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About This Particular Macintosh: About the [personal computing experience](#)™

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Welcome

by Robert Paul Leitao, rleitao@atpm.com

Welcome to the September issue of AT^{PM}! As summer slowly winds its way toward fall, this edition of your favorite Internet magazine will take the scenic route through the world of Macintosh computing as we bring you the latest news and views in our easy-to-read monthly format.

Dude, Where's My CPU?

On the last day of August, Apple Computer (to no one's surprise) finally announced the long-awaited G5 iMac. What may come as a surprise to many people is the form factor for the latest version of Apple's popular desktop computer. Sure it sits on a desk, but only a few square inches of the new computer actually touch the surface. The CPU and all of the internal hardware components are tucked behind the monitor in a revolutionary new design.

The new iMac sports the IBM G5 processor in 1.6 and 1.8 GHz options, and uses the NVIDIA GeForce FX 5200 Ultra to power graphics on the 17" or 20" LCD displays. Released at prices similar to the G4 iMac it replaces, the new G5 iMac will ship in September.

.Mac Again

It's renewal time again for many .Mac members. Apple's subscription-based Internet service has become an important component of the company's "beyond the box" revenue and gross margin strategy. Now available at a discount price of \$70 for buyers of new Macintosh computers, the regularly priced \$100 per-annum service is gradually gaining new subscribers while providing an increasing number of products and services. Watch for more exclusive .Mac items as we enter the month of September and tens of thousands of subscribers evaluate renewing their subscriptions for another year.

Buy Low, Sell High

It's the well-known strategy for investment success. Lesser known to most investors is when to buy and when to sell a particular stock. Investors who purchased shares of Apple a year ago must be doing the happy dance as AAPL hits new multi-year highs. On September 2, 2003 AAPL closed at \$22.85 per share. In late August 2004 AAPL was trading close to \$35.00 per share.

Thanks to the change in Apple's product mix (namely the success of the Apple iPod), many analysts are changing their valuation model for AAPL. Even at today's recent highs investors may see AAPL's current price as a buying opportunity.

Microsoft Versus Apple: The Music Edition?

In September, Microsoft will unveil a music store to rival Apple's iTunes Music Store. Media reports suggest Apple has rebuffed Microsoft's requests to make the iPod compatible with the Microsoft music service. Is this Microsoft versus Apple: The Music Edition? Once again the two companies are going head-to-head in a nascent market popularized by Apple.

The Apple iPod From Apple

This title appears to contain a redundancy, doesn't it? But read on...

The Apple iPod From HP

In late August, the folks at HP introduced the "Apple iPod from HP." That's right, the Apple iPod is now available for sale as an HP product. The Apple iPod from HP comes in white (just like the Apple iPod from Apple). The Apple iPod from HP comes in 20 GB and 40 GB versions (just like the Apple iPod from Apple). The retail costs of the Apple iPod from HP are \$299 and \$399 respectively (just like the Apple iPod from Apple). The Apple iPod from HP is manufactured by Apple (just like the Apple iPod from Apple).

That title wasn't the only thing to contain an apparent redundancy, was it? But read on...

Apple iPod Accessories for the Apple iPod From HP

The HP Web site contains a litany of Apple iPod add-ons for the Apple iPod from HP. In fact, many of the third-party iPod accessories are identical to the items offered at the Apple online store.

So where do the apparent redundancies end? The Apple iPod is the undisputed leader in the digital music player market. The Apple iPod from HP will extend Apple's leadership in this emerging market, while the increase in sales volume from HP will help Apple reach greater economies of scale. Apple brings the iPod to HP, and HP brings thousands of new retail points of sale to Apple.

Make no mistake: the Apple iPod from HP is all Apple and all iPod. The only thing redundant is the success both companies may find in extending the iPod's popularity.

Meanwhile, incoming freshman at prestigious Duke University will receive an iPod upon arrival on campus.

34,224 Problems, 1 Solution

It's estimated that more than two-thirds of e-mail traffic is spam. Many of us encounter a deluge of unsolicited e-mail on a daily basis. In this writer's case, I had an e-mail account so

full of spam messages it caused my well-known e-mail client to unexpectedly quit whenever I attempted to access the account. I stopped using the e-mail address.

Enter Michael Tsai's [SpamSieve](#)¹ solution. After the easy installation and a few user actions outlined in the instructions, this handy anti-spam utility churned through 34,224 pieces of accumulated junk mail messages while freeing the server of a huge e-mail mess and restoring my once-abandoned e-mail account to service. I recommend SpamSieve for Mac users who need a powerful anti-spam solution.

The ATPM Staff

The Candy Apple: Integration Is Kind of Sneaky

It's time to make The Change to OS X.

Desktop Muse: This Song Belongs to You and Me

"Happy Birthday to You, Shut Up or We'll Sue!"

Machine Language: Almost Just As I Predicted, Sort Of

"Had I actually turned this column in on deadline, you would be reading my confident prediction for a 'son of the Cube' iMac."

About This Particular Web Site

Firewalls, hamsters, Japanese translations, duck hunting, and unwritten books.

Cartoon: Cortland

Chad is not happy about the return of Cortland, and Todd attempts to woo Cortland over to the command line.

Cartoon: iTrolls

The iTrolls reveal the five stages of hard drive grief, send a get-well card to Steve, theorize about the origin of Mac rumors, and listen in on Schiller's Paris Expo keynote rehearsal.

Desktop Pictures: Renderings

3D renderings submitted by reader Mark Feemster.

Review: DEVONnote 1.0b

Eric Blair takes DEVONnote out for a spin to find out if it's up to the task of managing his mess.

Review: Hardware Hacking: Have Fun While Voiding Your Warranty (book)

A how-to for wannabe hardware hackers.

Review: iRac

College professor, plus coat hanger, plus spare time, equals a unique and useful Mac accessory.

Review: MicFlex

MacMice takes [Snaggy's advice](#)² and applies it to a microphone.

Review: The Spam Letters (book)

This book reverses spam and gives us a lot of laughs.

Review: Tactile Pro

"Apple will obsess over synchronized sleep indicator lights and how the bottom of the iMac looks, but it doesn't seem to take keyboards seriously."



1. <http://www.c-command.com/spamsieve/>

2. <http://www.joyoftech.com/blurbs/reviews/sightFlex.html>

E-Mail

About This Particular Outliner¹

I do not often take time to thank people for their Web efforts. Your article(s) on outliners deserve kudos. I do not know how, but I *strongly* invite you make efforts so your Web site is better known.

—*Jacques Racine*

Wow, I look forward to these articles every month. After each issue I try something new to see how it fits in with my workflow. I'm still surprised that there is not one outliner that will do it all but the way these articles spell out all of the features it is clear why.

Thanks very much for all this work. The quality of this series is incredible.

—*Julie Remold*

Belkin Media Reader Review²

I got this with my new 4G iPod. My experience³ wasn't as pleasant as yours.

—*Tom Boucher*

This works great for small files, but once you hit 6 megapixels, it crawls along. I'd recommend you look at either a SmartDisk FlashTrax⁴ or one of the many Archos⁵ products.

—*Paul Charlesworth*

I took mine back. It took 25 minutes to read a 512 MB card and completely discharged the iPod. Since I now mostly use 1 GB cards, it is totally unsuitable. It is a good idea, but a very poorly executed media reader.

—*Winsor Crosby*

iTrip Review⁶

I've used the iTrip for my 4th-generation iPod and it works just fine. Figuring out how to set the frequency was the tricky part (due to the fact that I rarely read manuals—doh!); but,

1. <http://www.atpm.com/10.08/atpo.shtml>
2. <http://www.atpm.com/10.08/media.shtml>
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once you get the hang of it, it's very simple. I commute through the Chicago metro area. For the most part, I can set it to 95.5 and get a good reception. The sound quality is on par with decent FM radio stations, so I am very happy with the product. It's great at parties, too, since I'm virtually taking my entire music library with me and I can play it on the boombox, although the sound quality is not CD-quality.

Performance will definitely vary depending on your location and other factors, but I've tried it in my Civic, my friends' Altima and Maxima, my home stereo, and my buddy's boombox. So far, they all worked fine. Great purchase for \$35!

—*C. Lee*

iTalk Review⁷

Thank you so much! I have been waiting for a review on the iTalk from *Macworld*, or *MacAddict*, or anyone for that matter. I wanted to buy one to start creating an audio journal and to record some personal interviews for a book I'm writing. This review really helped in making that decision. I wasn't sure about file size, how the file was stored, or if the quality would be good enough. I really appreciated your audio samples. They made the difference in my decision. I completely agree with Patrick S. This is one of the best reviews I have ever seen for any product. Well done!

—*Matthew Skaj*

Kudos

The site is nice enough to make me wish I had a Macintosh so that I could participate. As a multiple PC owner I have to just snatch a few images and make off with them.

—*Mike Taplin*

I enjoy the monthly AT[®]M transmission so very much. I really appreciate the time and effort your staff puts into preparing the issues. Thank you so much!

—*F. Hill, Anchorage*

7. <http://www.atpm.com/10.07/italk.shtml>

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The Candy Apple

by Ellyn Ritterskamp, eritterskamp@atpm.com

Integration Is Kind of Sneaky

I remember when the word first came out that if you bought a computer with Windows on it, there would be embedded ways to encourage you to use other Microsoft products, like Internet Explorer and Excel. We all gasped in horror. How could they think we would let them force us to use particular products, just because they were there? At the time, I misunderstood the nature of the problem. Later it turned out that it wasn't so hard to remove the stuff you didn't want, at least for computer users who could follow directions.

Several years later, I find myself in a similar situation, but in my case I'm getting to choose which products I want to use. They are not being forced on me. I've finally decided to upgrade to OS X so that I can have a new iPod. Yes, it has come to that. I must change the operating system on my computer so that I can have a new portable digital music player.

I know I could continue with OS 9 for quite a while. It works fairly well. But at some point I'll have to make the switch, if only to keep up with what I'll need to learn at work. I'd hesitated about changing here at home because the

computer's other user sometimes does not embrace change. But now he says he's ready, and that I should not delay because of him.

Dang it. I had a built-in excuse.

My iPod no longer connects properly to the Mac. The FireWire cable plugs in to it OK, but the port is kind of loose. Sometimes it's plugged in for a while but isn't charging. The Mac no longer sees it (the iPod doesn't mount on the desktop), so I can't make any updates to the playlists from iTunes. I use my first-generation iPod nearly every day at the gym, and I'd been thinking that one of the new mini-iPods would go great for that. They need iTunes 4, which requires OS X. I'd also been wishing I could buy music from the iTunes Music Store, also supported only by iTunes 4. So here we are. I am upgrading an operating system so I can play music on another device.

Funny how bound up together it all is. And funny how I don't really resent this interlocking the way I would if it were forced upon me. I am doing what I want to do, so that makes it OK.

Onward.

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This Song Belongs to You and Me

As we learned recently in the news, Woody Guthrie's classic folk song "This Land is Your Land" is actually in the public domain. The controversy began early last month, when Ludlow Music sued Jib Jab (a political satire site) that posted a parody of negative campaigning set to Guthrie's music. (Anyone unfamiliar with this story can find numerous references online.)

