock downgrades? Merril Lynch downgraded Apple's rating several times last year, each time citing reasons such as "dwindling market share" (wrong-it's fluctuated at worst, but rarely if ever dropped lower than seven percent in the last five or six years), "an installed base of only 20 million customers" (first, wrong…it's 22 million just in the U.S., not 20, and 56 million worldwide, second-they forget to mention that more than 19 million of those will repurchase a Macintosh when theirs becomes outdated, and that nearly two million more will be first-time users. They also fail to mention a loyal and market-leading educational base, as well as digital film and audio editing, both of which are dominant Mac markets) and "dwarfing by other computer platforms, namely Wintel." (okay, this one is actually correct. But Coke outsells Pepsi worldwide by an almost 9-to-1 margin, and you don't see Pepsi dying off.)

So if only one of these three arguments is actually able to hold water, then how can a supposedly responsible financial giant like Merril Lynch downgrade Apple's buy recommendation? Simple. Because they want to. Why? Because of corporate pressure from giants like Microsoft and Compaq who can offer perks and large commissions on the sale of their stock to brokers. They are encouraged to downgrade Apple by these folk, and when there's a buck to be made, downgrade they shall.

It's interesting to note that on the day that Apple first announced a possible $700 million loss, its stock actually rose 5.76%, on a day when Compaq only rose 1.71%, IBM .45%, and Microsoft lost .24%. Yes, all those companies have higher stock prices than Apple, so small changes would mean smaller percentages, but the computer market tends to dip and sway as a whole, and not everyone did so well that day. Analysts felt Apple's stock increased with the announcement, because investors felt Amelio was doing the right thing by taking the whole enchilada on the chin this quarter. Investor confidence in Apple is rising with Gil's tenure as CEO. Too bad the investment firms don't feel the same.

Finally, what about the allegations that Windoze '95 has leveled the playing field? Well, that's a good question. Most Mac users will still scratch their heads in amazement that a PC user could be enthralled with something so non-intuitive. It isn't the MacOS by a longshot. Even PC World

magazine reported that the MacOS was rated highest in their independent test...over Windows 3.1, Windows '95, OS2Warp, and even Windows NT. That's right...PC World. People using the MacOS still get more done in less time with fewer problems than folks using non-Mac operating systems. Does that sound like a leveled playing field to you? Microsoft might be catching up, but if you see the competition's back, as my father says, you're still behind. Even if you can count the hairs.

Windows '95 is, in my own opinion, such a humongous improvement over 3.1, that if you had asked, I wouldn't have even guessed that they both came from Microsoft. However, I would still be asking questions like "What does .ini stand for?" and "why doesn't anything happen when I click on this start button?" Intuitive, it ain't. I had to use 3.1 before, in my job at the time, and I will admit that if it were the only thing I had ever seen, '95 would be like a miracle. But my feeling on the matter is this: the improvement is so great, the critics hate to admit that as good as it is, it still can't compare to what amounts to a decade-old operating system. It hurts too much. Bill Gates puts all this effort into his new baby, and it still winds up being just second best in terms of usability and efficiency. When you own a PC, that's the last thing you want to believe. And you can take that to the front lines.

How Cool is Your Mac?

By RD Novo, rdnovo@aol.com

It's been a year since that first issue of *About This Particular Mac*. Of all the articles we've published in that year, one has been more popular than any other, generating mail even today. That article appeared in the very first issue of the magazine, and was called "How Cool is Your Mac?" In it, I tried to inject a little humor into the trials of deciding when to upgrade your computer.

In the spirit of anniversary recollection, I have updated and reprinted the article for this issue. I hope you enjoy it just as much this time around.

Bewildered by the vast array of computers out there? Don't know if you need PPC? PCI? Should you buy from PCC? Need PCMCIA capability? You want help? Well, we're not here to tell you what to buy, but we'll give you a helping hand on your way. This is the one-of-a-kind ATPM Coolness Factor rating system.

It's very simple. You take your computer, and you go through the list, tallying points as they apply to your setup. And the end you'll have a Coolness Factor for your computer system. Then you do the same for the system you are looking to buy, and you compare Coolness Factors. If you're really into it, you can have a contest at school, though we suggest an impartial judge decide on the merit of each entry. ("But, why can't I count all of my Apple branded t-shirts as accessories?")

Out of the Box

- **1 point** for being a computer. They are inherently cool.
- **1 point** if it has a colorful, rainbow-striped apple on the outside. After all, we pay for it, we might as well reap some benefit. Remember, this is a relative rating, and having a clone still isn't as cool as having an original.
- **1 point** if it runs the Macintosh operating system. (If you have a problem with this you're reading the wrong magazine. Go play Descent II, it'll make you feel better.)
- **1 point** if your computer is an all in one design. Still as cool as the day it was born.
- **1 point** if both a keyboard and a monitor came with your computer. Selling incomplete machines is not cool. Pretending you can buy a computer for $999 when it really costs $1400

is also not cool.
- **1 point** if it has an internal hard drive. I learned my "Mac SE with two 800k floppies" lesson. See below if you have an automatic floppy changer.
- **1 point** if it has a pre-installed CD-ROM drive.
- **1 point** if it has a PowerPC inside.
- **1 point** if you can turn your computer off from the keyboard. This is way cool.

Points for your Stuff

- **1 point** if you have a printer attached to your computer.
- **1 more point** if your printer is a laser printer.
- **1 more point** if your printer is a color printer.
- **1 point** for every other peripheral attached to your computer. This includes stereo speakers (not built in speakers), external storage devices like hard drives or tape drives, modems, CD-ROMs, a coffee pot, whatever. Sorry, your mouse doesn't count.
- **1 point** for every 8 MB of RAM (or fraction thereof) installed in your computer.
- **1 point** for every accelerator card installed, making your Mac faster than others of its ilk. This is a colossal expenditure of money, and deserves some reward.
- **1 point** for potential coolness if your computer has empty expansion slots.
- **1 point** if your computer is part of a local area network (LAN).
- **1 more point** if that LAN is purely infrared (i.e. no wires involved)

Points for Blatant Excess

- **1 point** for every 100 MB of unused internal hard disk space. (Zip disks do not count, for all intents and purposes they are like floppies.)
- **1 point** for every extra monitor attached to your Mac.
- **2 points** if you've dispensed with a modem completely and use ISDN instead. Add another point if you can get your GeoPort pod to do anything useful. (Doorstop does not count, but using it as a puppy's chew toy does, your indifference is cool.)
- **1 point** if your computer answers your telephone on a regular basis.
- **1 point** for each additional processor in your computer. That includes the DOS on Mac card from Reply Corp. and PowerPC upgrades that keep your original processor in place.
- **1 point** if you have foot-actuated rudder pedals for that complete flight simulation experience. Your single-mindedness is legendary.
- **1 point** if your Mac actually answers when you talk to it.
- **1 point** if you have the Apple TV Tuner card and refuse to watch normal TV anymore. Add another point if you get CNN at work on your Mac.
- **1 point** if you have an automatic floppy changer.
- **1 point** if your monitor tracks you as you walk around the room. Not that I've seen this, but it would be cool, no?

