

# TEK THOTS

## Electronic Newsletter

TEK THOTS

Volume 1, Number 7

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News/Editorial

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\* Welcome to the seventh issue of Tek Thots. I'd like to say that I'm not overly interested in starting a mailing list discussion group, but I am interested in feedback and discussion, so I'll occasionally print a response or conversation between readers (or between readers and myself). Again, while I welcome such things, I don't want that to become the emphasis of this newsletter. That said, here's a copy of a discussion I had with one of our readers. Anyone care to follow up?

>Date: Thu, 12 Dec 1996 14:05:09 -0600

>From: Suzanne Aldrich

>To: "sch@well.com"

>Subject: RE: Tek Thots 1.6

>

>Hey Mr (or is it Ms?) Tek thots? W/regards to your comments on MS taking

>Netscape's browser market share, I disagree. Haven't you heard about

>Netscape's "inked" agreement w/five of seven RBOCS: Ameritech, Bell

>Atlantic, BellSouth, Pacific Bell and Southwestern Bell which

>establishes Netscape Navigator software as the default browser for the

>regional Bell operating companies'

>(RBOC) Internet services? This deal will give Netscape a crack at a

>potential market of about 72

>million consumers and businesses in 25 states and Washington D.C., and

>in 15 of the nation's 20 largest markets.

>

>As far as the commercial online services, MS can have them. The RBOCS

>will eventually take away the commercial online services internet market

>share as well, because they've already established long-term

>relationships w/the consumer market, albeit, not always a positive

>relationship, but they own their own fiber networks in their respective

>regions.

>

>W/regards to your browser stats from Browserwatch. I've seen different

>figs from other analyst sources which shows Netscape holding @ about

>75%. Would like to know Browserwatch's methodology.

>

>Would like you feedback, as I consider you the expert.

>

>Respectfully,

>

>Suzanne

>

>PS. My opinion of MS is strictly personal. I can't stand the company -

>it's about time they were finally investigated by the justice dept.



>>-----

Hi! Thanks for responding! In fact, would you/do you mind if I were to print this (part of or all of) this response in a Tek Thots (with your name and email)? I don't know if I will, cause I'm not sure I want to turn it into a mailing list (as opposed to a newsletter), but if I get nice rebuttals like this, it might be worth putting in there.... Let me know.

Well, I partially agree with you. I think it's good for Netscape, obviously, and more power to them. While I prefer PCs, that doesn't mean I'm a huge Microsoft fan. Nonetheless, I think the RBOCs will have a lot to prove re being an ISP. They certainly have the infrastructure in place, but do they have the know-how, the customer service, the wherewithall, etc.? I know that Pac Bell has been successful in signing up a nice number of people here in California, but what will their retention rate be like. Not too surprisingly, I've heard little but negatives about their service and their support. Last Spring I beta tested for them, in the early stages, and their software couldn't even support Rockwell chipsets!

My point is, the RBOCs have a lot of potential, but there are a number of people in the industry who think they'll need time to prove they can handle it.

You're right about the commercial onlines, to a large degree. My major disagreement would be re AOL, which -- no matter how badly they treat their customers or do idiotic things -- has shown they're a player, and will continue to be so.

The reason why I think Browserwatch is significant (they track these things thru the usual methods) is that many visitors to the site are developers who are, presumably, producing Web content and sites. These people have a big impact on what we see. If 40% of them are using IE3 (compared to the estimated general public's 16%-20%), this bodes ill for Netscape. The implication is we'll see more and more IE-specific sites.

Finally, I think Netscape should continue to fear IE (and continue setting deals, like the RBOCs), because of ActiveX. Admittedly, it's difficult to forecast the future, but the fact is that it's built on a pre-existing technology with a base of over a million developers waiting to migrate pre-existing VB apps over. That's a pretty difficult thing to overcome



for Netscape....

Thanks for the comments, and feel free to keep 'em coming. Indeed, more are welcome.

- \* Suzanne is right to bring up Netscape's December 10 announcement though. Five RBOCs isn't too shabby, and there is a huge potential customer base. As she mentioned, the RBOCs are Ameritech, Bell Atlantic, BellSouth, Pac Bell, and Southwestern Bell. I'll be interesting to see what effect this will have.