Little did Ludlow Music realize that they really didn't own anything. As the court discovered, Guthrie originally copyrighted the song in 1945 (as part of a songbook, which the Electronic Frontier Foundation found at the Library of Congress). At that time, copyrights lasted twenty eight years and could be renewed once during that term for another twenty eight years. Guthrie, however, neglected to renew the copyright which expired in 1973.

Meanwhile Ludlow Music, unaware of Guthrie's original copyright, registered the song in 1956 as an original copyright, not a renewal. Ludlow then renewed the invalid copyright in 1984, which, unknown to them, was eleven years too late.

Public Domain? Don't Be So Sure.

It's surprising just what is and isn't in the public domain. A song may be a part of the fabric of the culture, as "This Land" is, but don't assume that means it belongs to the people. A case in point: "Happy Birthday to You." We've all sung it countless times at countless birthday parties, plus offices, schools, churches, etc. Yet, the seemingly timeless, authorless, should-belong-to-everyone "Happy Birthday" is under copyright, and will remain so until at least 2030.

Timing, Timing, Timing

The original melody we know today as "Happy Birthday" was written in 1893 by Mildred Hill. Her sister, Patty, added some simple words welcoming students to class:

Good morning to you

Good morning to you

Good morning, dear children

Good morning to all.

Not much different from countless other songs made up to entertain kindergartners. The original was published in 1893 in the songbook *Song Stories for the Kindergarten*. Soon after, the word "children" was changed to "teacher," and the last line was changed to match the first two. The result was titled "Good Morning to You."

The words we're all familiar with first appeared as a second stanza to "Good Morning to You" in 1924. Soon after, thanks in part to radio and talking pictures, the song became a birthday celebration song.

Happy Birthday to You, Shut Up or We'll Sue!

The song appeared in the Broadway musical "The Bandwagon" in 1931, was used for Western Union's first singing telegram in 1933, and Irving Berlin musical "When Thousands Cheer," also in 1933. The Hill family received no compensation for any of these performances, so in 1934 Jessica Hill (the third sister) sued on behalf of her siblings. As a result, "Happy Birthday" was copyrighted and published by the Clayton F. Summy Company in 1935.

Under the copyright law of the time, "Happy Birthday" should have entered the public domain by 1991 at the latest (following two twenty-eight year terms). But the Copyright Act of 1976 extended the term of protection to 75 years and the Copyright Extension Act of 1998 added yet another 20 years. So, as a result, "Happy Birthday" will not enter public domain until 2030. That's a whopping 137 years after the melody was originally composed.

So What Can I Sing at Birthdays?

Does that mean that every time "Happy Birthday" is sung that royalties are due. Of course not. Commercial uses, such as those that led to the original suit of 1934, as well as performances before large groups of people, require royalty payments, though the latter cases are rarely enforced. It does make me wonder, though, about other versions of birthday songs sung at theme restaurants.

And Why Do I Bring This Up

Well, first off, it's a fun fact that many don't know. But more importantly it shows just how ridiculous copyright laws have become. Some suggest going back to the original fourteen-year term (so-called "Founders Copyright"), but that's unrealistic. Too much time and money is invested in arts and entertainment. Only having fourteen years of benefit will discourage investment. In addition, as an artist, I like to have some control over how my work is used. To lose that control after only fourteen years and have a work I poured my soul into used to sell cat food is unthinkable. Perhaps a better idea would be to go back to the 28-year renewable copyright, but to allow two renewals instead of just one. The result would be a maximum term of 74 years (almost identical to the 1976

version of copyright law), which would easily span the lifetime of an artist. It won't happen of course. There's too much financial interest involved in making copyright last as long as possible.

Thanks to [Wired News](#)¹ and [Snopes.com](#)² for providing the background information to this article.

1. <http://www.wired.com>
2. <http://www.snopes.com>

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Almost Just As I Predicted, Sort Of

The new [iMac G5](#)¹ has arrived, and it is exactly what I expected it to be. And it is also exactly what I expected it would not be.

I was guessing the third-generation iMac would be a headless “son of Cube”—a hybrid of the spirit behind Apple’s stylish, white plastic Mac and the technology of the brushed-metal, shot-full-of-holes Power Mac G5. Unlike the failed original, the “son of Cube” would not be underpowered and overpriced. The release of Apple’s new line of monitors earlier this summer seemed to support this view: a 17-inch model was conspicuously absent from the lineup. The gap likely would be filled by a 17-incher released along with a headless iMac.

On the other hand, history tells us that iMacs are all-in-one computers, so the rumors of the new iMac would be a flat screen with the CPU and the rest of the works glued on its back seemed reasonable.

Had I actually turned this column in on deadline, you would be reading my confident prediction for a “son of the Cube” iMac. But since I dragged my feet until the new 17- and 20-inch iMacs were revealed, I can now weasel out of that prediction by admitting that I underestimated the significance of two key elements in the design of a new iMac: the heat generated by the G5 chip and the demands of Mac marketing.

It’s been clear for a while that venting the considerable heat of the high-powered G5 has been one of Apple’s biggest challenges in getting the speedy chip into a PowerBook. And while I figured that the designs of the two Macs were unusually linked by the G5 challenge, in the end that seemed more like an argument against building a compact iMac than one in favor of it. I underestimated Apple’s willingness to go the extra mile. It should have been obvious that if Apple engineers can find a way to get the chip into a PowerBook—and we know they will—they can also shoehorn the G5 into a trim new iMac design. And they did. But who would have thought that such nifty engineering would emerge in the iMac G5 *before* it graced the top of the line laptop? Not me, apparently.

The other underestimated factor was Apple’s determination to keep a firm line between the consumer and pro Mac lines. While a headless Mac and a larger range of monitor sizes offers more options—an iMac user could later trade up to a faster Mac without losing the investment in a flat

screen, and a pro user on a budget could opt for a smaller monitor on a Power Mac—that’s not what Apple wants. A headless iMac would blur the line between the consumer-friendly iMac line and the pro-oriented Power Mac. Veteran Mac users may want more monitor options, but to Apple, protecting the iMac image is more important.

I’m eager to play with the new iMac G5 and very pleased with its clean design. So far, I have only one small disappointment to report: I was hoping that if the designers managed to engineer a flat screen all-in-one, they’d also find a way to incorporate maglev technology so it would levitate above my desk.

iPod Insanity

On the day the iMac G5 was announced, Apple’s Web site slyly promoted the new model as “from the creators of the iPod.” But even with the tail wagging the dog, if the new iMac is even remotely as successful as the iPod, Apple will have no complaints. Not only has the wildly popular iPod-iTunes combo sent Apple’s stock through the roof, it seems to have the unexpected side benefit of driving the competition insane.

At RealNetworks, pugnacious founder and CEO Rob Glaser apparently has gone completely nuts following the realization that Apple is kicking his ass. RealNetworks owns Listen.com and the “celestial jukebox,” [Rhapsody](#)², which features subscription-based streamed music and downloadable music that can be burned to CDs. Earlier this year, Glaser e-mailed Apple’s Steve Jobs to suggest that the media titans would fare better in the coming online music war with Microsoft if the iPod were re-engineered to be able to play music downloaded from Rhapsody. Allegedly, Glaser threatened to team with Microsoft if Jobs declined his overture, which Jobs did. And when, mysteriously, Glaser’s e-mail found its way to the *New York Times*—there were suggestions that Jobs himself forwarded it to the paper—the snubbing of Glaser went public, big time.

No real surprise. Glaser’s been dissin’ Jobs for a while now. In a *Wired* magazine interview last year, before iTunes expanded into the Windows world, Glaser condescendingly thanked the Apple CEO for kick-starting online music sales: “It’s hard to design a better scenario for us than what Apple

1. <http://www.apple.com/imac/>

2. <http://www.rhapsody.com>

did” in creating the iTunes store, Glaser said. “It’s great having Steve Jobs get the word out since we have the best service for the 95 percent of the people who don’t use a Mac.”

Glaser rejects the Jobs mantra that people don’t want to rent music, they want to own it. He fervently insists that streaming and music-by-subscription are the future of online music, telling *Wired* that one of his company’s “challenges” is to “teach consumers about digital music.” But with RealNetworks joining other iTunes wannabees at the back of the pack, it’s Glaser, not music buyers, who’s been taken to school.

Undaunted by Apple’s rejection, Glaser kicked the rivalry up a couple of notches by releasing Harmony—software that allows any digital player to play music downloaded from Apple’s music store. Apple likened RealNetworks to a “hacker,” and threatened legal action, but Glaser still wasn’t done. He created an ersatz dot-org consumer Web site, “[Freedom of Music Choice](http://www.freedomofmusicchoice.org)¹”, self-described as “a destination for consumers to learn more about the issues of music choice in the growing digital music arena.” Glaser’s overheated site—“Consumers are getting a raw deal with the status quo in digital music”—features a logo graphic of an iPod as an unlocked padlock and a call to action: “Don’t let Apple break your iPod! Sign up and tell the Apple [sic] you want the right to choose where you get your music.” There’s also a mission statement vowing to help consumers “break the chains that tie their music devices to proprietary music downloads.” You can almost hear the patriotic music swelling in the background. And for a limited time, it’s available for just 49 cents! Yes, Freedom of Music Choice even includes a promotion for a Rhapsody half-price sale.

I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again, probably many times: Rob Glaser is a fatuous twit. Whether Apple should “unlock” the iPod is a question worth discussing—but it’s a business matter. There’s no Constitutional guarantee of freedom of choice in digital music players. Glaser’s phony baloney consumer-activist campaign (“Choice Rocks!”) insults those with genuine concerns about the issues of “the growing digital music arena”—interests that go beyond just selling music.

1. <http://www.freedomofmusicchoice.org>

The Empire Strikes Back

Even as the Jobs–Glaser drama unfolds, another big name has entered the online music “arena” (and without Glaser’s assistance!). After numerous delays, Microsoft is in music biz. Some industry watchers think the company will be an instant player, but don’t expect the Earth to move anytime soon. Microsoft may have enough muscle and guaranteed exposure to quickly move into second place, but its late start, unproven technology, and image problems guarantee Microsoft won’t be king of the hill anytime soon.

Microsoft is just not cool, and cool counts for a lot. Apple names software upgrades after big cats; Microsoft calls them “service packs.” Apple has Steve Jobs; Microsoft has Steve Ballmer. Apple has the iPod. Microsoft has a sticker that promotes its compatibility with less-popular players. There’s nothing sexy about the name “Microsoft Music Store.”

Still, Microsoft’s Janus software and a new version of the Windows Media Player will add a new dimension to the competition: the rented music so dear to Glaser’s heart. New digital rights management software will make it possible to subscribe to music without buying it, a scenario which has yet to get a serious market test. Will music lovers buy in to renting? No one knows. If conflicts pop up between software and players, will consumers be understanding if they can’t get to their rented music?

And, of course, like everyone else in Apple’s thinning competition, Microsoft lacks the one thing that above all else has made the iTunes Music Store a success: the iPod. So far, selling music online appears to be at best a break-even proposition while Pods are selling at premium prices faster than Apple can make them. Microsoft may become number two in selling music online, but to Rob Glaser’s consternation, it isn’t likely to be at Apple’s expense.