Points for Trying

- **1 point** if your computer is over five years old, and yet you still use it regularly. (Keeping important papers from blowing away in a stiff breeze does not constitute regular use. An aquarium-converted Mac, ala Andy Ihnatko does count.)
- **1 point** if you still haven't upgraded to a color Macintosh.
- **1 point** if you have resisted owning a Microsoft compatible machine too. It's okay if they force you to use one at the office, we can't punish you for the corporate nincompoops you work for.
- **1 point** if you think your Newton is so good, you don't need a computer.

• **5 points** if you still don't own a computer (and you're using someone else's to read this). It's getting to the point where ignoring the information superhighway (and its attendant metaphors) is retro-chic, and that's sort of French for "cool."

The Bottom Line

My IIci, when it was brand new (gosh, four-and-a-half years ago now) had a Coolness Factor of merely 11 points. When I did this column a year ago, it had a coolness factor of 14, considerably better. Today, Pokegenia is 16 points Cool. In another half a year or so, she'll get another point for being five years old. If I compare that with my dream system, an 8500/120 with bells and whistles I end up with about a fifteen point difference. It's time to upgrade. Of course, I've known that for a while now. For what I'm willing to pay, about $2,000, I could get a Performa 5215CD, with a Coolness Factor of 24. So yes, I should upgrade. Ta-da! Now I only have to pry that $2,000 out of my budget somewhere.

Last year when I ran this test, the new system I could afford had the same coolness factor as Pokegenia. Today the story is different. But after all, it doesn't take rocket science (or a cool quiz like this one) to figure out that it's time to upgrade from a IIci.

Try it out, and let me know what you think.

RD Novo is the editor of ATPM, and his views on life with a Mac
regularly appear in his column, found at the very end of this magazine.

Where in the World Wide Web?

By RD Novo, rdnovo@aol.com

With this issue, *About This Particular Macintosh* inaugurates its WWW site. No, it's not ready quite yet, but it will be soon. So you already know where to go for cool stuff about the Mac. But what about the rest of the web? Where else can you find cool Mac stuff? Apple's sites? What about software sites? What about cool places for Mac owners to go, sites owned by Mac folk?

Well, you've come to the right place. In this article we'll show you just where to go for some of the best Apple-centric stuff on the World Wide Web, that bandwagon to riches. <grin> Face it, we don't surf the web to get rich (or to spend money), we surf 'cause it's fun. And that's what most of these sites are about.

The Mother Ship

First, of course, are Apple's own web pages. Yes, much of it is sales flack or techie- drivel, but there's one page that certainly tickles me pink. They've affectionately named it "Always Apple" and you can find it at http://always.apple.com. Skip all the propaganda and go to the postcards from Cupertino. Then be sure to check out the "back" of each card, some of it is pretty cool, and it does give you the sense that there really are people working there. There's also "Why Mac" at http://www.apple.com/whymac, an Apple sponsored page that gives ammunition in the Mac vs. the World fight. And if you want a look at the Pippin, and you can read Japanese (and your system has KanjiTalk installed) you should check out Bandai's site at http://www.bdec.co.jp.

About the Mother Ship

There's one site I check almost daily, if I can, and that's MacWEEK's web site. But skip the long download of the cover page, and go directly to the news page for up to date incisive news at http://www.zdnet.com/macweek/news.html. There's also one of the best sites about the workings of Macintosh, in Ric Ford's MacInTouch site, at http://www.macintouch.com. You'll find very up to date information on bugs, crashes, releases, and whatever you need to know to keep your Mac running smooth. If you're looking for solutions to your broken Mac, you can't do better than the Sad Macs, Bombs and other Disasters site, at http://www.oakland.edu/~landau_/sadmacs, a site devoted to identifying and solving

common crashes and failures.

Zealous Surfing

For the fanatics among us there are several sites worthy of your surfing dime. The first, sure to be a boon to Apple enthusiasts everywhere, is the "eWorld off world Tour," a collection of sites devoted to bringing you the magic of eWorld, on the Web. Since Apple's not gonna do it, it seems it's up to users to keep the dream alive. (Do I sound like a fanatic yet?) Honestly though, at http://www.axon.net/eworld, the site is a clever and interesting retrospective on eWorld, and a look to the future of community computing on the web.

Other zeal-filled sites include the Macintosh Advocacy Page, notable mostly for the cool beta home page, at http://ume.med.ucalgary.ca/~watanabe/apple.html; and the stellar and fascinating Cult of Macintosh at http://cult-of-mac.utu.fi in Finland. They have a mirror in the US, but this is the place to start. You'll find all kinds of complete information about the Mac here, with a comprehensive listing of periodicals and other sites. Also of interest to Mac browsers is the Well Connected Mac, another complete reference site, at http://www.macfaq.com. That ought to do you for sites about the Mac, as they all have extensive lists of other sites about the Mac. (All links lead to Rome?)

Finally

The list is short, yes, but at many of these sites are lists of additional sites worth browsing. Last is a favorite of mine, with a whopping long address. Do surf by and see http://www.iti.gov.sg/iti_people/iti_staff/hcleong/appledays.html, the home of "An Apple a Day." This site, updated every day, showcases a new Apple-inspired, Apple-built, or just plain Apple-centric page on the World Wide Web. Very fun, and worth a new look every day of the week.

RD Novo is the publisher of ATPM, but he spends an inordinate amount of time surfing the web. This list is not comprehensive. Add a URL!
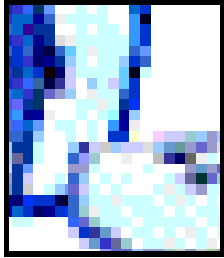
Lynn goes to the Cybermall

By Lynn Roseborough, UrsaMinor9@aol.com

Dear Dilbertmeisters :

Right on schedule after ordering through the dangerous "unsecure" Dilbert Store, my long-coveted DNRC Denim shirt arrived today. I have been lusting in my heart for one since seeing them worn at Comdex Las Vegas last fall, which is a an intense and rare achievement (developing desire at Comdex, I mean). When my pseudo-scrupulous monitoring of your website showed the shirts were back in stock, I leapt for joy (okay, I wiggled in my computer chair but, hey, after nine hours online any movement is remarkable), grabbed my (boyfriend's) credit card and poked out the magic ordering code that would make one at last mine.

Tears came to my eyes when I received the box today (just kidding, but I did scrap plans to flame your shipping department online). I carefully incised around the package perimeters, gently parted the cardboard box flaps and lifted out the shirt. It was beautiful, soft and beckoning to me, with Dogbert's insignia where soon my heart would be.

I slipped it on.

I was thrilled. Really. And so was my boyfriend, because although I ordered the smallest size made, M, we both can wear it at once. This is convenient because we are a close couple, but there is one area of contention. He insists on standing at all times on my left side, which means he gets the Dogbert symbol over his chest. I have nothing on my side of the shirt.