- \* Did you see what Reuters reported about Intel this week? Stunning news. Intel finished developing a supercomputer capable of doing one trillion operations a second -- the absolute fastest in the world. That speed comes close to tripling the previous record in computing speed (by Hitachi in 1995 with a supercomputer capable of doing 368 billion operations a second).

The Intel "supercomputer" (gotta love those media terms...) will be used at the government's Sandia National Laboratory to simulate the performance of U.S. nuclear weapons, replacing live tests of weapon stockpiles. It'll also be used to predict weather changes and natural disasters and in other Energy Dept. projects.

Intel built the "supercomputer" using 9,624 Pentium Pro chips, and linking them together in a "massive parallel processing" effort.

How much will this baby cost? Try \$50 million!

- \* Companies currently on my "Evil List," which has come about due to non-existent technical support:

- Creative Labs. A CD-ROM drive problem resulted in my calling their tech support number (which, at 405-742-6655, you'll notice cost ME money), only to wait on hold for a total of over four hours, never reaching a live human.

- EA. Game problem. Tech support hours are something like 8-5 M-F. What, do they think the rest of us don't work???

- Netcom. I'll admit it's been awhile, but I had some system problems, and needed a little advice. I called, at my cost, and held for a grand total of over seven hours. I faxed and emailed. TWO AND A HALF



MONTHS LATER, I got a generic return email!

Feel free to send me companies to add to the Evil List, along with explanations, and your names.

- \* Add Prodigy to the list of online providers who have beaten Cyber Promotions in court (at least count, all three major commercial onlines have won). The settlement has not yet been disclosed, but hopefully it's enough. As much as I'd like to think this would teach spammers a lesson, I simply don't think it will....
- \* How about those LUCKY Kingston Technology employees. \$100 million Christmas bonus (for 523 employees)!!! Sheesh -- that's treating your employees right.
- \* I get a lot of mail from people, asking various questions. Many of them focus on various hoaxes making their way around the Internet. One such message I've been getting a lot recently revolves around Houghton Mifflin donating a certain number of books to hospitalized children for every 25 email messages they get. Well, it sounded somewhat spurious to me, so I called HM up and spoke with Erica Kohnke, one of the PR spokespersons. Turns out that this is legit. Not only, but they've gotten a tremendous response, and have donated 2500 books so far. Check out <http://www.polarexpress.com> for more info. Nice to hear a positive like this.

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PC Thots  
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- \* In a recent Tek Thots issue, I wrote that Samsung is bailing out AST Research once again. Well, AST has now finalized their new two-year, \$200 million bank credit guarantee with Samsung. At the same time, AST also announced a one-year extension of another \$200 million bank credit guarantee with Samsung. So, in the end, Samsung is guaranteeing \$300 million to AST through the end of this year, increasing to \$400 million on January 1 (of '97). However, I still can't shake the feeling of WHY? I continue to assert AST is dead in the water.



\* In what may be construed as another middle fingered salute to the folks at Redmond, IBM says they'll discontinue development of Windows NT software to run on systems running the PowerPC chip (developed with Motorola and Apple Computer). The reasoning, evidently, is a desire to focus the workstation business on systems which run Unix on PowerPC technology. This, after IBM announced Windows NT running on the PowerPC in February.

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## Mac Thots

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\* Mac news, for me, has been anything but inspirational lately. I'm sick to death of conflicting reports, misreports, spin control, and the seeming leadership vacuum regarding the next major OS (let alone any OS strategy). Nonetheless, there are a few things happening in the Mac community. A final version of the Java VM is due out next month, BBEdit Lite for OpenDoc come out, ReadAudio 3 is available, Prodigy has a beta Web browser for Macs, etc. However, do you think there will EVER be a Mac VRML browser which is moderately crash-proof???

\* In their continuing effort to do nearly anything to lure users back to the fold, Apple is offering holiday rebates on many of their systems (including some printers and monitors). The rebates vary between as little as \$150 and as much as \$2000.

\* Yesterday, Apple CEO Gilbert Amelio demonstrated the mid '97 Mac OS update, code-named Tempo (it'll probably be called System 7.7). It's the first major revision to the Mac OS since System 7.5. Tempo is supposed to improve performance, as well as integrate the Internet and multithreading within the Finder.