A Last Word on iPods

You may have heard rumors of a forthcoming video iPod. As the owner of a handheld TV, I can attest to the limited appeal of watching a tiny screen, so allow me to immodestly offer a better idea: an iPod with digital satellite radio. Now, how cool would that be?



About This Particular Web Site

by Paul Fatula, pfatula@atpm.com

[Setting up Firewall Rules on Mac OS X](#)¹

Trying to set up Mac OS X Server's firewall using the provided GUI was both frustrating and confusing, so I decided to try doing it from the command line. This page was tremendously helpful. Beginning with a good description of what firewalls are and how they work, it offered a pre-written set of rules to help get me started, instructions for installing and using firewalls, and documentation to help me through understanding what the rules do. I found working with `ipfw` and setting up a shell script to apply my rules on system boot to be strangely enjoyable: the command line feels much more responsive than a GUI, since it is so straightforward and literal.

[HAMSTERster.com](#)²

[Friendster](#)³ is all the rage, one of many places where people can hook up with friends and meet new people online. Then came [Catster](#)⁴, where you can browse, search, and learn about any of nearly six thousand member felines. So I thought, ha ha, wouldn't it be funny if there were a Hamsterster? Well, I typed it in and yes, Virginia, there is a hamsterster. Web-savvy hamsters can search, browse, read about, and gaze adoringly at over 250 of their peers. They can also befriend each other, adding links on their profile pages to those of family and friends. This Web site may be the only chance for countless shut-in hamsters to hone their social skills.

-
1. <http://www.novajo.ca/firewall.html>
 2. <http://www.hamsterster.com>
 3. <http://www.friendster.com>
 4. <http://www.catster.com>

[Odd & Interesting Copy](#)⁵

Comical Japanese-to-English translation errors are kind of old hat, but this is a site I only recently encountered. This small collection also includes a typo on a "MacWold" badge, and a store sign advertising direct-import English version iBooks as "iBook for Engrish." No, not all the typos are Mac-related. Just trying to keep it relevant, folks.

[Duck Hunt](#)⁶

Hamsters (or people) who aren't feeling particularly social will be happy to learn they can also shoot ducks online. Yes, it's the classic game of Duck Hunt, played by mousing over a target and firing with a click. The sound is turned on by default, and it's loud, so you might want to mute your Mac before beginning a game while at work. Not that you'd play Duck Hunt at work. Of course not. Um. It's Duck Hunt, I can't think of anything else to say about it, so on to...

[Library of Unwritten Books](#)⁷

Have you got a great idea for a book but somehow just haven't gotten around to writing it yet? The Library of Unwritten Books collects short interviews with people about books they want to write. The interviews are made into small books and distributed. The Web site, among other things, includes a catalog of unwritten books, with title and author, that have been collected so far. A few titles I like include: *The Revenge of the Bullied One*, *The Brass Cow*, and *The Unofficial History of Play*. Those who live in England can also look for opportunities to record their own unwritten books.

-
5. <http://tabiwallah.com/oddwallah/>
 6. <http://www.johnnyslack.com/duckhunt/duckhunt.php>
 7. <http://www.unwritten.org.uk/index.html>

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Cartoon: Cortland

by Matt Johnson, mjohnson@atpm.com



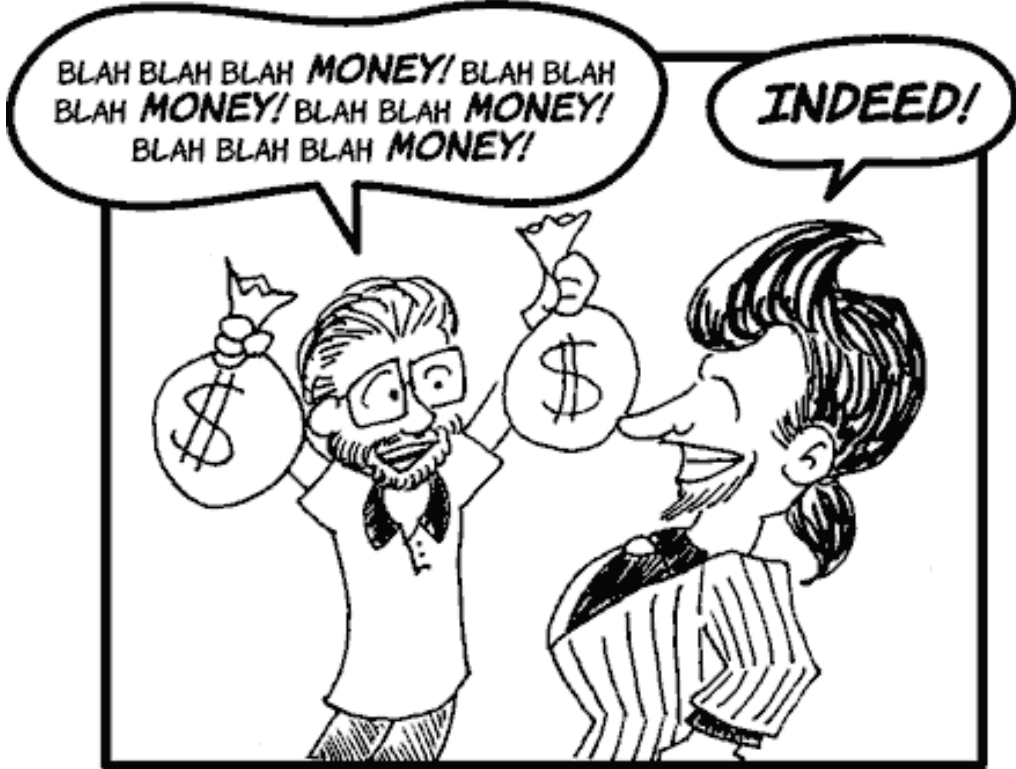
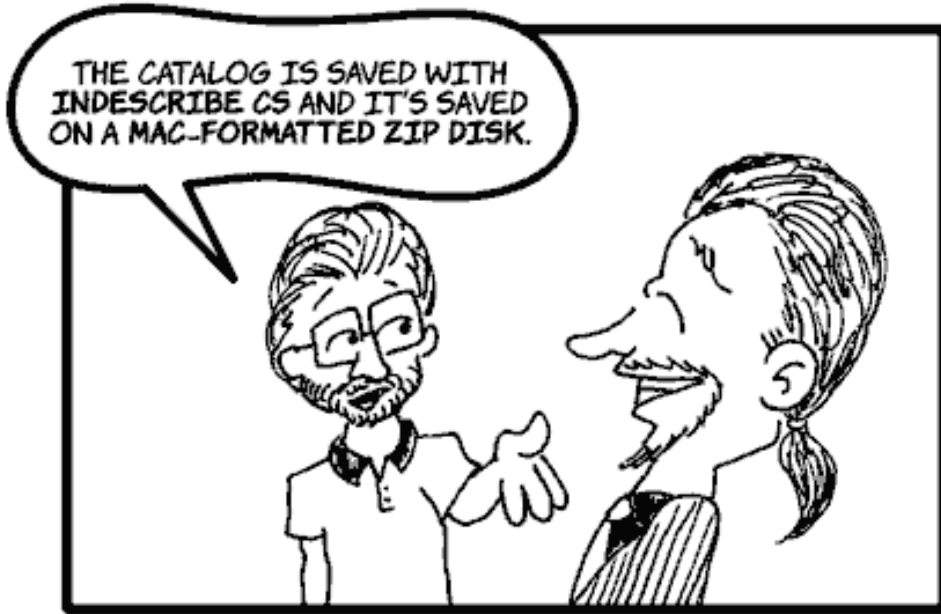
THE PRINT QUALITY IS TERRIBLE...
MY JOBS ARE ALWAYS LATE... IT'S NO
WONDER I'M THEIR ONLY CUSTOMER.



STILL, THE ASS-KISSING
IS SECOND-TO-NONE!

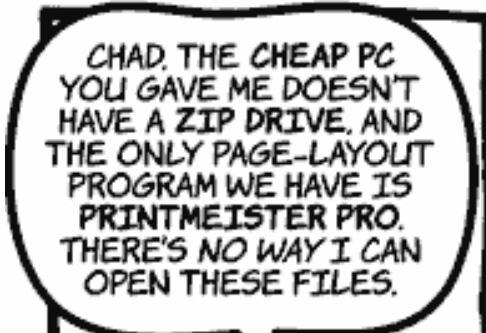
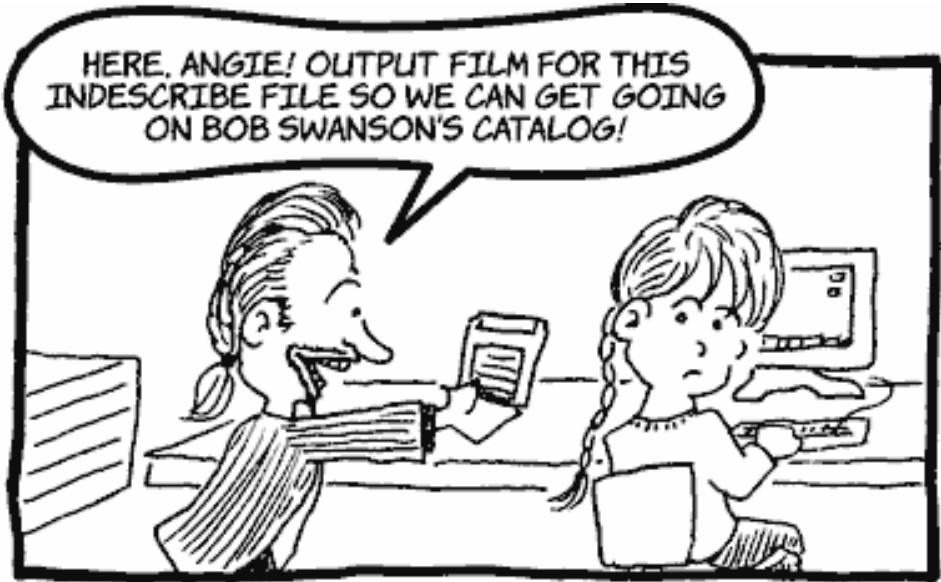


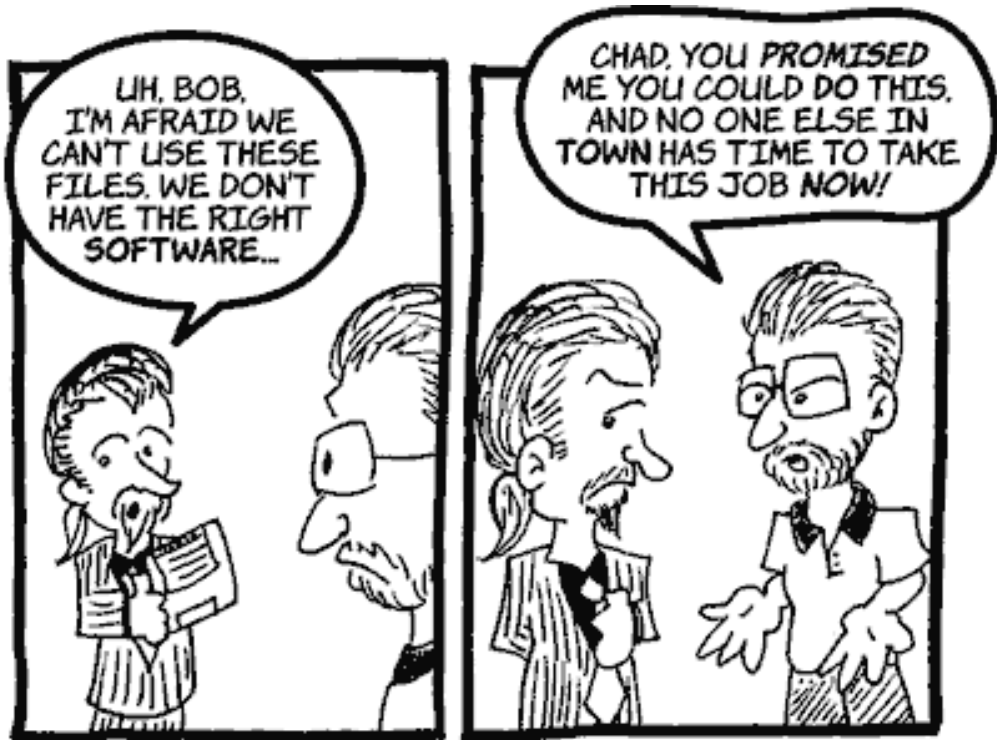
WHAT THE CUSTOMER SAYS...



