

TEK THOTS
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CONTENTS

- News/Editorial
- PC Thots
- Mac Thots
- Web Development Thots
- This Issue's Plug-in
- This Issue's ActiveX Control
- Stock Thots
- Game Thots
- Newbie Thot
- Privacy/Security Thots
- Poll

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News/Editorial

* Well, not too long ago, the prognosticators said this wouldn't be happening -- there wouldn't be a need. Now, however, USR, Rockwell, Motorola, and Lucent have all announced 56kbps modems. Even though they're all going with a new 56k chip set, the technologies will differ. USR will be producing an X2 technology permitting a 56kbps downstream connection from ISPs, while users will connect upstream at the V.34 standard. Lucent's V.flex2, however, will provide end-user connections to the network at 40kbps and higher.

Motorola's pushing for a V.34 type standard by mid '97, arguing that it won't be possible to expedite a new standard if proprietary solutions such as a 40kbps extension to the V.34 standard is pushed.

My initial question is, why would you want 56kbps over analog lines when you can get 56-128kbps DUAL+ over digital lines...?

* Microsoft recently stunned its RISC supporters by terminating NT development (Windows NT, Backoffice or Visual C++) for MIPS. This was brought about by NEC's (Japan) cancellation of its MIPS-based NT workstation line.

* Should Java-based business apps ever become a reality, Corel hopes to nail it. They're working hard on an office productivity suite written entirely in Java. . The pre-beta evidently has three modules -- a word processor (WordPerfect), a spreadsheet (Quattro Pro), and a charting tool (Chart). So far though (and not too surprisingly), reports are that it displays limited functionality.

* Sun is set to release a Java-based NC, scheduled to be introduced next Tuesday in New York. It's supposed to cost about \$700, and will be sold as a package with other hardware sold by Sun. Sun is taking the right approach too. As I wrote in the first issue of Tek Thots, I remain convinced that, for the consumer market, the NC will be dead in the water in a VERY short time (C64, etc.), but for the corporate Intranet ... well, that's another story altogether. And, from the looks of things, Sun is targeting this market in a big way.

* Symantec has expanded its relationship with Netscape. Netscape has pledged support for the Visual Cafe Java development environment, licensing Symantec's Java Just-in-Time Compiler 2.0. This is aimed at boosting Java development on Netscape's Open Network Environment platform. Symantec's JIT compiler will be bundled with all Netscape software for the Windows and Mac platforms. Considering how iffy some of these GUI Java dev-environments seem, this isn't a bad idea at all.

PC Thots

* It's been a long time coming. Intel recently displayed its next-generation Pentium chip, code-named "P55C" and now officially known as the Pentium Processor with MMX Technology (yeesh!). The new chip is expected to appear in early '97, and will initially run at clock speeds of up to 200mhz. Intel plans to manufacture the chips using a CMOS process, rather than the BiCMOS technology currently used in Pentiums.

* Intel seriously underestimated the demand for 200mhz Pentium Pros, and rumor is, they are OUT. Everyone who hasn't placed orders ... oh, 10 weeks ago or so, is outta luck. Why? Server demand.

* In a not-too-veiled warning to Taiwan's semiconductor makers, NEC said that if "newcomers" (ie, mostly Taiwanese companies) to the DRAM biz bomb memory prices next year, NEC's U.S. people will file a trade complaint with the Feds. Hmmmm, guess they don't like that Microsoft approach....



Mac Thots



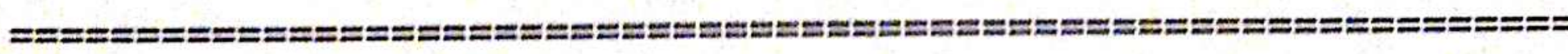
* Well, Apple surprised everyone -- shows how much the prognosticators know -- by announcing last week that instead of losing \$30 million, they had made a \$25 million profit last quarter. This is good; a stronger Apple is desirable.

However, two words of caution (or rather, two thoughts). First, Apple's fourth quarter profit, while a healthy surprise, is nearly half of LAST year's fourth quarter profit (\$48 million). Second, Apple is the ONLY computer manufacturer in the top ten to ship FEWER computers this year....