Nonetheless, I love it so much I'm planning a select gathering of friends, all of whom will also fit in the shirt with us.

Who in cyberspace are these things sized for? Does "M" indicate "medium" or "monstrous" size? Is this part of the Don Crabb Summer Collection (sorry)? What are the dimensions of the XXL size? The mind wobbles contemplating what they must be.

Or is this an example of my ingrained left-brain thinking patterns, expecting "M" size to be smaller than "L", "XL", and "XXL"? Are you trying to waken our right-brain creativity by rearranging the size categories so that they, perhaps, descend in proportion rather than

increase as one would expect. Or is this a more random pattern, designed to free us from years of rote-training by sizing the shirts with no actual correlation to the commonly expected clothing standards, allowing us to order size as our Zen souls choose, with the resultant garment being at one with our true selves?

Or are all computer people really THAT BIG?

By all American standards I am average in height and weight, although extra- ordinarily brilliant and beautiful. My boyfriend as well is of statistically-acceptable size parameters for his genetic heritage. This size "M" shirt reaches all four of our kneecaps, and the cuffs gently sway in the breeze that stirs as we attempt to locate our arms in the respective sleeves.

Hey, even kids love Dilbert and Dogbert, which may be their only redeeming quality, and many of these nattering little nerds are extraordinarily computer-savvy and fully capable of ordering your products online. What are they, but more importantly, am I supposed to do? The smallest shirt you make is more fabric-intensive than the most lavish of Bob Mackie creations. Yes, this is clothing to live in. But not to set up housekeeping in.

What to do, what to do...My Dogbert and Dilbert teeshirts fit me, sized for the mundane. Would you suggest perhaps to your design department that although we sit for hours on our spreading fannies typing on keyboards, not all of us have acquired elephantine proportions? Perhaps then, someday, I can order this oh-so-long-
desired shirt and wear *it all by myself*.

Lynn

[Lynn wrote to inform us that exactly four days later she received e-mail from Scott Adams, creator of Dilbert, in response to the above item of mail. Mr. Adams offered washing instructions, in the hopes that the shirt would shrink to fit. The Editors.]

"Segments" is a column area open to anyone. Send your stories, pictures, anecdotes, funny e-mail, or whatever to rdnovo@aol.com

I've been using Netscape since it first became available for the Mac. I've seen it evolve over the course of various revisions and public betas, so I am very familiar with the way it works. Netscape Navigator is the web browser that I, and most other Mac users are most familiar with, so this article will attempt to introduce you to the differences between Microsoft Internet Explorer and Netscape. It should be noted that Internet Explorer is still in Beta form, and as such, its feature set is not yet complete. It currently lacks support for security, and for frames.

They're Both Browsers

Both Internet Explorer and Netscape are World Wide Web browsers. For many sites, it does not matter which one you use. They both support the complete HTML 2.0 specification, and they share a common plug-in architecture. Both browsers support helper applications such as Stuffit Expander, and NCSA Telnet to further expand their capabilities. They also have similar ways of integrating these helpers into the web experience. They even have remarkably similar preferences and options that you can set.

Two Different Interfaces

While it's clear that the folks at Microsoft used Netscape as a model when creating Internet Explorer, the two have distinctly different interfaces. Netscape has a nice beveled grey toolbar, which looks like something you would find in Copland, the next integral release of the MacOS. It contains standard browser buttons such as Back, Forward, Print, Open, Find, and Home, and there are several options for configuring it. You can choose to view the buttons as text, as graphics, or to have them disappear completely. In addition, you can optionally display a set of buttons which are a sort of permanent bookmarks. These include such things as an Internet Search, What's New, and What's Cool. I don't display these buttons because they take up screen real estate. They are valuable resources though, and are available in a menu if you need them.

I'll have to admit that I didn't expect much in Internet Explorer's interface. I was a die-hard fan of Microsoft Word until Word 6 set new standards in bloated interface design and slow code. At first glance, Internet Explorer looks just like any other Microsoft product. It has the

Word/Excel style toolbar with those tiny square buttons that I find annoying to click on. Rather than having text on the buttons, Internet Explorer covers them with tiny icons, some of which I don't think are very self explanatory.

You have a choice between a Netscape style toolbar, which contains the same buttons as Netscape, but in an iconic Microsoft style, and a Microsoft layout which includes several extra buttons. Neither arrangement covers the full width of the browsing window, which makes me wonder why they didn't make the buttons larger. Also, since Microsoft cloned the toolbar's look from their other products, I wonder why they didn't make it completely customizable. Finally, I'm not sure why Microsoft put cut, copy and paste buttons on the toolbar. Does anyone use these? Keyboard equivalents seem much faster to me, and since people only copy text from web pages, the cut and paste features seem to be excess buttons complicating the interface.

The main browsing windows in Netscape and Internet Explorer are remarkably similar. Both programs have a small progress bar in the lower right hand corner of the window, and both have a status area in the lower left hand corner that shows information such as where the current link will take you, and some information about the file currently being loaded. Internet Explorer wins here. It's progress bar moves much more smoothly, and seems to be a better indicator of how much time it will take to complete the page. It also has a hot help area here, similar to the one in Word and in Excel that offers a balloon style help in the corner of the window. This is much faster, and more responsive than the sparse balloon help in Netscape. However, Netscape has better help documentation, and they have a number of good web sites accessible through the Guide Menu to help explain things to you.

One thing about Internet Explorer that I don't like, is that the command for opening locations and files is the same. Thus, if you want to open a file, you have to select open, and then click on the open file button. This two-step approach could be alleviated by making them two separate commands as they are in Netscape.

Using The Browsers

Both web browsers take up a fair amount of space, especially if you count their helpers. Netscape alone takes up 2.6MB in fat binary form, and Internet Explorer takes up 1.5MB. They also both have large RAM requirements. Netscape suggests 3000K, while Internet Explorer suggests 4000K. Neither of these RAM allocations is enough if you plan to have more than five complicated web pages open at once. Also, if you plan on using Macromedia's Shockwave plug-in, you should increase the RAM allocation of either product to 8000K.

Internet Explorer is significantly easier to configure than Netscape. It offers to automatically import your Netscape bookmarks into its Favorites list, and also can copy information such as your name and email address from InternetConfig.

Viewing Web Pages

There are basically three factors for comparing how various browsers display a page: how long it takes, what it looks like when finished, and what it looks like while in progress. As far as final quality is concerned, Netscape is the hands-down winner. It seems to reproduce font sizes and graphic layouts much more faithfully than Internet Explorer, which seems to judiciously add blank space between graphics, and between lines of text. Netscape also handles image errors better. When a graphic cannot be loaded, it replaces it with a broken picture symbol. Internet Explorer brings up a rather ugly and generic dialog box, notifying you that the image couldn't be loaded.

Speedwise, Internet Explorer is the winner. In my informal timings, it seemed to be about 30 percent faster than Netscape at loading pages. Internet Explorer is also better at displaying pages while they are loading. Netscape takes more time to initially display a page, and when it does, it loads text and graphics at the same time. Internet Explorer displays pages in two passes. First, it displays the text of the web page, with image placeholders. This step happens almost instantaneously. Then it goes back and loads all of the graphics, displaying in the status area exactly what type of image it is receiving. This results in a much more responsive web experience, and is I think the greatest advantage that Internet Explorer has over Netscape.

