

TEK THOTS
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Published irregularly by Scott C. Holstad

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News/Editorial

* Welcome to the fourth issue of Tek Thots. I apologize for the irregularity of its appearance. This is one of many sideline projects of mine, and I'm trying to somehow get this out every two weeks or so.

Thanks to those people who participated in the poll from the last issue. I found the results both interesting and helpful. Here is the order of the Tek Thots sections as you prefer them:

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Some of you made some valuable suggestions as well, and I appreciate these. For the record, for the time being, I'm not going to add any new sections, nor will I delete sections. I'll most likely provide more material for the popular sections, and concentrate less on game reviews, etc. Also, again for the time being, I'm not planning on adding sections which are not technical-based, as some of you suggested. I simply wish to maintain the technical orientation.

Finally, some of you suggestions term definitions. I've given this some thought, and I suppose that I've assumed a certain level of technical knowledge of the part of the readership. Perhaps this calls for another poll, but for the time being, I don't intend to define terms. If I refer to unfamiliar terms, perhaps this'll provide an impetus for research on behalf of readers who want to know more. Perhaps I'm dead wrong too -- write and let me know. If there's an overwhelming response asking for a glossary, I'll most likely implement it. One of the things which makes it difficult, is we have a readership base covering everyone from complete newbies to PhDs at the top of their field -- I've simply been trying to find middle ground.

* In a one fingered salute to Microsoft, Oracle announced they'll be bundling Netscape exclusively in its forthcoming NCs! Larry Ellison's been screaming for some time now about fighting Microsoft's dominance, and he's putting his money where his mouth is. In return for this, Netscape said it'll bundle Oracle's Universal Server (the top selling database) exclusively with its Merchant System, Publishing System, and Community System. This is great for Netscape, but a fairly gutsy move on behalf of Oracle.

* Lotus has announced it will ship both IE3 and Netscape3 with Notes 4.5 (also called Domino) set to ship next month. In addition, the two browsers will be included in their SmartSuite 97, due to ship after Christmas.

* In a recent issue of Tek Thots, I speculated that Reveal was not only washed up, but had completely disbanded, for all intents and purposes. How right I was. Just a few weeks ago, Reveal was forced into involuntary Chapter 7 bankruptcy by AMD and a couple of other companies. Evidently, the AMD charge has to do with a heck of a lot of money. As a Reveal product owner, I continue to have a bad taste in my mouth on this one.

* It had to happen sooner or later. AOL wised up and revised their pricing policies to reflect the current ISP standards. People can now get the standard \$20/unlimited time via AOL. They're also going to be providing IE3 to their customers.

ISPs everywhere are panicking, understandably. However, while I believe AOL had to do this, I don't necessarily buy into the assumption that the end of the world is nigh. First, AOL has never been profitable. So, listen to this: AOL is automatically transferring ALL existing customers from their current payment plans (around \$10/month) to the new payment plan (\$20). They're going to have quite a few pissed off customers by the end of the year, especially when customers realize they're going to have to physically call AOL to revert their payment plans to the current cheaper level.

Next, AOL doesn't have the infrastructure in place to handle unlimited usage. They're so used to ripping people off, that when their customers start staying online for 40 hours a month, they're going to be looking at a LOT of problems.

Third, AOL's interface remains clunky, graphics-intensive, and unfriendly in general. Even though people can bypass some of this, I think many people will continue to migrate to independent ISPs. Time will tell though. AOL's hoping to bump up their customer base from 6 million to 10 million sometime next year.

* Not only has AOL beaten Cyber Promotions in court, but now Concentric Network has as well. They just announced they have won a permanent injunction against Cyber Promotions, prohibiting the company from sending unsolicited promo to Concentric subscribers and from "falsely representing that (advertising) messages were sent from or endorsed by Concentric." While Cyber Promotions only received a \$5000 fine, it bodes well, because what they've been doing has been undesirable, unwarranted, and misrepresentative. Hopefully, this will discourage other commercial spammers; somehow, I doubt it though.