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## Web Development Thots

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\* Oracle's still pushing their apps to the Web. Designer/2000 is the latest to be updated. Version 1.3.2 helps with the design of HTML forms



which can be used to add, delete, and modify records -- not just query them (as was the case in the previous version). Designer/2000 doesn't really specify the HTML form design itself, but it generates a database schema and a set of stored procedures for use with Oracle's Web application server.

\* Corel has put out an interesting-sounding new product called WebMaster Suite, which combines: the Corel Web.Designer, Web.SiteManager, Web.PhotoPaint, Web.Draw, Web.Move, Web.World, Web.Data, O'Reilly's WebSite (a very nice addition, if I may add), Netscape Navigator (don't know which version), 7,500 clipart images, and a free 30 day Web site hosting. Looks like a pretty nice deal, and certainly one worth checking out.

\* JavaSoft and Microsoft are both going after the Java market in a big way. JavaSoft is launching JDK 1.1, while working hard with Intel on the Java Media APIs, scheduled for release sometime early next year. Meanwhile, Microsoft is trying to provide Java classes which leverage DirectX APIs. My money's on Microsoft, but it'll be an interesting ride.

\* Symantec has just released Visual Cafe, containing over 100 pre-built Java Beans components. It's going for about \$200 a pop.

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### This Issue's Plug-in

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\* How many of us use organizers, especially Day-Timer? Well, now there's a Day-Timer plug-in for Windows 95 (<http://www.daytimer.com/comp/plugin.html>). I have rather ambivalent feelings, because I think their stand-alone software is great, but I can't see much practical use for the plug-in specifically. Nonetheless, Day-Timer encourages us to use the plug-in to "view contact information, calendars and dated events in the familiar Day-Timer interface within your browser."

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## This Issue's ActiveX Control

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- Most of the ActiveX controls I write about are for developers to integrate into their pages, but this one's for users. The Adobe Acrobat Document Reader (<ftp://www.microsoft.com/msdownload/sbn/adobe/Rdrr32b1.exe>) allows you to interact with Adobe's .pdf files, an increasingly popular Web publishing format. This type of tool is increasingly necessary on the Web.

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## Stock Thots

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- US Robotics (USRX) has been going wild recently. Since announcing their 56kbps modem, they've gone up to the high 70s before falling more than 10% in a day. Frankly, I've always liked USR, and would expect them to ultimately hold pretty steady.
- 8x8 (<http://www.iit.com>) is expected to release their IPO this week. They design and develop video compression semiconductors, among other things. Their semiconductors (used for video conferencing) combine RISC microprocessors, digital signal processors, video processing circuitry, static RAM memory, and software to compress and decompress video and audio while establishing and maintaining network connections. Their sales have gone up nearly 45% over the past year, to about \$29 million. They're expected to offer 2.5 million shares for \$8-\$10. Might be worth a thought.

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## Game Thots

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- These game demo ideas are brought to us courtesy of Eugene Ridenour, EarthLink's Gamemaster.

## PC Game of the Week: Fallen Haven

Take command of defending Human or invading Tauran forces in the struggle



for control of new Haven. Build structures, research technologies, and mobilize your forces in preparation for the ultimate war. Then send your troops into battle and match wits with the enemy, up close and personal. (<http://www.imagicgames.com/fhaven.dir/fhaven.html>)

### Mac Game of the Week: Alley 19 Bowling

Alley 19 has successfully replicated the bowling experience with its unique mouse-controlled throwing action. Best of all, Alley 19 combines all the fun and competition of real bowling with an original '50s soundtrack. (<http://www.starplay.com/alley19.html>)

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### Newbie Thot

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\* Sick of seeing the term "Java " thrown about, yet not knowing what the heck is going on? What's with the coffee references anyway? Well, if you want a basic intro to Java -- what it is, where it came from, what it does, etc. -- check out my EarthLink article, "Have a Cuppa Java," at <http://www.earthlink.net/daily/tuesday/morejava.html>.