Downloading

The ability to save files and images to your hard disk for later retrieval is one of the most important jobs of a web browser. Netscape triumphs in both of these areas. Both Netscape and Internet Explorer let you download a file by choosing a command from a popup menu. If you click on a link to a file, Netscape will open a new downloading window, allowing you to continue browsing in the window you were in. This downloading window is significantly smaller than a normal browsing window, and resembles the Finder's copy window. Netscape also supports drag and drop, letting you simply drag an image or link into a folder, or disk, in the Finder. By contrast, Internet Explorer forces you to tie up a large window for downloading each file. Granted, you can resize it if you want to, but Netscape's method is far more elegant. Also, Netscape gives you full statistics about how the file is being copied. It tells you the size of the file, the estimated time remaining, and the percent complete. Internet Explorer only tells you the size of the file.

Bookmarks and Favorites

Functionally, Netscape's Bookmarks and Internet Explorer's Favorites are basically the same. However, there are several things that make Internet Explorer's Favorites superior. It consolidates all the commands for manipulating and adding Favorites into one menu. To edit Bookmarks in Netscape, you must first go to the Windows menu to open up the Bookmarks viewer and editor. Then an Item menu appears, letting you edit Bookmarks, and add dividers, bookmarks, and folders. This is a bit cumbersome, and is also slower than Internet Explorer.

Internet Explorer keeps a detailed history of all the web sites that you have visited, and preserves this between launches of the program. It also provides an easy method for revisiting items in the history, and adding them to the Favorites list. However, both programs could learn from Apple's Cyberdog, which has a much better way of keeping track of bookmarks, and dynamically resolving them. That is to say, if you bookmark a link before visiting it, the bookmark's title will change to the title of the link's page after you do visit it.

Mail, News, and FTP

Both Netscape and Internet Explorer include these tools. Both have minimal mail clients that are slow, but useful if you want to quickly write to someone referenced on a web page. The newsreaders aren't really worth using, as most shareware newsreaders are faster and more powerful. While neither Netscape, nor Internet Explorer includes an FTP client that can rival a stand-alone product, I prefer Netscape's, because it displays icons, and because it makes navigating directories somewhat easier that Internet Explorer does.

Final Words

At this moment, the choice between Netscape and Internet Explorer is easy, because Internet

Explorer does not yet support frames or security features. However, this will change, when Microsoft issues the final release. When this happens, the choice will no longer be quite so easy. Despite its comparative sluggishness, I recommend Netscape to everyone. It is the standard for web browsing, and 85% of all people who use the web use Netscape Navigator. It offers superior capabilities for downloading files, and it is the only browser that is guaranteed to view pages correctly.

Internet Explorer is a much more responsive browser, and is also faster for most tasks. It has slightly better bookmarking capabilities than Netscape does, so if either of these is important to you, it is worth a try. It is not yet however, a product that can rival Netscape as the browser for the masses.

If you need more advanced features, or integrated bookmark and history features than either of these programs offers, I suggest that you take a look at Apple's Cyberdog. Cyberdog is a collection of Internet components, all of which are integrated with a bookmark list and with the MacOS. It is still in beta form, but offers an impressive set of bookmarking tools.

Also worth a look is the Netscape Navigator Atlas Preview. This is a publicly released version of an early Beta of Netscape 3.0. It improves on the current Navigator by adding support for Java, better navigation in frames, more compact downloading windows, InternetConfig support, better help, and more. Be aware though, that it is beta software, and therefore is not as stable as the less featured Netscape 2.0.1.

You can try Netscape, Atlas, Internet Explorer, and Cyberdog for free, simply by downloading a copy from Netscape's, Microsoft's, or Apple's web pages respectively. The best way to decide which browser to use is simply to try out a demo for a few days to see how it fits in with your surfing style.

Michael J. Tsai is the editor of all reviews in ATPM. He doesn't have a column (unlike many others) but his writing appears in every issue.

FileMaker Pro comes of Age

Reviewed by Robert Paul Leitao, rodestar@aol.com

It was a beautiful day in Burbank. The sun was shining. The air was uncharacter- istically clear, and our FileMaker disks came back from Claris. The fine folks there were able to successfully recover our data. This meant that our sweating brows could finally be matted, and we knew once again at a glance who owned the distribution rights to each of our motion pictures in every territory throughout the world.

Life with FileMaker and then FileMaker Pro seemed to alternate between a swooning dance with death, and the awkward first steps we each took at that first Junior High School dance after spending most of the night gawking at our future dance partner from across the gym floor.

In fairness to Claris, some of the problems had little to do with the software. As Mac users we were accustomed to being spoiled. FileMaker always seemed, in a phrase, "unMac like." In some ways using FileMaker represented the fledgling emergence of the Mac from just a niche machine to a more complete small business solution. We were used to simply clicking, scrolling, and using preformatted layouts and windows. By definition, FileMaker, like any database application that was intended to be versatile, required the user to preplan, to format the layouts and windows, and to develop how data was to be inputted, displayed and manipulated.

At the time FileMaker wasn't our favorite database application for the Mac, it was, for the most part, THE database application for the Mac. While many of us would spend a year learning the ins and outs of Photoshop, very few of us would want to spend even a month learning the basic ins and outs of FileMaker Pro. The thought of developing a database wasn't something that got most people up and going in the morning. Again, in fairness to Claris, the technical support staff always seemed to be extraordinarily helpful to anyone who made an earnest effort to learn and understand the software.

One of the problems with FileMaker and FileMaker Pro was that they were always exceedingly fragile. FileMaker documents, prior to FileMaker Pro version 2.1, required intensive care, especially if a file was accessed by more than one person over a rudimentary network. There were times that we would make intra-day backups of our FileMaker documents because the files

were so easily corrupted. We were constantly "recovering" the data.

Secondly, the documentation that came with the application wasn't easily understood. Thirdly, because it wasn't "relational," (more on this a little later) the uses were either somewhat limited or the amount of layout design work required for each file seemed overly burdensome.

For those of us who were good with spreadsheets we would often adapt a spreadsheet to perform a particular task or role rather than deal with the intricacies and fragility of FileMaker. FileMaker was relegated for use in only specific data management roles, rather than used as the full-service database solution it was intended to be.

This is Now

The good news, is that was then, and this is now. FileMaker Pro 3.0 is now what many of us had long-hoped it would be: a true database solution for the Macintosh platform. (There's a Windows version too.) After several years of prior versions, working with FileMaker Pro 3.0 is no longer like asking for directions to that small town in northern New England. Yes, now you can get there from here.

For anyone considering purchasing a database application for the first time, FileMaker Pro 3.0 is well worth the $199.50 street price admission. For starters, the documentation is solid. The tutorial provides a very nice overview of working with the software, and many of the templates can be easily modified to provide almost immediate solutions to your data management requirements.