* Mac OS Runtime for Java (MRJ) is out! . Pre-alpha testers can try out their JDK 1.0.2 -compliant applets, as it's designed to provide a stable implementation of the Sun JDK 1.0.2 spec. You can download it at: <http://www.devtools.apple.com/mrj/>.

* Apple's Java Virtual Machine won't ship with a 7.6 release until mid '97.

* The Mac is going to have a new memory standard -- one that's going to be incompatible with the 5-volt DIMMs in the current Power Mac systems. Motorola's new StarMax clones use 3.3V DIMMs on a motherboard which is incompatible with 5V modules. The new DIMMs are expected to become common system components sometime within '97.



Web Development Thots



* TVObjects recently released Applet Designer 1.0, designed to turn the Visual Basic environment into a Java development environment. To do this, the program allegedly incorporates the core of Java functionality into the VB user interface, allowing developers

to author applets within a familiar environment. I haven't had the luxury of seeing this yet, but I honestly wouldn't mind....

* Metrowerks is shipping CodeWarrior 10, which has a new version of the Java development IDE.

This Issue's Plug-in

* Animation is increasingly popular on the Web. If you go surfing around, you can find some very cool examples. Unfortunately, you seem to need a specialized plug-in for each and every one of 'em! Well, FutureWave Software (<http://www.futurewave.com/>) is shipping its own plug-in for PCs and Macs called FutureSplash which enables users to display vector-based animation. As such animation is smaller in format (and faster) than GIFs or JPEGs, downloading is faster and playback typically begins immediately. After you grab this plug-in, you might want to enjoy FutureSplash's demos -- they can be very cool. While their file format hasn't necessarily caught on in a huge way across the Net, there is potential, and it might be worth checking out.

This Issue's ActiveX Control

* Microsoft's Menu control (<http://microsoft.saltmine.com/isapi/activexisv/prmgallery/gallery-activex-info.idc?ID=158>) allows the Web author to place a menu button on the page that brings up a menu using the standard Windows menu look and feel. The Menu control fires events that the Web author can respond to via VBScript code. It seems like a handy control for developers, and as soon as I get the time/energy to create my own IE3-version, this is a control I'll no doubt incorporate.

Stock Thots

* Firefly, one of the first companies to publicly display intelligent agent functionality on the Web, is one of the current golden techs. They recently completed a private placement of \$10 million in preferred stock via Goldman Sachs. This after licensing pacts with ZD Net, Yahoo!, and Reuters, among others.

* Wired is having a REAL hard time getting its IPO ready for the end of the month. Evidently, possible investors are bailing, and the proposed price is WAY too high (something akin to 11 times over real-time worth...).

* Two firewall companies to look at: Raptor Systems Inc. and CheckPoint Software Technologies Ltd. CheckPoint has already turned a couple of key distribution deals into solid success, registering revenue of \$7.4 million for their most recent quarter, more than four times the amount earned during the same quarter in '95. As a result, CheckPoint's stock rose to a recent high of \$36.25 from its June IPO price of \$14. Not too shabby.

* Recent Winners:

Iomega
Sybase
IBM
Microsoft
Netscape
MCI

* Recent Losers:

Spyglass
Madge
C/Net
Infoseek
CompuServe
Digital (\$66 million!!!)

Game Thots

* Microsoft has hired Alexey Pajitnov, legendary Tetris creator, to help expand the company's line of PC gaming software.

* This Issue's Game:

Mission Force: Cyberstorm
Sierra-Online

Based upon their earlier Earthsiege games, Mission Force: Cyberstorm is the newest Giant Robot action/strategy game. Most of my friends are into real-time gaming (ie., hard core action), but I remain entranced with turned-based games, if they're done right.

On the whole, this one is. You command a platoon of giant fighting robots called Hercs, for which cyborg-like artificial life forms have been created. These BioDerms "link" with the Hercs to form a more effective fighting unit while making warfare safer for humans in general.