WHAT THE SALES REP HEARS...

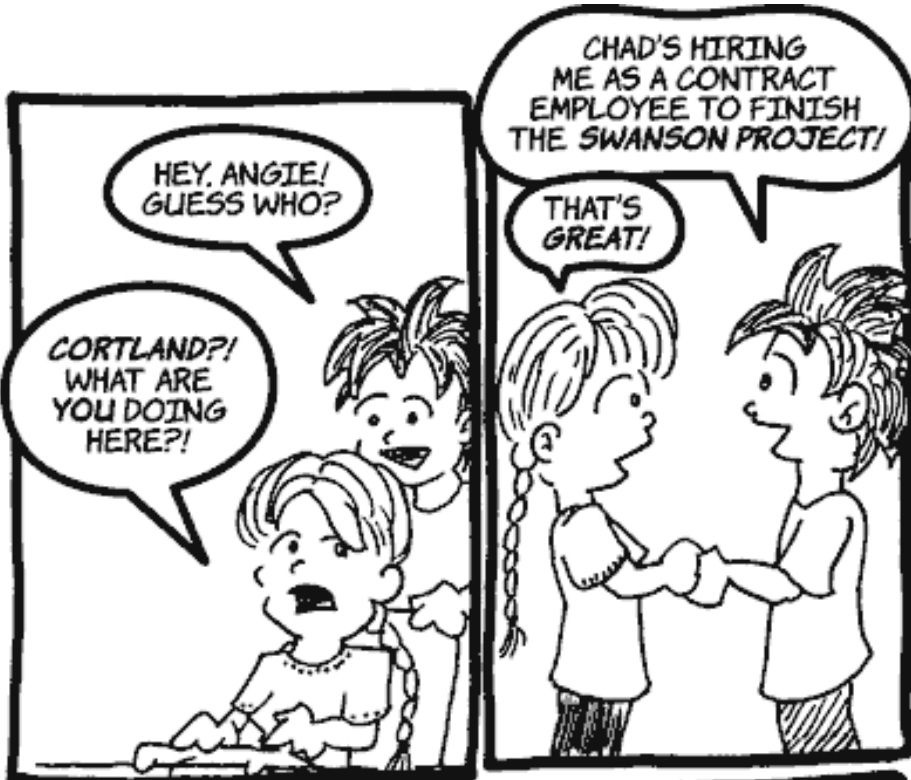




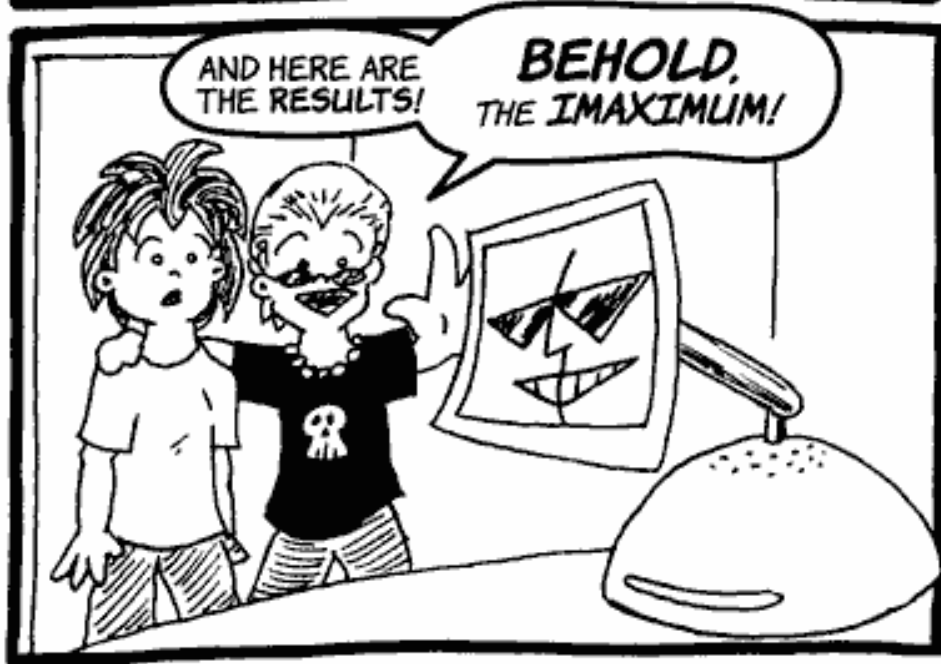
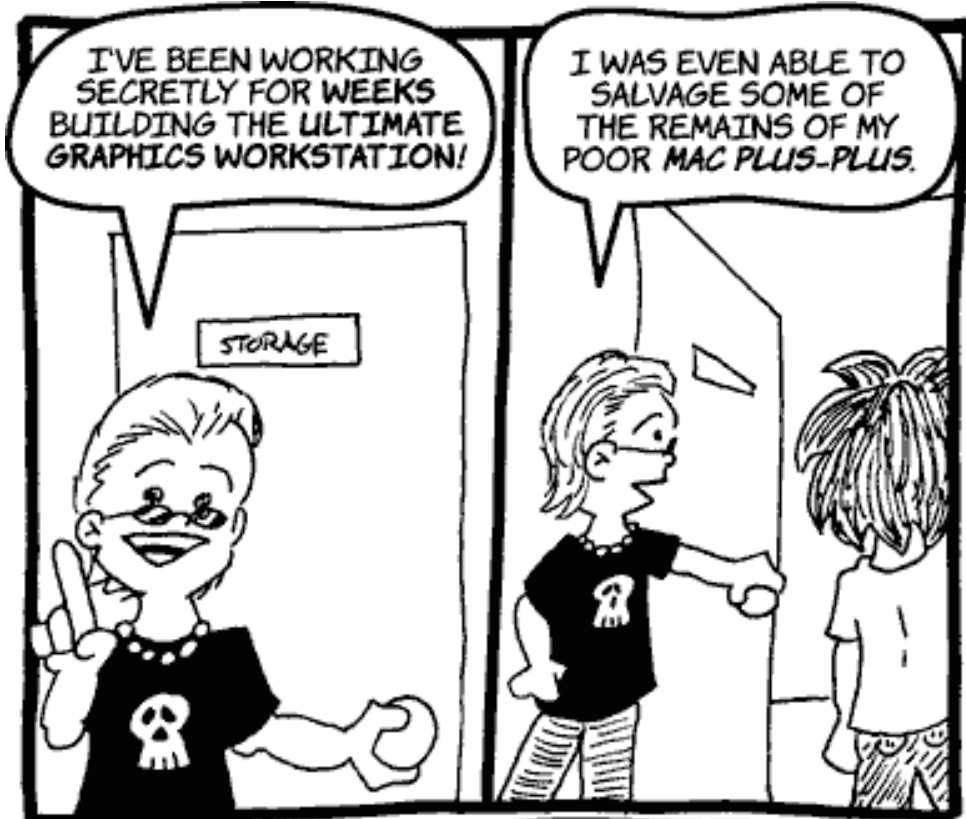










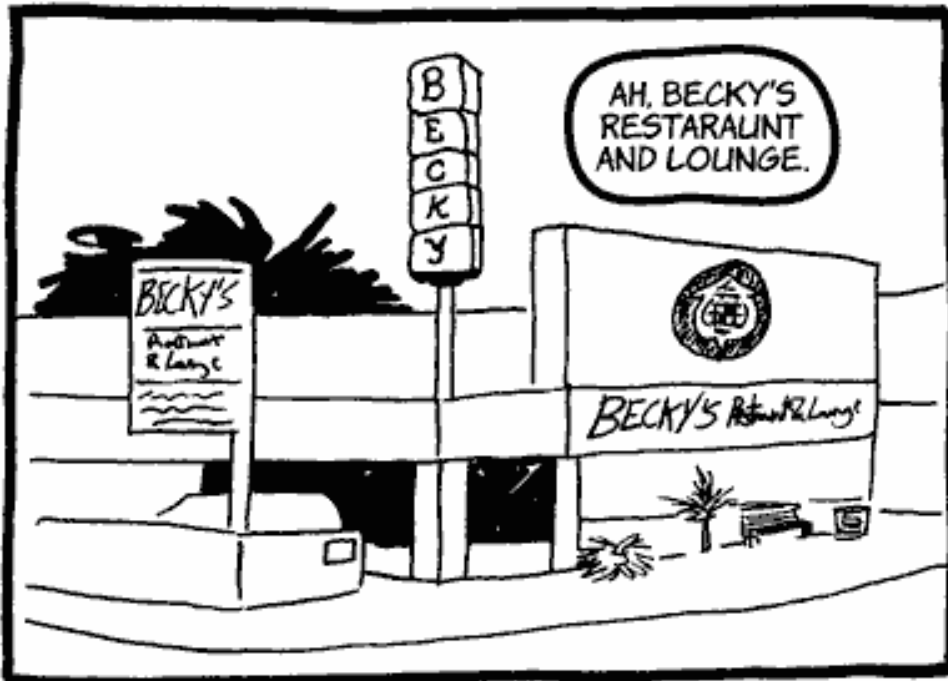


WOW! A 3GHZ G5 CPU, 8GB RAM,
LOADED WITH ALL THE ESSENTIAL
SOFTWARE. THIS'LL REALLY HELP
ME OUT, TODD! THANKS!