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### Privacy/Security Thots

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\* Word has it that the UK Labour Party Web site was hacked last week. Interestingly, although the Telegraph reported this, the article is no longer available online. Gee, wonder why.... Anyone have any insight into this?

\* On another hacking note, on December 9th, hackers broke into the Singapore government's main Web site and replaced it with a list of the user identities of more than 100 officials from various government bodies. Evidently the site was up for a solid 12 hours; rumors have it that a cgi script loop was used to execute the hack. It's sort of interesting how this one really hasn't seen major press....



Incidentally, in Singapore, hacking can carry a fine of \$2,000 and a two year prison term. (What, no caning?) It'll be interesting to see if anything comes of this.

\* Has this been the year for virus hoaxes, or what? I am so sick to death of idiotic messages spamming the universe regarding mythical viruses. Some of them are so absurd, that my wife asked "When will we see the 'Tickle Me Elmo' virus?" Well, following hot on the trail of Deeyenda is "Penpal Greetings." I can't even begin to count how many of these messages I got last week. If I didn't know better, I'd begin to worry that I'm getting flamed;) Anyway, here's one of my responses:

Thanks for the info. Ironically enough, I received it on the same day that a virus hoax piece I wrote appeared (at <http://www.earthlink.net/daily/tuesday/hoax/>).

This virus is a hoax. The message contains similarities to the Good Times and Deeyenda virus hoax messages. More importantly, you can find info validating the fact that it's a hoax (such as at <http://www.datafellows.com/v-descs/penpal.htm>).

I looked up this Carrick Troutman fellow and gave him a call. Turns out that he'd just found out it's a hoax, but too late -- he's passed on this info to tons of people. I gave him the URLs of some places he can check with for virus info before passing said info on.

FYI, it's practically impossible for a virus to destroy your computer by reading an email message. Viruses are programs, which means they must be executed. Typically, then, they'll be in email attachments, not the actual email messages.

You might want to pass this info on.

>----- Forwarded message -----

>Date: Tue, 10 Dec 1996 09:38:48 -0500

>From: <@Phobos.stepenv.com>

>To: sch@well.com

>Subject: (Fwd) Virus Alert

>

>Hello. Wanted you to be aware of the following.

>



>Importance: High

>

>If anyone receives mail entitled: PENPAL GREETINGS! please delete it WITHOUT  
>reading it. Below is a little explanation of the message, and what it would  
>do to your PC if you were to read the message. If you have any questions or  
>concerns please contact SAF-IA Info Office on 697-5059.

>

>This is a warning for all internet users - there is a dangerous virus  
>propogating across the internet through an e-mail message entitled "PENPAL  
>GREETINGS!". DO NOT DOWNLOAD ANY MESSAGE ENTITLED "PENPAL GREETINGS!"

>

>This message appears to be a friendly letter asking you if you are  
>interested in a penpal, but by the time you read this letter, it is too  
>late. The "trojan horse" virus will have already infected the boot sector  
>of your hard drive, destroying all of the data present. It is a  
>self-replicating virus, and once the message is read, it will AUTOMATICALLY  
>forward itself to anyone who's e-mail address is present in YOUR mailbox!

>

>This virus will DESTROY your hard drive, and holds the potential to DESTROY  
>the hard drive of anyone whose mail is in your inbox, and who's mail is in  
>their inbox, and so on. If this virus remains unchecked, it has the  
>potential to do a great deal of DAMAGE to computer networks worldwide!!!!

>

>Please, delete the message entitled "PENPAL GREETINGS!" as soon as you see  
>it! And pass this message along to all of your friends and relatives, and  
>the other readers of the newsgroups and mailing lists which you are on, so  
>that they are not hurt by this dangerous virus!!!!

>

>

>Carrick T. Troutman, Jr.  
>Director, Military Systems Division  
>Subsystem Technologies, Inc.  
>102 Brookstone Court  
>Yorktown, VA 23693-5515

I have to admit to not knowing anything about this Subsystem Technologies, or their Military Systems Division. I do know I found this Troutman person's home phone number, and called him there, reaching him during the day. I (gently) chided him on his irresponsibility, and told him how he could research these things first. Call me irresponsible, but if we all started trying to find people spreading these things on, and calling them on it, maybe the proliferation would decrease to a more livable limit....