You have to go on various missions, from harvesting ore for profit to defending or attacking bases. The battles take place on a grid-based battlefield (top-down view), on an interesting array of planets. As is the case in turn-based games, you make your moves, fire your shots, plan your strategy, and then wait for your enemy to do the same. The battles can be a lot of fun: the Hercs range from small and fast, to big and cumbersome yet powerful. The graphics are attractive, the game is easy to install, and it's multi-player.

Downsides: After awhile, the missions become repetitive. Almost downright boring. On a different note, gee, a manual woulda been nice....

Still, decent game. Fun for the first 25 hours or so. Not overly system-intensive for a Sierra game. I guess at \$55, you'll have to weight your preferences, but many people will get this game and enjoy -- for awhile. I was one of 'em.

Newbie Thot

* Do you find yourself struggling through Netscape's newsreader when surfing through Usenet newsgroups. (You do know what Usenet is by this point, don't you?) Well, don't fear -- there are tons of decent newsreaders out there, for both PCs and Macs. If you want to try some out, check out my article, "Cruising Usenet Newsgroups in Style" (<http://www.earthlink.net/daily/friday/newsreaders.html>).

Privacy/Security Thots

* I wrote a couple of pieces in August (<http://www.earthlink.net/daily/tuesday/virus.html> AND <http://www.earthlink.net/daily/friday/virus2.html>) about computer viruses which elicited some interesting responses. Now, I've used many anti-virus utilities over the years, and I've been fortunate enough to snag a virus or two in my time, but I typically have relied upon others for benchmark tests -- the usual university studies, organizations, Henri Delger, etc. Recently, however, some anti-virus software companies have been trying to convince me that their products should be mentioned in the same breath as the big boys. I listened to one of these, Eliashim Software (VirusSafe), decided to try out an eval copy, and wasn't overly impressed. Thus, I've decided to take it upon myself to start testing out anti-virus software for Tek Thots. I'll run as many of the various utilities through

SCANNING tests (only) as possible, and provide the results here. To that end, I will be receptive to suggestions, anti-virus software eval copies, and viruses themselves (zipped ONLY, ideally via floppy to me c/o EarthLink). At this point, I plan to start with a minimum of 100 viruses of all types, and increase the number. For the record, I am biased, based upon past personal performances, but I do plan to be objective in my testing.

* There have been some recent rumors that the PZzip Trojan Horse is nothing but another Good Times hoax. Whatever the case, the NCSA is still reporting it to be authentic, issuing the following: "The "bad" version is called "PKZ300B.ZIP" or "PKZ300B.EXE". Delete it immediately if you find it; do not attempt to run it or unpack it."

* Excerpts from a recent issue of Secrecy & Government Bulletin:

* Classification of the intelligence budget will actually be increased with the creation of the new National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA, known in some circles as "enema"). The budget of one of NIMA's components-- the erstwhile Defense Mapping Agency-- had been unclassified. But with its consolidation into the NIMA, its budget is now classified, along with the rest of the new Agency budget. This is ridiculous, but largely irrelevant: Information on the NIMA budget will soon be published through the FAS Intelligence Reform homepage.

* The CIA intervened to block legislation that would have led to the release of U.S. intelligence records concerning Nazi war criminals. (H.R. 1281, "The War Crimes Disclosure Act"). "Given that half a century has passed since the end of World War II and given that the cold war is over, I find it outrageous that the CIA would block a bill which would help us shed light on the Holocaust," said Rep. Carolyn Maloney on September 24. But "the CIA strenuously objected to the legislation and has effectively killed it in this Congress." War criminals everywhere can breathe a little easier.

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POLL

I've been please with the response I've received thus far. I write this, primarily for myself, in that these are topics which interest me. However, I'm always interested in seeing what other people what more of, and to that end, I'd like to ask you to rate the various sections of Tek Thots on a scale of 1-10 (1 being your favorite section, and 10 being your least favorite). If one or two of the sections seem to be crowd favorites, I'll most likely try to add to them in future issues. Simply cut and paste the poll section and email it to me at sch@well.com. Thanks!

Tek Thots Reader Poll

Please rate the following categories on a scale of 1-10 (1 being most preferred and 10 being least preferred).

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|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| News/Editorial | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| PC Thots | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| Mac Thots | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
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| Newbie Thot | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
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Additional comments/suggestions:

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