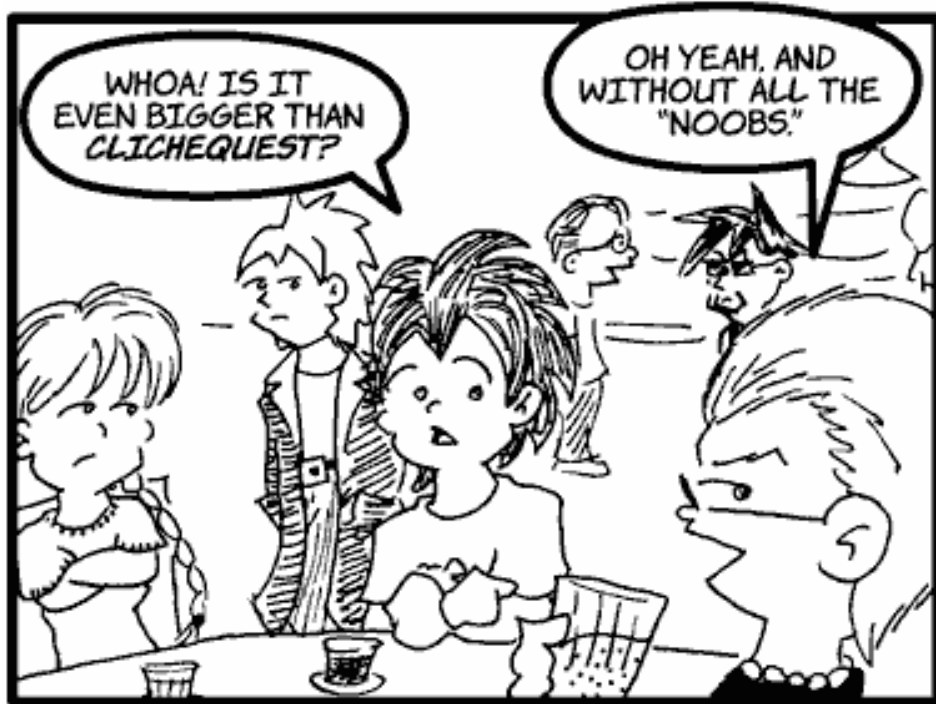
NO
PROB.

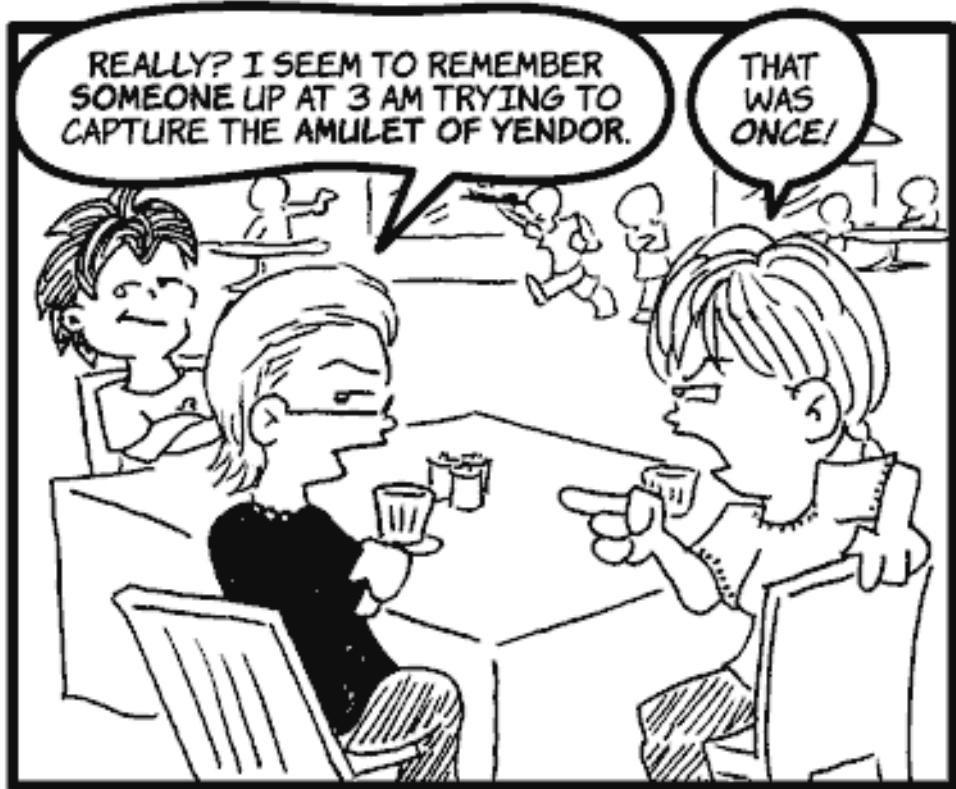
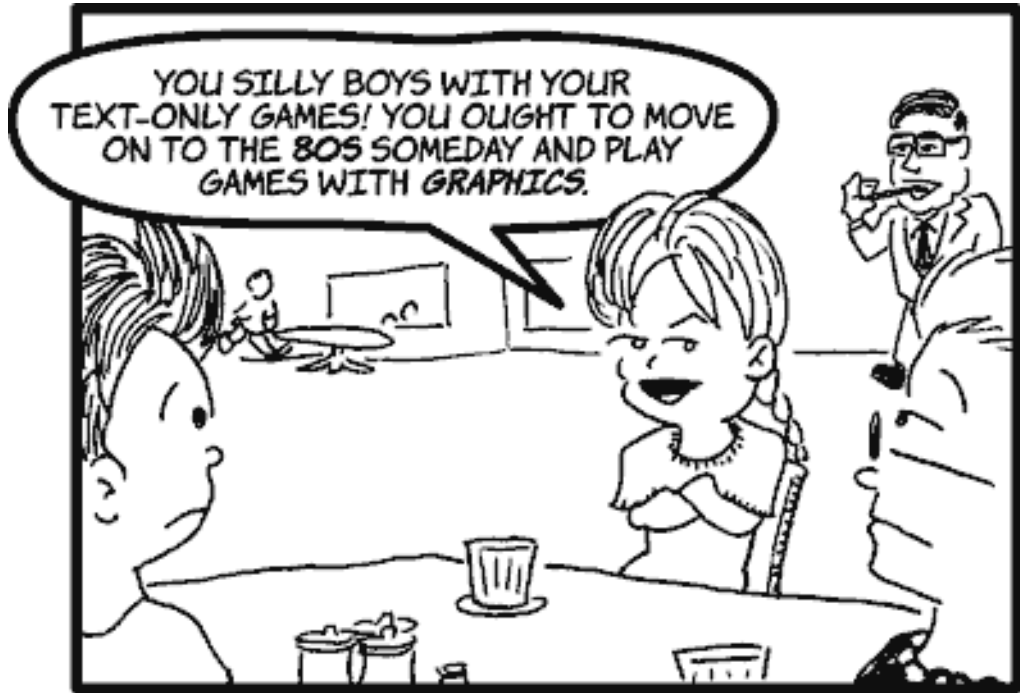
NOW, WHAT YOU SAY WE HEAD
OVER TO BECKY'S TO CELEBRATE?

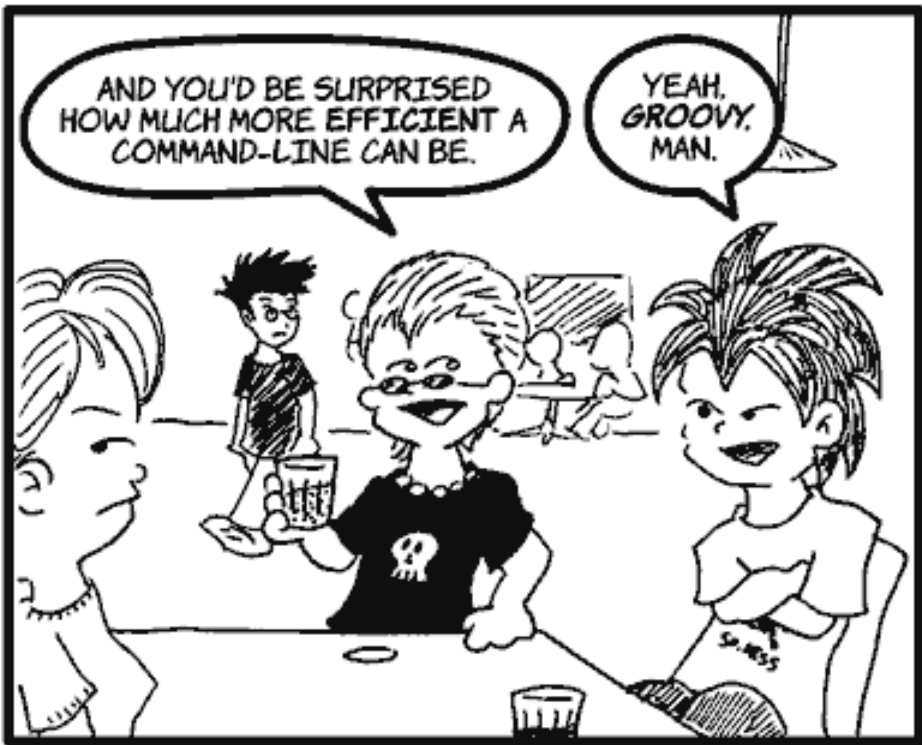
OK, BUT
YOU'RE PAYING,
FREELANCE
BOY.