For those of us that have used FileMaker Pro before, the new version is like visiting with an old high school friend after both of you graduate from college. Your outlooks have changed, your needs and desires are a bit more sophisticated, but you're surprised at how easily you can relate with one another on important new issues of the day, while still fondly remembering the times you shared when life was seemingly less complicated, and more carefree. The upgrade, at $99.95, is less expensive than your final college class and more fun than cutting the math test in high school.

I make my living consulting small businesses on finance and accounting. People hire me usually because they can't afford full-time accounting personnel. With FileMaker Pro 3.0, I can offer clients two important options. I can setup and maintain their database, or I can walk them through the setup and help them to easily maintain the database themselves.

For new and experienced users, the most compelling change in FileMaker 3.0 is that it is now "relational." This means that information such as names, addresses, and product information are no longer copied from one FileMaker Pro file to another. Information can now be shared from one file to another. Redundant data no longer needs to be stored.

For example, if my company sells a product, I create an invoice for a customer transaction in my invoice file, but the data about what was sold is stored in my sales line item file. The invoice file has a "portal" or window which displays the information unique to that transaction from the sales line item file.

This makes it easier to create sales and product reports, because the file which maintains that data (the sales line item file) can be designed more freely for my custom reports, and because the size of my invoice file is much more manageable and less encumbered because the sales information no longer needs to be permanently stored there. The customer information can also stored in a separate file.

FileMaker Pro 3.0 will still require the new user to spend some time becoming familiar with the application, but for $199.50 the time spent is now a worthwhile equity investment in your business.

For me and many of my clients, our databases are constantly honed and revised as needs and business circumstances change. FileMaker Pro data is easily exportable to other applications. I often export data to Microsoft Excel for one-time reports, or to experiment with different ways of manipulating information before creating more permanent reports in FileMaker Pro. This provides me and many of my clients with the best of both worlds—you can use your FileMaker Pro data in different applications for different purposes, or you can ultimately design a layout and report in FileMaker Pro on your time schedule to provide the appropriate information.

For small businesses that can't afford full-time accounting or data management personnel (we do live in the real world of paying the rent and feeding our families) this provides an opportunity to have your information now, and to revise your FileMaker Pro file later as needs and time permit.

For experienced users, Claris offers an excellent tutorial devoted expressly to building relational databases for about $30. I followed the tutorial step-by-step and was amazed at how quickly I was able to make the adjustment to "relational thinking" in building new databases, and in converting older ones.

FileMaker Pro is no longer like that swooning dance with death for your data, or like when the music stops that first time in the Junior High School gym and you're less than gracefully trying to exit the floor hoping not too many of your friends saw you out there trying. FileMaker Pro 3.0 is more like: "Wow!, that data dance was cool. Let's see what happens when we try to tango!"   Kudos to Claris on this one. Investing in FileMaker Pro 3.0 is money well spent.

Robert Paul Leitao is a columnist and reviewer for ATPM. For more about him, follow his life in "Apples, Kids and Attitude" every month in ATPM.
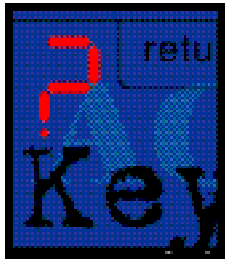
Comics

Cartoons and comic books have been part of American culture for over a hundred years. First appearing in newspapers and magazines in the late 1800s, cartoons have been bringing laughs and social commentary to the masses on a regular basis ever since. Who doesn't remember asking for the "funnies" section of the Sunday paper when it arrived? Or going to the local drug store to buy a favorite comic book? These things are part of our heritage.

Along with the computer revolution, came the publishing revolution. Individuals no longer need to rely on a publishing company or newspaper to express their ideas. Anyone who owns a computer and has access to the internet or to a commercial online service can be a publisher. By simply creating a publication in a digital form and then uploading it, the author has reached a potential audience of literally millions of people. Because of this "freedom of the press", there has been an explosion of comic books and cartoon strips of every conceivable type. I went online to see what I could find. Here are some examples.

America Online has several comic-related forums containing a wealth of information for the enthusiast. DC Comics, Dilbert, and political satirist Mike Keefe each have their own forums. These forums typically contain message boards and live chat rooms for discussing popular topics. Plus, you can usually find old comic strips and original artwork available for downloading.

Those interested in the history of comic books should check out the Comic Strip Centennial Area. This area was created in honor of the 100th anniversary of cartooning in America. Cartoon history students will be off to a good start after reading profiles of the Hall of Fame cartoonist. These profiles are part of the Hall of Fame exhibit that will soon be on display at the International Museum of Cartoon Art, a brand new 52,000 square-foot facility now under construction in Boca Raton, Florida. The Hall of Fame was established in 1975 to honor lifetime achievement in the cartoon art form. Twenty seven artist are profiled by Brian Walker, creator of the Hi & Lois comic strip. The profiles span the past hundred years, from early pioneers like Rudolph Dirks (Katzenjammer Kids) and Charles Dana Gibson (the "Gibson girls"), to contemporaries such as Walt Disney, and Charles Schultz (Peanuts).

If you think you have what it takes to be a DC comic artist, a set of submission guidelines is available in the Disclaimers/Notices/Guide section of the DC Comics forum. Thorough, helpful information concerning DC's requirements will prepare you to submit a professional

demonstration of your work. There are tips concerning artwork covering pencil, ink, lettering, and coloring. Plus story submission guidelines. Did you know stories are judged based on a story "Springboard". A story "Springboard" is a one page story concept containing five elements: a beginning, a middle, an end, a hook, and reader identification. Include more than this and it won't even be read. Hey, no one said fame and fortune would be easy.

If you're really the independent type you might consider going into syndication. Syndicates sell the work of cartoonist to magazines and newspapers, splitting the profits with the artists. One of the world's largest syndicates, King Features, has a set of submission guidelines also. The competition is tough. King Features receives over 6,000 submissions a year. However the rewards can be sweet. Depending on how many newspapers subscribe to your comic strip and other products created based on your characters, you could conceivably pass the $1,000,000 a year mark. Just ask Charles Shultz, or Gary Larson.

When it comes to the Internet, comics rule! There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of web sites devoted to comic books. The number of independent comic publishers is staggering. One site you may want to visit is The Comic Book Net at http://members.aol.com/ComicBkNet. The Comic Book Net publishes a text only electronic magazine called THE COMIC BOOK NET ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE which is jammed full of news, reviews, new releases, and addresses of current comic-related web sites. Another helpful site is the Comic Book Depot (http://www.insv.com/comxdepo/comxlinx.html). Here you can find alphabetically arranged links to many comic publishers, art galleries, printers who specialize in comic printing, news and discussion groups, and dealers.