* Has anyone been thinking about this? You know companies are going to start migrating the JVM API over to their own code and customizing it (it's already happening). Well, what then? Proprietary JVMs mean no more cross-platform portability -- Java's major, major, major feature.

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PC Thots

* Not only is Hayes putting out a 56K modem, but they're going to be releasing an ISDN TA next month, and a 6MB ADSL modem. Coming back from bankruptcy pretty nicely there.

* Samsung has had to double the \$200 million line of credit they extended AST recently. God only knows why they're trying to bail out AST, which has shown little foresight over the past year or two. Even though I wasn't putting out Tek Thots at the time, some of you who know me may recall my prediction that AST will become little more than a memory in a reasonable period of time. I remain convinced of this assertion.

* Cyrix's new M2 chip sounds really exciting! It has a 64K internal cache, MMX extensions (of course), and -- reportedly -- a 75mhz bus speed! Initial versions of the chip are supposed to run at 180mhz, but it's supposed to increase to 225mh soon thereafter.

Mac Thots

* Well, it's finally here -- after much whining and gnashing of teeth (at least from me). On November 5, Microsoft finally announced the arrival of IE3 beta for Macintosh (available at <http://www.microsoft.com/ie/mac/>). I can't tell you how relieved I am to see the beast -- it's SUCH an improvement over 2.1. However, the first beta shows that there's still quite a way to go. While it supports HTML 3.2 (including CSS), its support of Java is contingent upon downloading the Apple MacOS Runtime for Java (<http://devtools.apple.com/mrj/>). At some point, the Metrowerks Java VM will be posted as well. Fairly lame. Moreover, it doesn't support JavaScript or ActiveX controls!!! Word is, future (beta) versions will correct these problems; let's hope so.

* What is up with Apple? I'm sick to death of the rumors circulating about their next OS. One day, Mac OS8 won't be backward compatible. The next, there won't be any Mac OS8; instead, a brand new OS is under development. Then, Be is going to be it. Next, retractions, refutations, etc. EXCUSE ME: ever heard of PR people? Ever heard of sticking to one story? Are you people so damn stupid that you have to screw everyone out there?

Well, here's the latest from Tidbits (which I'm printing without permission -- hope they don't sue me: I don't make a dime off this...):

Heads Be Spinning

by Geoff Duncan <geoff@tidbits.com>

Nature abhors a vacuum; apparently, the same is true for the mainstream and trade press following Apple's operating system plans (see TidBITS-343_). Last week brought a new torrent of speculation from Reuters and MacWEEK about Apple Computer, newcomer Be, Inc., and the future of the Mac OS. All told, these articles hinted at a brand new Macintosh operating system that might run on Intel-based machines, an Apple buy-out of

Be, and a hybrid Copland-Be system that might be ready by mid-1997. Add to these articles hundreds of increasingly spurious rumors and threads on the Internet, and the lines between fact and fallacy nearly vanish, so far as the general public is concerned.

<<http://cnn.com/TECH/9610/31/apple.reut/index.html>>
<http://www.macweek.com/top_stories/news_beos.html>

Both Apple and Be have issued "clarifications" to refute statements in these articles. Apple denies it has signalled a new direction in its OS strategy, or that it's planning a version of Mac OS written from scratch that would also run on Intel processors. Be Director Mark Gonzales has specifically disassociated his company from a report in MacWEEK's Mac The Knife stating Apple wants to acquire the Be OS at least partially to leverage revenue as a BeOS developer and as a publisher of other BeOS products. Gonzales states flatly that Be is not open to business alliances along those lines.