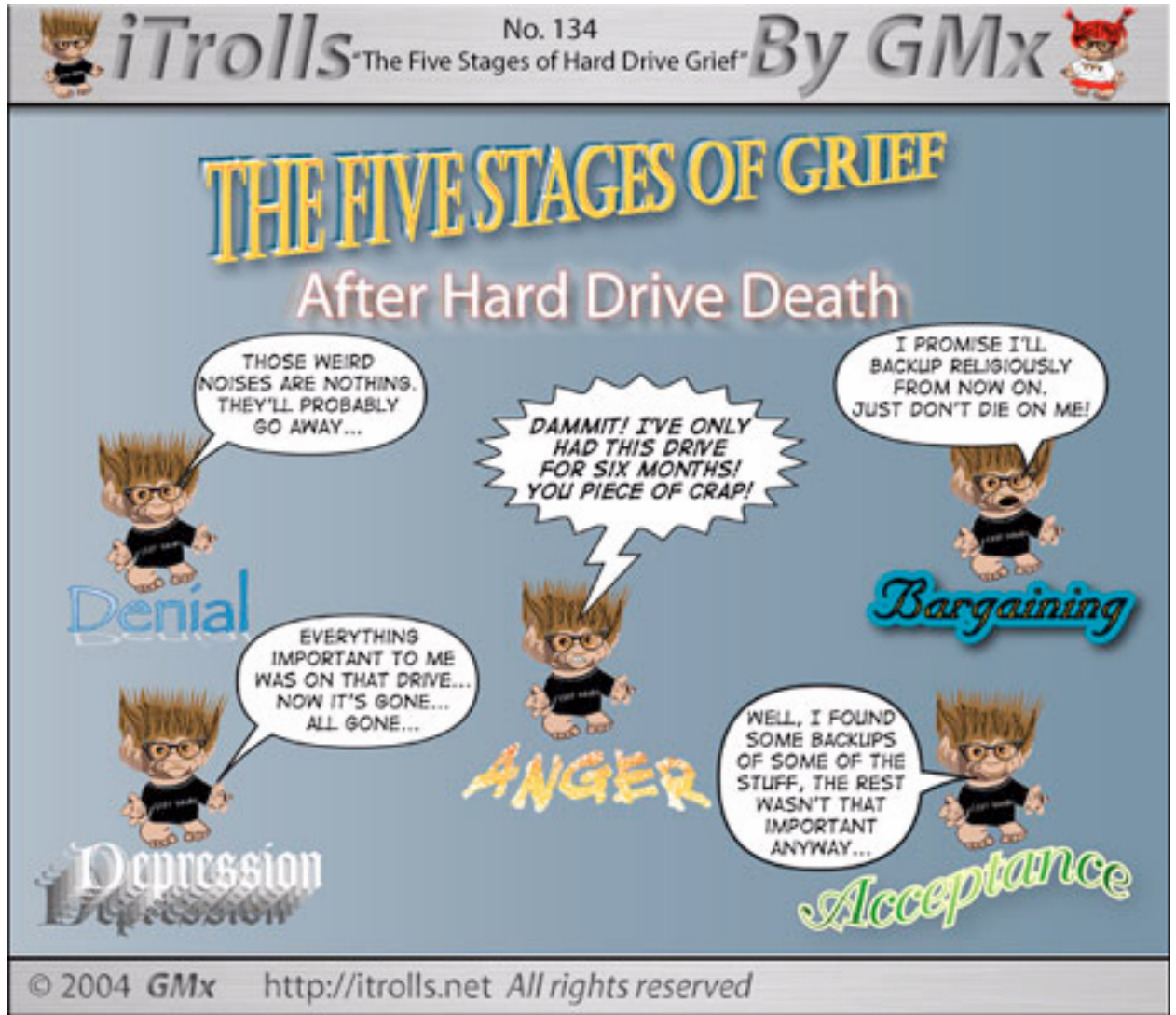


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Cartoon: iTrolls

by GMx, <http://homepage.mac.com/gregmx>





iTrolls

No. 135 "Get Well Steve"

By GMx

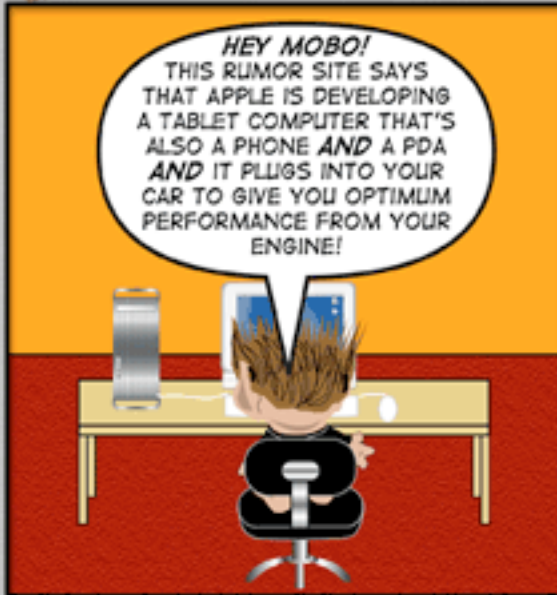


Get Well and Stay Well Steve!
The World Wouldn't Be the Same Without Your Vision
(Reality Distortion Field and All)!



From Everyone At iTrolls

© 2004 GMx <http://itrolls.net> All rights reserved



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<http://itrolls.net> All rights reserved



PHIL SCHILLER REHEARSES HIS LINES BEFORE STANDING IN FOR STEVE AT THE PARIS EXPO.

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<http://itrolls.net> All rights reserved

Copyright © 2004 GMx, <http://homepage.mac.com/gregmx>.



Renderings

Renderings¹

This month's desktop pictures are 3D renderings that were submitted by [Mark Feemster](#)². More artwork from Mark is available in his [gallery](#)³ at 3D Commune.

Previous Months' Desktop Pictures

Pictures from previous months are listed in the [desktop pictures archives](#)⁴.

Downloading all the Pictures at Once

iCab and Interarchy (formerly Anarchie) can download an entire set of desktop pictures at once. In iCab, use the Download command to download "Get all files in same path." In Interarchy, use HTTP Mirror feature.

Contributing Your Own Desktop Pictures

If you have a picture, whether a small series or just one fabulous or funny shot, feel free to send it to editor@atpm.com and we'll consider publishing it in next month's issue. Have a regular print but no scanner? Don't worry. E-mail us, and we tell you where to send it so we can scan it for you. Note that we cannot return the original print, so send us a copy.

Placing Desktop Pictures

Mac OS X 10.3.x

Choose "System Preferences..." from the Apple menu, click the Desktop & Screen Saver button, then choose the Desktop tab. In the left-side menu, select the desktop pictures folder you want to use.

You can also use the pictures with Mac OS X's built-in screen saver. Select the Screen Saver tab which is also in the Desktop & Screen Saver System Preferences pane. If you put the ATPM pictures in your Pictures folder, click on the Pictures Folder in the list of screen savers. Otherwise, click Choose Folder to tell the screen saver which pictures to use.

Mac OS X 10.1.x and 10.2.x

Choose "System Preferences..." from the Apple menu and click the Desktop button. With the popup menu, select the desktop pictures folder you want to use.

You can also use the pictures with Mac OS X's built-in screen saver. Choose "System Preferences..." from the Apple menu. Click the Screen Saver (10.1.x) or Screen Effects (10.2.x) button. Then click on Custom Slide Show in the list of screen savers. If you put the ATPM pictures in your Pictures folder, you're all set. Otherwise, click Configure to tell the screen saver which pictures to use.

Mac OS X 10.0.x

Switch to the Finder. Choose "Preferences..." from the "Finder" menu. Click on the "Select Picture..." button on the right. In the Open Panel, select the desktop picture you want to use. The panel defaults to your "~/Library/Desktop Pictures" folder. Close the "Finder Preferences" window when you are done.

Mac OS 8.5-9.x

Go to the Appearance control panel. Click on the "Desktop" tab at the top of the window. Press the "Place Picture..." button in the bottom right corner, then select the desired image. By default, it will show you the images in the "Desktop Pictures" subfolder of your "Appearance" folder in the System Folder, however you can select images from anywhere on your hard disk.

After you select the desired image file and press "Choose," a preview will appear in the Appearance window. The "Position Automatically" selection is usually fine. You can play with the settings to see if you like the others better. You will see the result in the little preview screen.

Once you are satisfied with the selection, click on "Set Desktop" in the lower right corner of the window. That's it! Should you ever want to get rid of it, just go to the desktop settings again and press "Remove Picture."

Mac OS 8.0 and 8.1

Go to the "Desktop Patterns" control panel. Click on "Desktop Pictures" in the list on the left of the window, and follow steps similar to the ones above.

Random Desktop Pictures

If you drag a folder of pictures onto the miniature desktop in the Appearance or Desktop Pictures control panel, your Mac will choose one from the folder at random when it starts up.

1. <http://www.atpm.com/10.09/renderings/>
2. <mailto:mark@staminastudios.com>
3. <http://www.3dcommune.com/3d/gallery.mv?Bryce+only+6+8HdFA4TLA>
4. <http://www.atpm.com/Back/desktop-pictures.shtml>

DeskPicture

An alternative to Mac OS's Appearance control panel is Pierce Software's DeskPicture, [reviewed](#)¹ in issue 5.10 and available for [download](#)².



1. <http://www.atpm.com/5.10/roundup.shtml>
2. <http://www.peircsw.com/DeskPicture.html>

Review: DEVONnote 1.0b

by Eric Blair, eblair@atpm.com

Developer: [DEVONtechnologies](http://www.devon-technologies.com)¹

Price: \$20

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.2 with Safari

Trial: Fully-featured (150 hours)



DEVONnote, from DEVONtechnologies, is the latest in a long line of tools I've tried using to organize information related to my various endeavors. I've found that it has some powerful features that are quite useful, but that it also has some annoying shortcomings.

The Basics

On the surface, DEVONnote is note-taking application. However, its feature-set goes much deeper. For text editing, DEVONnote supports both plain and rich text documents. You can import and view a number of different file types or link to any file on your hard drive or to any page accessible via the Web.

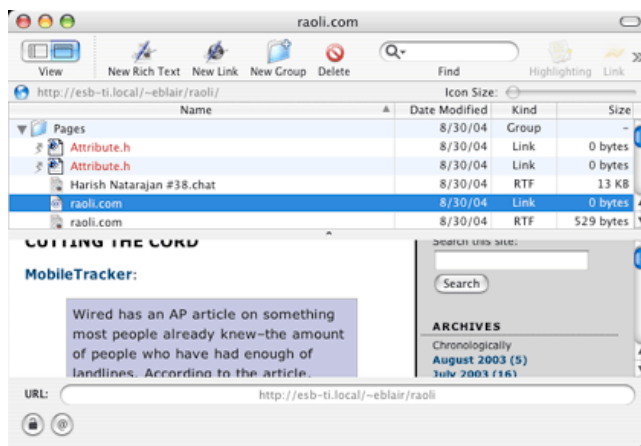
DEVONnote supports two different interface styles—Note Pad and Outliner. Note Pad view presents a hierarchical view of all the items in your database along the left side of the DEVONnote window. The right portion of the window displays the content of the current selection, if DEVONnote is able to display the file type.



Note Pad View

Outliner view displays all the items in the database at the top of the DEVONnote window. Unlike Note Pad view, the Outliner view displays additional information about the

items in your database—the data modified, the item kind, and the date modified. The content of the selected item is displayed below the item list.



Outline View

Additionally, DEVONnote allows you to mark whether or not an item is complete, similar to OmniOutliner. It actually took me a little time to find this feature—I expected it to be enabled as soon as I switched into Outline view. It turns out you need to select the Show State item in the View menu. This replaces the items' icons with red, green, and black shapes that can most closely be described as gear-shaped. Red gears indicate items, green gears indicate complete items, and black gears indicate groups that contain some completed items.

I found the user interface for this feature a bit odd, especially since the manual shows normal, OS X-style checkboxes when describing how outlining works.

Documents and Links

Everything in DEVONnote that's not a Group is either a document or a link. Documents are files that have been imported into the DEVONnote database, whereas links point to files that are stored on your hard drive.

Depending on how you organize your data, you may prefer to use documents, links, or a combination of the two. Documents are editable, but any changes made inside of

1. <http://www.devon-technologies.com/products/devonnote/devonnote.php>

DEVONnote aren't mirrored back to the original files. Similarly, changes made to the original files aren't reflected in the DEVONnote database. Links, on the other hand, aren't editable. However, they always display the contents of the source file.

Links also have other advantages over documents. Links can point at any file on your hard drive, whereas documents can only be created for the file formats DEVONnote understands. While DEVONnote can import a number of different file types, there are a number it cannot, including image file formats. Creating links to these files at least allows you to reference these files and open them in other programs.

The other advantage of links over documents is that links can point to Web sites and other items in the DEVONnote database. DEVONnote's inclusion of Safari's HTML Web renderer makes it simple to incorporate information from the Web into your personal notes.

I have two minor complaints about the handling of Web links. First is the creation of links. Links to items in the DEVONnote database are easy to create—you simply highlight the term you want to link and select the link destination via the contextual menu. Creating Web links is a bit more complex. You need to use the Make Link command on the link term. Once you've created the link, you need to switch out of the document you're editing to change the URL associated with the link.