If your love of comic art outweighs your desire for monetary gain, you can always publish your artwork for free. This is exactly what several artists do. Although they go about it in different ways. Many artists upload comic "pages" as graphic files— usually in GIF or JPEG format. This is an easy way to show off your creations. All that is needed by the user to read the comic is a graphic viewing application or a paint program. Below is a comic page graphic by Todd DeMelle (http://users.aol.com/ejwize/) entitled "House of Asterion". Todd created the ink drawings by hand, scanned them into PhotoShop and added the color. He then uploaded the page as a JPEG file.

Dana Muise has taken a different approach to comic book publishing. Dana has created a shareware comic viewing application called Brain Box Comics. Sort of a digital comic book, this

application is unique in the fact that comic strips are saved as "story" files that can be opened by the application. Authors are encouraged to submit comics to Brain Box and new stories are uploaded to America Online and the Internet. Take a look at the unique interface of the Brain Box viewing application.

Comic art comes in many forms, including icons. That's right, you can replace that old hard drive icon with a snappy new Spiderman one. Or maybe you would prefer Tweety bird. Here are some samples of icons I found online.

If you are creating your comics digitally, you may want to consider some of the many comic fonts available. Katherine is a freeware font designed by Don Miller. It resembles the lettering used in the comic strip Kathy.

Dave Dumanis describes his Mars font as a cartoonist's version of Courier.

ToonTime is a shareware font created by Mart Yawnick in the style of classic cartoon lettering.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Comics are well represented in the online world. You should have no problem finding something that interests you, or makes you smile.

Working for Tips

by Adam Junkroski

Beauty and the Beast

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A BEAUTIFUL DESKTOP AND ONE IN PERIL

One thing about us Mac users; we do more system tweaking than any other OS users. That's partly because it's so easy, and partly because part of the Mac experience is that your computer is as individual as you. I don't know about you, but I no longer even refer to "my computer" as my computer. I call it by name, "Tiberius." When absolutely necessary, "My Mac." I cringe when I slip on this point.

In the process of tweaking, the beginning and intermediate user can stumble upon many freeware, shareware, and retail solutions for customizing the desktop of your best friend. Many of these are well-written, excellent programs for creating a new look on your screen.

Some, on the other hand, are just downright dangerous.

There are tricks to knowing the differences between Beauty and the Beast, and they are all very

simple. We'll discuss those, plus ways in which to guard your system from dangerous additions that could mean computer chaos. So without further ado, here are some ways of determining how to safely beautify your Mac's desktop.

Show me how you do that trick...

Oof. Bad song, unless you're into The Cure. Anyway, the main trick to knowing the difference between Beauty and the Beast is easy. Ask yourself a few questions. What is it? Is it an application? A control panel? An extension? Does it use a Res Edit-type utility to hack into system code? The answers to these questions will give you hints about how much trouble you might be getting into.

Extensions and Control Panels (CDEVs)

Extensions and control panels are great ways to put your system in danger. Unless written by major software vendors or Apple Computer itself, they often cause crashes and freezes. They even do it sometimes when they are written by major software companies. After Dark is a great example. Worse, they are almost always memory hogs that will slow down your computer's performance.

I know what you're thinking. The coolest customizers are extensions and control panels, right? Cursor Animator, Aaron, After Dark, Wunderbar, etc. Unfortunately, this is true. It is also the unfortunate truth that they are usually the prime suspect in crashes on such systems. This does not by any means mean you cannot use them. Just know how to use them safely.

First of all, use your head. Do not install two extensions or control panels that do the same thing. They WILL crash the system. For example, using two different window-customizing extensions will cause the system to get confused and lock up in many instances. If you have to have one at all, choose your favorite, and store or trash the other.

Second, never install more than one such extension or control panel at a time. If you have Aaron, Cursor Animator, and After Dark sitting in front of you, waiting to be loaded onto your system, pick one ONLY, load it, and use the computer normally for a week. If no trouble crops up, you are probably safe to load another and repeat the process. But keep a note of when you installed it. If trouble comes up later, you'll want to disable all the non-system 7.X extensions first, and add them back in one at a time to see who the culprit is. Lots of fun, right?

I want to make a quick note here that many of the programs I mentioned are the result of lots of hard work and programming expertise. The programmers of these extensions and control panels know their stuff, and I do not in any way intend to besmirch their products or abilities. However, the programmers are incapable of seeing every possible system configuration, since literally millions are possible. There are other extensions out there that they are unaware of. They don't realize that something you have on your computer might well be asking the computer to perform a similar task simultaneously, thus causing a freeze. It is for this reason that I issue this warning, and no other. I use Aaron myself, and it works beautifully. But that might change in the future, depending on what I add to the system.

Applications

Applications that run in the background and beautify your Mac are rare. They consist mostly of either self-launching or manually-launched screen savers. They are, for the most part, completely safe. This is because they open and close, leaving the system software more or less

alone, and asking for memory only when they are running. FirePower is a sharware screen saver that runs a single module (fireworks), is self-launching, and completely stable on four systems I've tested.

Another such program is called Christmas Lights. It puts little light bulbs around the perimeter of your screen and plays Christmas music in the background. Not much good for summer, granted, but you get the idea. It runs on five or six hundred kilobytes, and is completely non-intrusive. Programs like it should also be safe.

Again, you won't find many programs that fall under this category, but rest assured that when you do, they will be safe 99 out of 100 times. If they aren't, all you have to do is restart and never open them again. You'll know immediately if they are causing trouble. Much neater than extensions.

Res Edit-Type Hacks

I am going to take a beating for this, and I am prepared for it, but it is my opinion that unless you have some basic knowledge of toolbox calls, lower-memory globals, event queues, and the like, you should never, ever use a hack into your system software. If the references I made above to domains and actions of the system software are totally foreign to you, then I have made my point. I don't care if it comes with instructions on how to use it. Chances are good that you can miss something, delete something, or change something that is not meant to be changed. This can cause a catastrophic error of the kind that doesn't even let you start up. Sound like fun?

Why does this happen? Well, when you use a "hack," as they are often called, you are essentially rewriting parts of system code. While Res Edit itself always reminds you to work on a copy of a resource rather than the original, this hardly matters once you've restarted with a hacked system file. Sure, your original is still there, but you'll need to load your disk tools to get to it. If you were unlucky enough to work on the original, guess what? Time to reinstall the system software. And we all know how much fun that is, don't we?

This does not mean that Res Edit is evil. It means simply that you should stay away from your system file. Apple gave you a way to modify the system, and that way is called extensions. And they can be trouble enough. Why make it worse? Res Edit is wondreful for changing font IDs to avoid conflicts and so on, but keep it away - far away - from anything having to do with your system software.

Okay, Adam, what *can* I use?

Don't misunderstand this article. With the exception of the hacks, I am not rejecting any way of beautifying your Mac. Using these programs, however, becomes a responsibility. You owe it to yourself to use them wisely, knowing to disable them first when trouble arises. As I said, I use Aaron, and it runs flawlessly on my 7500 and my 520c. My brother loves running it on his 540c, but his 7100 does all kinds of silly things if he tries to run it. The same thing was true of my old 660AV. It just depends.