<<http://product.info.apple.com/pr/press.releases/1997/q1/961031.pr.rel.macos.html>>
<<http://www.macintosh.com/beknife.html>>

However, as with Apple's recent attempts to elucidate its operating system plans, these official responses have generated more questions than answers - what Apple says is overshadowed by what Apple is not saying. Apple has not denied it is in acquisition talks with Be; similarly, Apple has not denied it is considering a hybrid operating system built on Copland's microkernel with Be's application layer. Add to this a story in today's San Francisco Chronicle that Apple is actively seeking to locate (and possibly fire) employees who are sources of recent news leaks and rumors, and you get what can only be described as an untenable public relations position. So far, Apple's most definitive statement regarding its operating system plans is that it plans to make a definitive statement in "early 1997." Unfortunately, if rumors continue as they have been, that stance will only make a bad situation worse.

<<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/chronicle/article.cgi?file=BU9425.DTL&directory=/chronicle/archive/1996/11/02>>

At this point, it's too murky to tell what the final outcome of this windbagery might be. However, Apple and Be have reasons to talk to each other that have little to do with Apple acquiring Be's operating system. Be may have a significant interest in Apple's "middleware" (like QuickTime and QuickDraw 3D), and Apple should want to see Be's port of Be OS for the Power Macintosh succeed, whether or not it's under an Apple logo.

In the meantime, Be is pushing ahead with a developer release of BeOS for Power Macintosh (to be bundled free of charge with the January issue of MacTech magazine), and technical discussions are appearing about the realistic possibilities of the Be OS on Macs. We can only hope both Apple and Be understand silence only encourages unwarranted speculations and that they should take control of the situation, rather than letting the situation control them.

<<http://www.mactech.com/>>
<http://www.macweek.com/mw_1036/news_mac_beos.html>

Web Development Thots

* Wow! After months of promises, Netscape has blown it. Their recent decision not to implement industry-supported Cascading Style Sheets just came out of left field. Instead of CSS, they're promoting their own JavaScript Style Sheets -- a standard they submitted to the World Wide Web Consortium. This is simply amazing, because they've received so much criticism, first, for not providing CSS in Navigator 3.0 (as Microsoft did in IE3), and second, because they're not adhering to standardization. While this last point isn't necessarily unusual for them, it simply gives more fodder to Microsoft's campaign. Add that to the burgeoning potential of ActiveX, and Netscape's *screwup* could be yet another nail in their browser coffin.

Many developers are pretty darn upset at the prospect of Microsoft and Netscape heading for yet another fight over browser code support, as this obviously will drive up development cost. Add that to the fact that many publishers have already completely bought into CSS. Digital Style and SoftQuad are among the companies supporting CSS. Frankly, CSS had become somewhat of a symbol for Microsoft, and they've squawked long and loud about Netscape not adhering to standardization issues. I'm just amazed that Netscape is doing this.

* VB5 is due to hit the streets soon, and a lot of people are excited. Microsoft is building full ActiveX support into it, and it's specifically designed for developers who want to embed interactive controls in their Web pages. VB5 CCE lets developers build, test, debug, compile, and reuse ActiveX controls. Very cool. Anyone want to give me an eval copy?

* Yay! A company called Acadia Software is about to help JavaScript developers out by releasing something called Infuse. Its interface is said to be similar to Internet Explorer's, which is good. With hundreds of thousands of JavaScript-enhanced Web pages (including my personal page), there's a real market for intuitive, user-friendly GUI development environments. You would think Netscape would have a vested interest in seeing Infuse succeed, especially in light of their recent announcement regarding JavaScript Style Sheets.

* The JavaBeans (<http://java.sun.com/beans>) API is ready to go ahead of schedule and will be shipping with versions of the JDK in the very near future. JavaBeans is an architecture that allows developers to write reusable components once and run them anywhere, and a lot of people have been looking forward to this.

This Issue's Plug-in

* How about productivity plug-ins? Now Software (<http://www.nowsoft.com/>) is putting out a couple of interesting ones. AboutPeople and AboutTime are Mac and PC plug-ins which can be fairly cool. AboutPeople lets you view searchable address books which instantly display as a business cards in Netscape. AboutTime lets you view browsable calendars in Netscape which you have to see to appreciate. While both plug-ins may be best suited for corporate intranets, both seem to hold a great deal of potential. Download 'em and check out the samples.