Granted, you can drag and drop a link from your Web browser, but there are times where I would prefer to either type or paste the link. In these cases, I'd like to have a keyboard shortcut that would let me create a Web link, enter the URL into a sheet, and go back to working on my original document.

My other complaint is how errors are handled in Web pages. Once you select a Web link, DEVONnote attempts to load the page. If DEVONnote's not able to load the Web page, it displays a sheet saying that the page couldn't be loaded. If I'm just flipping through items with the arrow keys when I don't have network access, these sheets really get in the way. I'd really prefer if DEVONnote displayed the error message inside of the Web display.

DEVONnote supports most of the most common document types for import—plain text files, RTF files, and Word files (under 10.3) are fully supported. The latter two types are imported as RTF, so most of the formatting is preserved. You can also import iChat transcripts, but they come in as plain text files. That's unfortunate, since any Web site addresses in the log aren't turned into links.

It's pretty clear that some of the limitations in the supported file types exist mostly to differentiate DEVONnote from DEVONtechnologies' higher-end products. There's nothing wrong with this, but some of the limitation seem a bit forced. Even though you can't import or view images in links, you can display images as Web pages. Likewise, HTML files that are imported or linked through the file system are displayed as plain text, but HTML files linked through URLs are rendered as Web pages.

Dealing with Databases

DEVONnote uses a single database to store all of your entries. The advantages of this approach include keeping all of your data easily accessible when using DEVONnote and providing DEVONnote with more data to aid in classifying other documents.

A downside of the database approach is that it's harder to segregate your data into separate files, if you so desire. DEVONnote allows you to change the location of the database, but all this does is copy the data from your existing database into the new location. It's up to you to clear out the new file and populate it with new data.

Granted, most people probably won't want separate databases, since DEVONnote allows you to group your entries, but I can think of a couple of cases where this might be useful. For instance, you could have a password-protected database for work-related items but a publicly accessible database available for home use. Another reason for separate databases would be for using DEVONnote as an outliner. If you choose to activate the Show State command, the state display is active for all items. There's no way to display state information for only some items.

For some reason, DEVONnote stores its database as six different files. If you're backing up the database, you need to make sure you back up all six files. I can't say why these six files weren't wrapped in a package to make them easier to handle.

Conclusion

DEVONnote does a fine job of tracking your data and integrating with all sorts of data sources, either by linking to them or copying their contents into the database. If you're looking for a way to pull your data together in a central location without breaking the budget, DEVONnote is certainly worth a look.



Review: Hardware Hacking: Have Fun While Voiding Your Warranty (book)

by Chris Lawson, clawson@atpm.com

Author: Joe Grand (editor)

Publisher: Syngress¹

Price: \$40 (list); \$28 (Amazon)

Trial: [Table of Contents](#)² and [Sample Chapter](#)³



Overview

Hardware Hacking: Have Fun While Voiding Your Warranty outlines the basics of hacking and electrical engineering and then presents several projects for the aspiring hacker to try at home. Aimed at the most entry-level audience, readers with prior experience in the field will likely find much of the material rather elementary and redundant.



Layout and Organization

The 537-page book, measuring about 8" by 9", is divided into 15 chapters, organized into three sections. You can download a PDF copy of the [Table of Contents](#)⁴ from Syngress.

Observations and Opinions

The most compelling reasons for buying this book are probably the first two chapters, which provide a fairly thorough overview of basic hardware hacking tools and basic electrical engineering. Loaded with photos and further reading online, these two chapters are really the highlight of the book.

Unfortunately, the rest of the book is rather less compelling. Two well-written and well-organized chapters on Atari hacks are bright spots in an otherwise very basic and fairly mundane compilation of material that is nearly all available for free—and with more detail—on the Web. In fact, the book makes extensive reference to Web sites throughout, for which its authors should be commended, but it leaves an experienced hacker such as this reviewer wondering why anyone would buy the book instead of spending some quality time with Google. Several of the chapters manage to stray substantially from the topic of hardware hacking, with entire sections devoted to software-only topics. While it's clearly acceptable to discuss software-related aspects of a hardware modification—I'm intimately familiar with several such cases—an entire section on reformatting an iPod to work on a Windows machine hardly seems relevant to a book on hardware hacking.

Having nine separate authors writing the various chapters also works against this book. The editing is inconsistent, and the book vacillates between the extremely basic (replacing an iPod's battery, changing an LED) and the terribly complex (adding a serial port interface to a PlayStation 2 and writing software for it).

Strengths

- Good overview of the basics.

4. http://www.syngress.com/book_catalog/287_HRD_HCK/toc.pdf

1. http://www.syngress.com/catalog/sg_main.cfm?pid=2870

2. http://www.syngress.com/book_catalog/287_HRD_HCK/toc.pdf

3. http://www.syngress.com/book_catalog/287_HRD_HCK/sample.pdf

Weaknesses

- Never gets past the basics for the most part, but goes far, far past them when it does.
- Struggles to be more than a compilation of already-available material.

Summary

Having [recently reviewed](#)¹ a very similar book, making mental comparisons was inevitable. While the previous book could perhaps be faulted for thinking too big—after all,

1. <http://www.atpm.com/10.06/hardware-hacking.shtml>

making a skyscraper-sized Tetris game isn't a two-hour project—it was, above all, entertaining. *Hardware Hacking*, unfortunately, misses that mark by aiming too low. A young teenager with a strong desire to tinker and a patient parent for supervision might enjoy this book, but those with experience and a working knowledge of Google would do better to put those skills to use instead.

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Review: iRac

by Chris Lawson, clawson@atpm.com

Developer: [Sam Girton](#)¹

Price: \$10

Requirements: any laptop or iMac G4

Trial: None



Sometime during the last six months, I became the Unofficial ATPM Laptop Stand Review Guy™. The latest offering in this category, called the iRac, is the intriguing product of an Ohio University professor's imagination, combined with a coat hanger and some spare time. Essentially a two-foot piece of very heavy steel wire, the iRac's claims to fame are its low cost, light weight, and unique design.



The iRac comes in two colors: white, to match your iMac or iBook; and stainless steel, which complements recent PowerBooks very nicely, and wouldn't look entirely out of place with an iMac, either. Both colors have rubber "socks" on the tips of the wire for added grip and to protect the surface of the laptop or keyboard. Early versions of the white

iRac (including the review model) lacked the rubber sleeve on the apex, but all new iRacs are shipping with the rubber sleeve for additional scratch and skid protection.



In terms of functionality, the iRac is nearly perfect. It raises a 15" PowerBook G4 about two inches at the back (roughly the same as a [PodiumPad](#)² with two risers installed) and holds it fairly securely in place. I never worried that the PowerBook might slide off the stand, although the tripod layout of the stand makes it somewhat less stable than a PodiumPad or [iLap](#)³. The width and depth of the iRac can be adjusted by hand to fit larger laptops, although it may be on the large side for a 12" PowerBook or iBook, or a similarly sized Wintel laptop. The height, on the other hand, is essentially fixed. It could probably be bent to a higher incline with the use of appropriate tools, but the standard height should be about right for most applications. For use as a

1. <http://theirac.com>

2. <http://www.atpm.com/7.08/coolpad.shtml>

3. <http://www.atpm.com/10.05/ilap.shtml>

keyboard rack on an iMac G4, it's unlikely that any adjustments will need to be made at all unless your keyboard is very oddly shaped.



A word about the iRac's use with an iMac: because I'm primarily a laptop user, this is written primarily as a review of those capabilities. I can envision the iRac being quite nice for getting a keyboard out of the way on an otherwise-overcrowded desk when you want to do some non-computer work on the desk. College dorm desks are always too small, and the iRac could easily provide the extra space a student needs to get homework done at her desk. Best of all, it won't break a student budget. Watch out for the Eject button, though—ejecting the optical drive with the keyboard hanging in the iRac will give your optical drive fits!

Perhaps the biggest drawback to the iRac's unique—and, to my eye, very refreshing—design is that it proves completely useless on anything other than a flat, firm surface. A PodiumPad can work on a lap or a pillow in a pinch, but the iRac's design places pressure points precisely where you don't want them on your lower body, and it sinks into soft surfaces easily, essentially negating the elevation and improved airflow it provides on a desk.

Since no one has yet made the perfect laptop stand that combines portability with use-anywhere convenience, perhaps owning two stands is the answer to the laptop warrior's dilemma. The iRac's low price makes it an attractive option for a travel stand to complement a more expensive local-use stand such as an iLap (which is too big to travel well) or an [iCurve](#)¹ (which doesn't travel at all), and the combination is more effective than any single laptop stand could be.

1. <http://www.atpm.com/9.08/icurve.shtml>

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Review: MicFlex

by Chris Lawson, clawson@atpm.com

Developer: [MacMice](#)¹

Price: \$50

Requirements: USB port

Trial: None



A few months back, Lee Bennett [reviewed the iFlex and SightFlex](#)², which, as you might guess from the similar name, are similar products. The MicFlex, instead of working with Apple's iSight camera, contains its own built-in microphone on the end of a metal gooseneck stalk. At the other end is a male USB plug, which can plug directly into a laptop's USB port for travel use, or into a heavily weighted hemispherical base for desktop use.

The sound quality of the MicFlex is far superior to that of the built-in mic on a 15" Titanium PowerBook G4, as it should be. It is also, however, superior to my previous digeridoo "recording studio" setup, a fairly decent unpowered mic run through a stereo system into the mic jack on the back of said TiBook. Regrettably, we are unable to provide audio samples, though I believe the samples on MacMice's [MicFlex product page](#)³ are representative of what the average user can expect to hear.



The weighted base comes with a six-foot cord, plenty long enough to position the MicFlex for optimal pickup with nearly any possible CPU/monitor/keyboard configuration.

2. <http://www.atpm.com/10.05/iflex.shtml>

1. <http://macmice.com/micflex.html>

3. <http://macmice.com/micflex.html>

While this is a strength—and a welcome one, after many readers took MacMice to task for the objectionably short cord on [The Mouse](#)¹—the base is also the source of two complaints with the product. First, the painted finish on the base is very delicate; despite careful packaging, the review model arrived with several scuffs in the paint, showing the plastic outer shell of the base through the scuffs. The second issue I have with the base segues into my final complaint with

the product: for \$50, there should be an unpowered, two- or three-port USB hub in this base. Simply put, \$50 is just too much for a computer-quality microphone. An all-metal base would also mitigate the high price.

Fortunately—or unfortunately—MacMice has a very compelling product on its hands here. It's certainly unique in the market, and in a very good way. When the price comes down to \$30, it'll be flying off the shelves.

1. <http://www.atpm.com/10.04/mouse.shtml>

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Review: The Spam Letters (book)

by Elyn Ritterskamp, eritterskamp@atpm.com

Author: Jonathan Land
Publisher: No Starch Press¹ (O'Reilly)
Price: \$15
Trial: None



We all get some spam, even those of us with great filters. We have varying reactions to it. We roll our eyes at the attempts to lure us in, highlight it all and delete it, or actually get suckered in and open a piece now and then. And then we roll our eyes, or we get mad.

Jonathan Land didn't just get mad. He got even.

All right, fine; he didn't get even. The spammers didn't quit. But his response to spam is the fist in the air that makes you feel great about resisting something stupid. He has compiled a book of some of his best e-mail responses to spam, and it is hilarious.