But I refuse to be vague in this article, because I hate it when writers pat you on the head, say "be careful," and then push you into traffic. So here is a short list of beautifications that I feel will work safely on your system, for at least two-thirds of the users out there. By the way, I make no claims as to the validity of this opinion for any specific system, it is a generalized opinion. Also, you must still remember to be careful when using these programs simultaneously:

Aaron 1.2 (custom desktop interface), FirePower (screen saver), Christmas Lights (holiday cheer), Desktop Textures (desktop patterns), Apple's Desktop Patterns (a desktop pattern installer that's about as safe as you can possibly get. It comes with system 7.5 or better) any icons (easiest when the picture actually stands for the folder, not when it comes as a Res Edit file), any sounds (note that you'll need a utility to convert .WAV files, which are PC-based sounds. Brian's Sound Tool, available on AOL, is good for this), fonts appropriate to your printer (unless you have PostScript software or a PostScript printer, PostScript fonts will not print correctly on your printer. You'll need TrueType fonts instead.), and most background and startup picture utilities.

Most of these should be available on AOL, at the keyword "download" do a file search for the product. Christmas Lights is not shareware however, you'll have to buy that in a store. The items that are shareware or freeware may also be available on other services and local bulletin board systems. Please remember to pay shareware fees if you use a product. It doesn't matter if you've used it for two years already. Don't be embarrassed. Once the programmer has your check, he'll be all too happy to forgive your oversight. Giving these good people our money assures that they'll give us more cool stuff in the future, often for free, just because they love programming.

Before I close, I'd like to mention another little program that could be construed as beautification. It's called Rainbox, and is freeware. It is one of the most addictive little art programs I have ever owned, and is not only free, it is safe for your Mac. It is a short download, and will keep you happy and occupied for hours. Download it, e-mail the author, and thank him profusely. You'll be happy you did.

Customizing your Mac isn't just something you should consider. It's a duty. Do it responsibly, and you might even find that your productivity increases as a result. If nothing else, your enjoyment of your Mac will.

Next month... Adam isn't going to write "Working for Tips" next month. Instead, he's moved to a different part of the magazine, to entertain us with his strategies for keeping the Mac on top. Check out his new column, "On the Front Lines," and let him know what you think.

Did you Check the Plug?
by Mike Shields

Interactivity

As I write this, it's April 6th, 1996, and I just received my shredded copy of Interactivity magazine in the mail, the May issue. Significant for two reasons: A) There's a review of Adobe Pagemill, and 2) The post office tried to cover its tracks by taping the magazine back together. Another fine example of your tax dollars at work. Ok, so the post office is fully privately funded, but you get the idea. As this is the 'Web issue' of ATPM, I'm hoping this will all become relevant. One day soon, in the middle of the night, you'll wake up in a cold sweat, and say to yourself, "Of course, what Mike was babbling about all makes sense now!"

The Hughes Wide Web

Set your browser to http://hww.hac.com/. Wait, you can't get there from wherever you are. Why, you ask? Because this is the new thing that companies are doing, it's called an Intranet! We have several web pages, and a few full time web page developers, that tell everyone about the wonders of life at Huge. Now you, as mere mortals, can't get to this information, because it's propietary, and sits behind a firewall. Don't take this as a challenge, you won't be able to break it.

I know.

I've tried.

Alas, that is another column. Anyway, to get to the Web proper from Huge, before a month and a half ago, you needed to do the following: First, fire up MacX (version 1.5 for the 7200's, however we talked about those last month), next run NSCA Telnet, and login to igate1 (this is the firewall I told you about). But wait, there's more. After you get on to the Sun workstation, you get to issue the command:

setenv display <IP address>.

Your IP address of course being the one that is assigned to your particular computer. You see, every Mac, and PC for that matter, has its own unique IP address that the fabulous folks at the Network Operations Center, or NOC for those that know, has assigned it. And you wonder where all the IP addresses are going. Actually, the way I hear it, our addresses don't count against the worldwide total of available addresses, they're just internal to Huge. And finally after this, you

may fire up your browser o' choice. For awhile, it was Netscape, but apparently we only had a Demo Copy or limited use version, because when I started, it was Mosaic or nothing.

Now I'm sure you can see some problems with this setup, but allow me elaborate. After all, I'm here to inform, as well as increase my word count at the same time. Whereas before, you were on a really fast Ethernet Network, now you're going through a painfully slow Unix machine, with the over 500 other people that are qualified to have an account on the firewall. In addition, as opposed to multiplication or subtraction, You're running two, yes two! additional programs on your Mac, besides your browser du jour. MacX to interpret the graphic commands that come from the Sun, and Telnet in the background, to keep your connection up and running. Now I don't know which is slower at this point, your browser, or Heinz Ketchup its first time out of the bottle. Molasses has also compared favorably, in taste tests conducted by 4 out of 5 Husers.

Remember how I said this is the way it was before a month and a half ago? Well, to make a long story short, which is too late at this point, Huge came up with an alternative solution. On or around the middle of February, which would be the same time you were reading my first attempt at talking about life at Huge, we were given the opportunity to sign up for a proxy server account. Now what you ask, is that? Well, first, get approval from your department head, then fill out a form, then wait approximately 2-3 days, and that's working days, as opposed to actual days, by which time you should receive the okay to go ahead and connect to the proxy server. This entails getting the latest and greatest version of (insert appropriate trumpet fanfare here) Netscape!

2.0 when this whole thing started, 2.01 as you are reading this, soon to be outdated by next month, when Microsoft, AOL and Netscape Inc. all try to buy each other. Yes, that's right. For those of you reading this on the MSN, or The MicroSoft Network, our good buddy Bill (Gates, not Clinton) is already going to abandon you. As you know, our other good buddy Bill has already abandoned you by signing the Telecom bill, complete with the Communications Decency Act.

After downloading and installing Netscape, you find your preferences, and load up the proxy prefs with all sorts of addresses that I can't divulge. Well, I could tell you, but then.... Having done this, you are now able to get to the Web, without dealing with the firewall, which is supposedly faster. I mean, you have a T3 connection to the proxy servers, it should be quick. In theory. From what I've seen, it's about the same speed as a really good 28.8 modem. Now here's a really good opportunity for a product placement, but Supra has not come forward and offered me a free modem. So I really ethically can't mention them.

Anyway, this brings us back to last month, when I told you about the 7200 that I needed to put System 7.5.3 on. You see, the reason I needed to do that, was that Netscape doesn't work with versions of Open Transport less than 1.1. It's a documented incompatability. The Huser's computer would freeze every time she tried to access a certain part of the CNN home page. The good news is, after getting her up and running with the operating system o' choice, she's going great guns. Now, when she tries to get to that particular part of the CNN home page, instead of her computer freezing up, it comes back 5 minutes or so later, with a message saying that there are too many people trying to access this link, try again later. Say for instance, at 3:30 in the morning, when you're the only one on the 'net. Of course, you won't be at work at that point, and the news will be old and gray by the time you read it, but at least you'll get there.

Java, or Hot Coffee Comin' Thru!!!