\* Well, I'm continuing the AV testing process. I'm continuing to procure AV evals, as well as viruses. However, this is taking up a bit more time than I wish to devote (currently), so I'm considering making this more of a bi-issue feature, rather than a regular feature in each issue. Unless I receive tons of email requesting that it conti

PRODUCT	Number Caught (out of 200)	%
Anywhere AV	199	99.5%
Dr. Solomon's FindVirus	199	99.5%%
ThunderBYTE (Tbav for Windows 95 v7.06)	198	99%
F-PROT (v. 2.24c)	196	98%
Sophos Sweep	196	98%
IBM Antivirus	195	97.5%
Invincible	195	97.5%
McAfee VirusScan 95 (2.01.218)	195	97.5%
Leprechaun	192	96%
Norton AntiVirus	191	95.5%

Notes: I do plan on listing all of the versions tested. I have no excuse; I simply haven't gotten around to doing that yet.

\* EPIC has produced a brief analysis (found at [http://www.epic.org/crypto/export\\_controls/draft\\_regs\\_12\\_96.html](http://www.epic.org/crypto/export_controls/draft_regs_12_96.html)) of the Commerce Department's Encryption Export Regulations Draft. Not to shockingly, it looks pretty horrifying. Here's a small excerpt of the analysis:

December 11, 1996

The Commerce Department is circulating draft regulations that differ sharply from earlier assurances made by the White House to relax export controls on strong encryption. The draft regulations state that it is the aim of the Commerce Department to promote "a worldwide key management infrastructure with the use of key recovery and key escrow encryption items." The proposal contrasts with earlier assurances that encryption standards would be voluntary and market-driven.

The regulations would amend the Export Administration Regulations (EAR) by imposing national security and foreign policy controls ("EI" for Encryption Items) on certain information security systems and equipment,



cryptographic devices (including recoverable encryption software) and related technology.

For the first time, the Administration makes clear what it means by "Key Recovery Encryption." The regulations state that

For purposes of this rule, "recovery encryption products" refer to encryption products (including software) which allow law enforcement officials to obtain under proper legal authority and without the cooperation or knowledge of the user, the plaintext of encrypted data and communications.

This is an exact description of the original Clipper encryption proposal that was widely opposed by Internet users and industry when it was announced in 1993.

\* **VERY BIG PRIVACY NEWS:** Alexandr Nikitin was released from FSB-based prison in St. Petersburg on December 14. Bellona (<http://www.grida.no/ngo/bellona/ehome/press/151296.htm>) reports that the release was ordered by the State Attorney in Moscow. This is a stunning reversal of policy for the Russians.

Nikitin had been held in isolation for 10 months, since the arrest by the Russian security police FSB (formerly the KGB). They have now been forced to release him, primarily due to massive public pressure. If this is indeed the reason, this is a first.

For those unfamiliar with the case (I first read about it in the September/October issue of The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists), Nikitin helped author a paper called, "The Russian Northern Fleet: Sources of Radioactive Contamination" (<http://www.grida.no/ngo/bellona/ehome/russia/nfl/index.htm>), banned by the Russians since October 22. The paper focused on extensive nuclear pollution in northern Russia (such as the fact that 16 reactors have been dumped in the Kara Sea, six of which still contain fuel). In October, Bellona's Russian offices were ransacked, and Nikitin was arrested and charged with treason. Bellona hired a lawyer named Yuri Schmidt to defend him, but -- get this -- "internal FSB procedures require any lawyer who takes a case involving treason to agree not to travel abroad for five years and to have his mail and phone calls intercepted" (Bulletin, pp 5-6)! Egad! Schmidt wasn't thrilled, refused to accept those conditions, and was denied the right to see Nikitin. Meanwhile Nikitin was denied bail because he was absent for court. Why was he absent? The FSB refused to present him in court,



keeping him imprisoned. Moreover, Schmidt wasn't even allowed in the courtroom!

I still don't know of the "official" reason for Nikitin's release, and he's still not off the hook. Let's keep our thoughts with Bellona and Nikitin and hope that the right to communicate knowledge about nuclear irresponsibility may prevail.

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At this point and until further notice, the email list will be handled manually.


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

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