This Issue's ActiveX Control

* Joe Oliphant's Graphics View OCX (<http://www.webtools.atoncesoftware.com/Vendors/OLIPHANT/exes/gvocx.exe>) is a graphics file display and printing ActiveX control that allows viewing of many graphics-file types, including ART, BMP, CUT, DIB, GEM, GIF, HRZ, IFF, IMG, JPG, LBM, MAC, MSP, PCX, PIC, RAS, RLE, TGA, TIF, WMF, and WPG. Full VB and C source code are included in this download. Seems pretty robust.

Stock Thots

* Was I right about Wired, or what??? I reported that there were numerous rumors to the effect that potential investors were bailing, and that the IPO price would fall, as it was vastly over-valued. Well, two days after I wrote this, Reuters released a story reporting that investors were indeed bailing, and that the IPO price was being dropped from \$14 to \$8. The IPO has been delayed, as I understand it. Frankly, many people have asked me about this, and I personally can't put my finger on any one thing (whereas you can look at Quarterdeck and know exactly why they're hurting). Scoops are welcome on this one.

* Lucent recently reported a fourth quarter profit of \$255 million, or 40 cents a share, on revenues of \$5.918 billion. During the same period last year, the company had a profit of \$13 million, or 2 cents a share. I think things will continue to get better. Lucent's announcements show a continued commitment to technology advances.

* Intuit's stocks have jumped (up 23.73 percent on Wednesday) because of rumors that Amex might buy the company. However, this also isn't the first time Amex has been rumored to take over Intuit; this happened as recently as last spring.

* Ingram Micro's IPO did pretty well -- at least out the door. On opening day, Ingram shares reached a high of 23 1/2, up from an anticipated opening of 19 in morning trading, before settling to 20 1/2, raising \$405 million alone. Predictions are that the stock could reach the high 20s/low 30s within months.

* After reporting a first quarter dip in income, Cisco's stocks actually went up 50 cents to \$62.25. Maybe, it's because it was the 10th positive quarter in a row for Cisco. You can glean more info at: <http://www.cisco.com/warp/public/146/1stQ.html>.

Game Thot

* None for this issue. I am desperate to get my hands on Master of Orion 2, though, and you can be sure to get a review of that baby when it FINALLY comes out.

Newbie Thot

* Don't know why I didn't mention this one earlier. I can't tell you how many times over the years I've been asked something like, "But Scott, who OWNS the Internet???" Well, I do -- it's in my backyard. Seriously, after boring people to tears with a technical explanation or after making them think I'm some New Age freak with an ethereal explanation, I finally sat down (a few months ago) and wrote an article explaining just this. While no one does own the Internet, of course, you can actually pin down who RUNS the Internet. If you're interested, check out my article, "But Who Runs the Darn Thing?" (at <http://www.earthlink.net/daily/monday/who.html>).

Privacy/Security Thots

* I was recently contacted by someone at McAfee after having advised a Mac user to utilize Disinfectant to scan their system, among other things. Now, most people know Disinfectant is the virtual de facto virus scanner of choice for the Mac platform, and while the McAfee person was courteous, he was also adamant in his assertion that Disinfectant

can't snag all of the Mac viruses out there anymore, especially Word Macro viruses. Now, I'm the first to admit that I'm not the biggest virus expert in the world (Alan Solomon is), so I don't know what to say about this contention. I got an eval copy, but I have ambivalent feelings. First, I don't get Mac viruses, for a variety of reasons. Second, with under 45 Mac viruses in existence, I don't really see the need to test and evaluate such a product, at least not on a long-term basis. I would welcome comments on this.

On a different note, I promised in the last issue of Tek Thots that I would start conducting my OWN tests of AV scanners, for several reasons. I am still taking suggestions and comments, as well as eval AV products and zipped viruses. I was hoping to begin with this issue, but I simply have not had the time, so it'll have to wait. I am prepared to begin with about 10 AV products. Again, send me evals and send me those infected floppies, c/o EarthLink.