Now the really cool thing about the latest and greatest of Netscape is that it's Java enabled. Or is it? I read a security document at Huge the other day that makes this a two edged sword. It turns out that not only can you do really cool Web stuff with Java, you can also do strange things like, oh say download the preferences of the person's browser, which contains all sortsa good info

like your eMail address, your real address, type of computer, shoe size, mother's maiden name, etc. Now I only spent 4 months in sales, however, I'm pretty sure that the people that study these types of demographics can use this type of info at their leisure. The answer of course, is to turn off JavaScript before you go a browsin', however, what's the point? Lately, if you can't see all the latest and greatest and coolest stuff that's out there, why bother? The statistic is the Web is doubling in size every 30 days or so, depending on where you read it. Wouldn't you think that some of these people might be doin' some cool things using Java? Wouldn't you like to see it?

My Andy Warhol Quote

"In the future, everyone will have their own Web page..." Use at your leisure, however, you must give me credit. Not too many people know that I'm famous, so I need all the help I can get. Thanks.

You've got Questions

Only two this month, which means either your Mac is working fine, or you're getting your answers someplace else. Actually, there are days at Huge that I believe the former is true. Eventually, I'm going to run out of amusing anecdotes, and then this column will become fully interactive, with you asking poignant questions, and me responding with witty answers.

Subj: Re: Did You Check the Plug
Date: Sun, Mar 10, 1996 4:05 PM PST
From: Ze Princess
To: MikeShields@eworld.com

Howdy Mike!
I enjoyed your column "Did You Check the Plug?" in the Feb 14th issue of "About This Particular Mac." I'd like to use your Mac expertise to solve "The Case of the Disappearing Arrow Icon." Here's the story: The arrow (pointer) icon on my son's Classic II has turned invisible several times while running a program (not necessarily the same program). The arrow still functions—-we can click and pull down menus (which is not easy with an invisible pointer). When we quit the program, the arrow icon reappears. Mike, what does this mean (I hope it's not serious) and how do we solve the case? I'd really appreciate your advice.
Your reader, Princess

Answer: Well, well! My first satisfied reader! Too bad I don't have an answer for her! But seriously, I'll be the first to admit I've never used a Classic II, however, I do love the detective work. My guess would be that the memory partition of the program(s) in question would be the culprit. To increase this, simply do a Get Info from the File Menu (or command-I) on the program in question while you're in the Finder. This will give you a box that tells you all sortsa wonderful things, including how much memory should be required to run your program. Simply hilight the numbers in the boxes, and enter a larger number. Lately, at Huge, we've been running Gatesware, which is a real memory hog, so I've been cranking up the memory requirements of Word, Excel, etc. to twice what Bill recommends. Further info available at AskBill@Microsoft.com. If this doesn't work, the simple solution would be to buy a new Mac. I hear the 7200's are really good.

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Subj: ATPM/Question
Date: Fri, Mar 29, 1996 4:05 PM PST

From: Sean Larsen
To: mikeshields@eworld.com

Hi! Thanks for offering help to the general readership! By the way, you guys have a great 'zine! It's one of the few that I read "cover" to "cover"! Here's my question:

I'm trying to get connected to a local Internet Service Provider; I'm tired of the slow speeds of AOL and CompuServe Internet connections. However, I am using a new PCI Mac, a Power Mac 7500/100, which runs with Open Transport only, and is therefore not compatible with MacTCP.

I have read several "solutions" to this problem, but they all involve turning off or disabling Open Transport. I can't do this, since I use the local-talk network to print and to network with two other computers. And I can't switch to "classic AppleTalk" because it's not supported on my machine. Perhaps you can help me! Do I have some of my facts wrong, or am I approaching this wrong? Do you know how I can get connected to the Internet with my Power Mac 7500/100?

I am using System 7.5.3. My modem is a Global Village Teleport Platinum. I have lots of RAM and hard disk space. I use Now Utilities and QuicKeys and a Kensington Turbo Mouse. (I'm giving all this info just in case it raises any red flags vis-a-vis Internet connecting). Thanks a million! Sean in Ben Lomond

Answer: Well Sean, it seems like you have the latest and greatest in hardware and software, and I like that you're running 7.5.3 with no problems(?) As you know from my trials at Huge, my exposure to this type of problem is limited, however, you said the magic word when you mentioned Open Transport, in conjunction with 7.5.3. This would imply that you're running version 1.1 of OT. If you aren't, this is your problem. Again, you can "Get Info" on Open Transport, which is hiding in your Extensions folder, I believe. Somewhere in the middle, or even at the top of the info box, it should tell you the version of Open Transport you're running. Then it's simply a matter of getting your ISP to provide you with the proper info to put in the proper slots. It would be really cool if I could put a screenshot here, to help you out, however, my column's late, and I don't have access. Anyway, if this is not the problem, you may have an extension conflict rearing it's ugly head, and I explained how to resolve those last month.

Blatant Solicitation

Again, I ask, what's troubling your Mac lately? Let me know, I can help. I think. For those of you out there that are PC afflicted, I don't do Windows™.

"Did you Check the Plug?" is © 1996 by Mike Shields, mshields@ccgate.hac.com

ATPM Wants You

We've said this before, but we'd like to say it again. ATPM is about your Macintosh, about our Macintoshes, and about the Macs of people who have never seen our magazine. We strive, every month, to give you a taste of what it's like to own a Mac. And for that, we need the stories, reviews, opinions, ideas, and anecdotes of Mac users just like you. We want you to write for ATPM. We'll take prose, poetry, pictures, questions, fanciful imaginings… pretty much anything you care to give. ATPM isn't much good without you, and even with a staff of editors and writers, we'll never represent the Mac user without your input. Please consider sending us your writing. Send it to rdnovo@aol.com

Artists

ATPM is looking to find an artist or three who'd be willing to produce regular pieces for the magazine. I'm thinking about a cover piece in each issue, probably related to the feature for that issue. Interior art is also wanted. This position may be paid (depends how much you want) and would be on a piece-by-piece basis, with rights to the interior art transferring to Only Boy Productions. Cover art pieces will remain the property of the artists. We can talk. rdnovo@aol.com

Distributors

ATPM is distributed every month on several different nets. That's a chore, and I'm looking for people to do it for me. If you are willing, and have accounts on CompuServe, AOL, or anywhere else, let me know at rdnovo@aol.com

A Lawyer

Yes, we're looking for a lawyer with some free advice to give. Of course we won't hold you responsible for anything, especially not advice, but none of us know the first thing about what we're doing, and at the very least we need someone to tell us that we should be thinking about this or that or the other.

Next Time

Unfortunately, it seems that I'll be buying a Windows machine in the next month or so, and setting it up at home. They only use Windows machines where I work, and it's been very hampering to have to convert stuff back and forth (when I can). I'm afraid that I won't have as much time to dedicate to my Mac, and I fear that the magazine will have to fold in the near future. Hey, it looks like we must all bend under the weight of Bill Gates' foot. I just hope I go with honor. See you all next time, I guess. Oh, and by the way, don't forget that this is the April issue, however late into April it might be, so, happy April Fool's!