Land decided to take whatever offer came in the mail and actually reply to it. He dreamed up characters and scenarios to answer all this spam, and the results are very entertaining. Many of these offers deserve to be cussed out, and there is a good bit of profanity in his letters. I found every bit of it appropriate to the subject and the tone, but you may not want to buy this for your preacher for a thank-you present.

Some examples:

When faced with an offer for a remote control you will never lose, Land counters with a request for a remote control that can be swallowed and excreted by prison inmates playing a twisted game.

His replies to offers of sexual enhancement products are the stuff of teenage frustration made worse.

He nearly hires a student who claims to have read about his job opening. Land claims the job was not to have been advertised for a few more days (of course, there is no job, as there is no company). The exchange continues and only gets more absurd.

I very much enjoyed the sequence of e-mails concerning a textile plant overseas. The plant wanted to sell textiles, but Land asked if it could manufacture T-shirts. He sent photographs. One said, "21 cents an hour...and all I made was this lousy T-shirt!"

There are porno site spams, horse racing scams, and my second favorite: an entire chapter on Nigerian money-laundering plans. Land poses as an entrepreneur unwilling to go along and as his own business manager, who is very willing to get involved. In one sequence he plays on that schizophrenia. It is all thigh-slappingly funny.

My favorite entry: in the message subject, Land is asked, "Have you planned for your family's future?" The message says he can save money on life insurance, but Land decides to answer the question. Painstakingly. In excruciating detail. Yes, he has planned for his family's future, and it is not a pretty one. I can't begin to explain the whole scenario, but I was crying when I got done. It is genius.

I love the idea of this book. I love that Land has decided not to take any more abuse from the spammers and to fight back. At the end of the book he provides actual spam-fighting Web sites, because he admits his technique will not stop them. He also says he used to get five to ten pieces of spam a day, and now that he is replying to some of it, he gets upwards of 400. He reminds us not to reply to Unsubscribe notices from unsolicited spam, because all it does is let someone know they've hit a real address.

1. <http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/1593270321/>

If you've ever thought about returning fire to a spam e-mail, you're probably better off not doing it. But you can read this book and know that someone has already done it for you.

P.S. Not that you would want to, but you can rest assured that unsubscribing from ATPM will not result in any extra spam. The notification e-mail we send each month is request-only, and you can get out of it if you like.

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Review: Tactile Pro

by Michael Tsai, mtsai@atpm.com

Developer: [Matias Corporation](#)¹

Price: \$100 plus \$20 shipping (direct from Matias); \$80 (Small Dog Electronics); \$100 (Dr. Bott)

Requirements: Mac with USB

Trial: None



A good keyboard will help you type faster, more accurately, and more comfortably. Apple once shipped excellent keyboards with its computers, from the compact keyboards that accompanied the IIGS and the SE/30, to the 5 lb. Extended Keyboard II that many consider to be the best Mac keyboard ever made. Sadly, things went downhill from there, as Apple shipped the Apple Design Keyboard, followed by various USB keyboards—from the dreadful bondi and fruity models, to improved black-and-white Pro models that didn't quite rival the cheaper ADB models. Apple will obsess over synchronized sleep indicator lights and over how the *bottom* of the iMac G4 looks, but it doesn't seem to take keyboards seriously.

Although I'm picky about keyboards, I've never been a fan of eccentric ergonomic ones like the [Datahand](#)² and [Kinesis](#)³. I'm happy with a traditional keyboard that's well designed and made. As far as I know, the Tactile Pro is the only such Mac keyboard that is being manufactured today. It easily surpasses Apple's current offerings, so this review will compare it with two legacy keyboards that are more worthy.



Tactile Pro and Apple Extended Keyboard II

Apple Extended Keyboard II

The monstrous Apple Extended Keyboard II is of the “platinum Mac” era, and it doesn't win any style points. It has a natural upward tilt (that is, it's higher in the back), and there's a sliding switch in the back that lets you tune this tilt to your liking.

Choosing a keyboard is a personal matter, but most people who think about such things favor keys that are “clicky.” At one extreme, consider a standard 5-function calculator. The keys depress little, if at all, and they're silent. At the other extreme is a mechanical typewriter. The keys have much more travel. They're harder to push down, they go down further, and they make a lot of noise.

The Apple Extended Keyboard II is, for many people, a happy medium. You can rest your fingers on the keys, without worrying that you'll accidentally type something. When you press a key, it moves down a comfortable distance (more than on Apple's current keyboards), and then it springs back up, getting your finger ready to type the next letter. You can feel when you've depressed a key enough to make it register, and when it's back to the rest position. The keys make a bit of noise, but not enough to bother anyone. The tactile and audible feedback improves typing accuracy, and when you do make errors, chances are that you'll have felt them.

Micro Connectors

When I first started using a USB-equipped Mac, USB keyboards were few and far between, so I used a [Griffin iMate](#)⁴ to connect my trusty Apple Extended Keyboard II. Alas, that keyboard eventually stopped working. Though it was possible to find another on [eBay](#)⁵, I thought it best to check out the USB offerings. I went to Macworld Expo and various retailers and tried all the ones that I could find. All

2. <http://www.atpm.com/7.05/datahand.shtml>

3. <http://www.atpm.com/9.01/kinesis.shtml>

1. <http://www.tactilepro.com>

4. <http://www.griffintechnology.com/products/imate/>

5. <http://search.ebay.com/apple-extended-keyboard>

were disappointing, except for the Micro Connectors “flavored” keyboards (available in the fruity iMac colors, plus graphite). I use one to this day.



Micro Connectors Keyboard

The Micro Connectors keyboard is of the “transparent Mac” era. Like most third-party products from Apple’s colorful days, it looks cheaper and less refined than the products it imitates. All but the graphite model look hideous to me. Above the function keys, you can see through the case to a row of resistors, capacitors, and other components that look best hidden. The tilt of the keyboard is slight and to my liking, though there are feet in the back that can rotate down to increase the tilt. The layout lacks the newer keys for volume control and ejecting.

The key caps are narrower than on Apple’s keyboards, and they require more force to push down than on the Apple Extended Keyboard II. There is a good amount of resistance and spring-back, but the key action feels tighter than on the Apple keyboard, and less cushioned. The Micro Connectors keyboard is also considerably louder. The clacking sound doesn’t bother me, but it might bother co-workers if you share an office. You wouldn’t want to use it while someone is trying to watch TV, or to take notes during a conference call.

The Micro Connectors keyboard is flawed, but it is overall my favorite Mac USB keyboard. Unfortunately, it is no longer being manufactured. MacConnection and MacMall still have some flavors in stock for about \$50; using Froogle, I was unable to find anyone selling the graphite models.

Tactile Pro

Since I was happy using my Micro Connectors keyboard, I stopped paying attention to keyboards until I read in [TidBITS](http://db.tidbits.com/getbits.acgi?tbart=07607)¹ that Matias had introduced the Tactile Pro

Keyboard, claiming that it had recreated “the best keyboard Apple ever made,” the Apple Extended Keyboard. It sounded like a product built just for me.



The Tactile Pro looks better in the photo than in person.

The Tactile Pro is designed in the style of Apple’s second-newest keyboard, the white Apple Pro Keyboard that shipped with the iMac G4. It is probably the best-looking third-party keyboard that I’ve seen, but its styling doesn’t quite match Apple’s. The keys are made of a cheaper-looking white plastic, which is gritty and slightly shiny and reflective. Apple uses a smoother plastic with a flatter white.



The Apple Pro Keyboard looks better in person than in the photo.

The words “matias tactilepro.com” are printed on the right side of the spacebar. The other keys are marked to show which characters and symbols are available when you hold down Option or Option-Shift. While many will no doubt find this helpful, I prefer the uncluttered look without the extra markings. Strangely, the symbols for the Shift, Control, and Option modifiers are *not* marked on those keys. This would help people decipher menu keyboard shortcuts.



Tactile Pro Keys

1. <http://db.tidbits.com/getbits.acgi?tbart=07607>

A long USB cable is connected to the center, and the keyboard acts as a two-port USB 1.0 hub. There is a full complement of keys, including F1–15, the three volume keys, and Eject. Surrounding the keys, as with Apple's keyboards, is a layer of clear plastic. After a while, this will collect dirt and hair, but fortunately the keyboard can be opened and easily cleaned by removing two Phillips screws on the bottom.



Tactile Pro Slant

The shape of the keyboard is much closer to that of the Micro Connectors keyboard than to Apple's USB keyboards. It is comparatively high in the front, and there are two clear latches for raising the back. It is very solidly built and has a good set of four rubber pads to prevent it from sliding around as much as the Apple Pro Keyboard that it resembles.

The keys are pyramid-shaped, smaller at the top than at the bottom. The tops of the keys are a little narrower than I'd like. They are more concave than on the Extended Keyboard II and the Micro Connectors keyboard, and much more so than on Apple's newer keyboards, which have almost flat keys. Some people like the concave shape because it helps their fingers slide into the centers of the keys. Personally, I like flatter keys. My fingers aren't accurate enough to always hit the centers, and so I feel like I'm typing on the edges, not getting solid and even contact with the keys.

The keys have good action. You won't press them down accidentally, and when you do press down there is good travel and spring-back. This is a great improvement over Apple's USB keyboards, which have a squishy feel and little spring.

However, I don't like the Tactile Pro's action as much as the Extended Keyboard II's, or even the Micro Connectors keyboard's. First, I like keys that offer some resistance, but the Tactile Pro felt too stiff. Initially, it reduced my typing accuracy, because I wasn't used to pressing down hard enough. I'd keep losing my rhythm. Eventually, I got the hang of it, but I never came to prefer it.

My second complaint is that the Tactile Pro is louder than even the Micro Connectors keyboard. Worse, in addition to the normal clicking noises of the switches, the keys make a high-pitched springy sound that rings. I almost wished my Mac had a louder fan, to drown out this sound.

From what I'd read about the Tactile Pro, I expected that it would feel like my Apple Extended Keyboard II. In reality, the only similarity is that both use genuine keyswitches (not membranes). Edgar Matias informed me that the Alps keyswitches used in the Extended Keyboard I and Extended Keyboard II are no longer being manufactured, and that the Tactile Pro uses a descendent of these switches that's a cross between the two. The Micro Connectors keyboard was made in the same factory as the Tactile Pro, but it uses a fourth type of switch, which I think is between the Extended Keyboard II and the Tactile Pro (closer to the Tactile Pro).

Conclusion

The Tactile Pro doesn't feel anything like the Extended Keyboard II, as I was led to believe, so the only advantages it offers me are its styling, and the volume and eject keys. Thus, I'm sticking with my Micro Connectors keyboard, and I'm glad that I bought a spare graphite model.

If you're using an Apple keyboard, I highly recommend trying out some alternatives. If you can stomach the Micro Connectors keyboard's looks, it's a good value, and you might end up preferring its feel. Otherwise, buy a Tactile Pro. Matias has not been able to re-create Apple's keyboards of yore, but it has built a solid product: the lone Mac clicker in a membrane world.

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1. editor@atpm.com

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5. <http://www.aladdinsys.com/expander/index.html>

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