* Remember hearing about that kiddie porn AOL spam a couple of weeks ago? Most people now agree it was a hoax -- some idiot's version of a nasty trick. Whatever the case, here it is, for your review:

"Date--Mon, 21 Oct 1996 04:18:17 -0400
From--[xxxx]@aol.com
Subject--Child XXX

Hi! I sent you this letter because your email address was on a list that fit this category. I am a fan of child pornography and for the past 4 years, I have been able to gather quite a collection of it. I have pictures, VHS tapes, posters, audio recordings, and games based on child pornography. I am now selling my products (or trading for other child pornography). I have a complete color catalog of all my products now available. You can purchase pictures, both normal kodak, and computer GIF or JPG's. You can purchase posters, the VHS tapes, and Audio recordings. If you send your picture, I can morph your face into one of the action shots to make it appear that you are the one having anal sex with a young boy. There are many preferences you can choose from. Hair color, weight, age, height. Age of the young boys range from 7 yrs to 17. Young girls, age 4 to 19. For \$2.99 we can send you a personalized audio cassette of a little boy moaning and groaning your name. There are many other products and services.

If you were not supposed to receive this letter, please delete it immediately. I send out these advertisements to this mailing list once a week. If you you want to get off this mailing list, please send a letter to my address below. Do not write to this email address because I will delete it after I mail these letters. The only way to get off this mailing list is to write to my address below.

Here are some prices:

Complete Color Catalog (160 pages).....	\$5.00
100 Pictures young boys age 7-12.....	\$9.95
120 Pictures young boys age 13-17.....	\$11.95

VHS tape, young boys "Bath Time"\$49.95
 VHS tape, young boys "Happy B-day, Timmy"\$49.95
 VHS tape, young boys "Bobby and His Friends"\$49.95
 VHS tape, young boys "Kid Loves Candy"\$39.95
 VHS tape, "Mister's Sin (Tale of an Alter Boy)"\$39.95
 Personalized Audio tape.....\$2.99
 Personalized morphed action pic.....\$14.95
 (be sure to include your picture)

If you have any child pornography yourself, preferably young boys ages 7-9, I will trade or buy them from you. If they are action shots, of an adult with the young boy having sex, I am willing to trade big, or pay a lot. Please write to me for more details. Thanks.

You can send a cash, check, or money order. Make it out to my company :
 "Kwo UN"

Send your order to:

Child Fun
 Attn: Steve B[xxxxxxx]
 [xxx] Roosevelt Ave., Apt. [xxx]
 Jackson Heights, NY 11372

You can also send your credit card numbers. I do not accept American Express cards."

Pretty dang amazing, eh?

* On October 30, the USAF's first Information Warfare Training Laboratory was opened at Goodfellow AFB in Texas by General Billy Boles, Commander, Air Education & Training Command. The lab is supposed to teach both offensive and defensive aspects of Info Warfare -- anybody care to speculate...?

* A recent issue of the Journal of Electronic Defense reports that, unable to resolve software and integration problems, the US Army has called off the initial operational test and evaluation (IOT&E) of its Ground Based Common Sensor Light, the first of the three Intelligence and Electronic Warfare Common Sensor (IEWCS) platforms to go to the testing grounds of Ft. Huachuca, AZ. The system was scheduled to complete the test run in September. Crews from both Electrospace, the EMD developer, and Lockheed Martin Federal Systems, the production contractor, were at the site and attempted to get the system into working order, but were unable to pull it off. The system never made it to the field; "It was cancelled before we started," said a range official.

As a result, Army officials at Vint Hill Farms Station, VA, were regrouping behind closed doors for a Special In Process Review of the program -- a "recovery plan," in the words of one source close to the program.

Online versions of this electronic newsletter will be archived at:
<http://www.well.com/user/sch/tekthots.html>.

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