OTTAWA PC NEWS

Review of the May Meeting

From Thailand...with coriander (and other disinfectants)

by Jackson Hibler

"It was curious. The pain...was there. No doubt it was worse than it had been. No doubt if he analyzed it carefully, he could measure how far the infection had moved back up into his system."

Thus does John Ralston Saul depict the progress of viral infection in his vivid, insightful look at life, death and adventure in Thailand, "The Paradise Eater". How appropriate to find Thai roots to the anti-virus approach presented by James Roy at our May meeting.

Victor Charlie in Thailand

James' program, Victor Charlie (VC5), grew up in the hothouse of Thai computing. Theft of software, quick and dirty replication, modification, hacks, trojans, worms, viruses: such computer "disease" is rampant there, virulent strains become quickly endemic. Here in remote, cool Ottawa, disease usually comes "from away". We often have time to hear about its appearance elsewhere. Diagnosis often precedes the onset of local infection. Treatment plans are well in place by then. Not in Thailand. And if James is to be believed, soon not in Ottawa either.

Virus scanners must be updated

James warns us that it is not enough to rely upon proven diagnostic cures. This is what McAfee's Scan program does: it looks for bitstrings of code known to reside in di-agnosed viruses. James admits that Scan does a good job of finding again what has been found before. His concern is that Scan cannot find what has never been found before. Scanners must be updated frequently to stay current with the continuing emergence of new viruses. Now we find ourselves about to be the hosts of a new viral strain (polymorphic) which encrypts itself anew each time it is activated. James admits that Scan (again) is successful in detecting the encryption header used by these viruses so far, but frets it is only a matter of time until the encryption "engine" will be able to encrypt itself randomly...and still function.

VC5 stands prepared to pounce

VC5 deals with this perceived threat differently. Instead of trying to prevent the onset of infection, VC5 invites infection with "bait" and stands prepared to pounce should a virus become activated. VC5 keeps a doubly encrypted checksum record of some of your critical files to permit CRC "bitchecking" to detect any change in those files. VC5 also maintains protected backups of critical areas of the disk so that when a virus is detected it can use sledge hammer cures: deletion, cold boots, and then restoration. VC5 also tries to get a bit-string "signature" of any active virus it encounters so that it can also do some scanning, to try to chase down an active virus through your system and disks. VC5 also looks for the coding styles of previous virus authors when it scans, to try to get a leg-up

on scanning only for the known and unvarying.

Limit to number of files checked

James Roy says his system works against the unknown, as well as the known. But for his system to do its "bitchecking" in a timely manner, the total number of files checked is limited to a few—15 according to his booklet. (That seems hardly enough

NEXT MEETING : **Thursday, June 18, 1992**

to guarantee the timely detection of any .COM or .EXE infector which might move into any or all of your executable files.)

Crying wolf

VC5 is not a TSR, but can be called from batch files, perhaps as you exit each of your usual programs. This is done to avoid the "crying wolf" syndrome that anti-virus TSRs can fall into until you turn them off in frustration. (Symantec's Anti-Virus for the Mac can drive you mad with its flashing screens warning that your routine file copying has given evidence of "virus-like" activity. Of course it has!) Such false alarms can become so numerous that you would be most unlikely to ever notice a genuine alarm. And TSRs, like DOS, can be fooled, too. VC5 might not be so easily fooled — when it is looking — and if it is looking in the right place.

SnoopGuard

John Nash takes a different approach with SnoopGuard. This is a hardware supported "lock and key" that uses passwords and permissions to close off critical floppy or hard drives, or the entire machine, from any attempt (human or viral) to fiddle with their contained data and programs. If SnoopGuard's system does not rely upon DOS' mutable "attribute" switches, then this approach can yield excellent security. (Unfortunately, John did not have a chance to get into the technical details at the meeting, and I could find no nitty-gritty "specs" to peruse.) The big problem with locks, however, is that they must always be used. What if you don't bother to lock up consistently, or can't? Complex programs like Windows constantly write to themselves to record every nuance of change made by the user to the desktop, or other defaults. This can force you to keep opening and closing the locks till you forget to close up, or get tired. This is how super-tight security defeats itself!

Will we take measures?

So where have we come? Is this progress? Are we threatened enough to take the measures urged upon us by Messrs Roy and Nash? Would it do any good? Perhaps John Ralston Saul can also speak to this conundrum. Same book. He is now about to put us into the hands of a Bangkok taxi driver — another kind of hacker — more than a little bit like a computer network manager, eh? Here we go: [Almost all Thai drivers are professionals, but...] "...a high percentage of the city's taxi drivers had a streak of lunacy in them that revealed itself through a particularly personal form of driving—something to do with mathematical minds attempting to calculate irrational circumstances." Be warned, before boarding...and good luck!

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Technology watch

Chip news and Seagate & IBM install OSs on hard-drives

by Mark Edwards

More gleanings from the "Electronic Engineering Times"

Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) has released a new PC that is designed to be upgraded to the P5 (the 586 to everyone except Intel). This deskside (floor standing tower) PC (no size given) is based on a motherboard with a plug-in CPU board that is compatible with Intel's Xpress bus architecture that allows easy expansion to new bus speeds. No price has been quoted, but it sure won't be cheap.

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More on the 386/486 saga

Texas Instruments has announced that it will be the second source for the Cyrix 486SLC chip, not only for OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers), read: clone makers but also for their own specialty products (faster Speak & Spells?). Intel has also announced that they will be

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"*In some respects, Intel may have outsmarted themselves with the P5.***"**

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slashing the prices on the 486SX, with promises of chip costs of under $100 U.S. by the fall.

In some respects, Intel may have outsmarted themselves with the P5. With the great success of the 386s, the penetration of the 486 has been slow. With the P5 coming soon, many people may leapfrog from the 386 to the P5 without touching the 486. This could cause grief at Intel who undoubtedly pumped millions into the development of the 486.

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Hard-drives shipping with pre-installed operating systems

The same publication also mentioned that Seagate has signed agreements to install and sell DOS and Windows on their hard disks, and will start shipments in June. Interestingly, Dominique Lacasse's High-Tech column in the Citizen June 7th, discusses the problems caused by IBM pre-installing its own OS/2 on selected PS/2 models. This uses up a lot of disk space and shuts Windows and DOS out at the point of sale. I wonder who thought of this first?

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It's Summer: time for a break

by Lynda Simons

Traditionally, OPCUG has not met during July and we won't be meeting this July either. Since our home has been a high school we haven't met in August either. Last year we met twice in September to make up for this. This year we are planning to do the same, but are waiting to hear from the school board before we can publish dates. There's no newsletter in July, but watch for the August one: future meeting dates will be published there.

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Windows SIG

Frederic Dahm, Windows SIG coordinator will be out-of-town for the June meeting, so he's been trying to schedule a different night for the Windows SIG to meet. Check the PUB or call the OPCUG answering machine for more news.

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Newsletter

The next newsletter will be out in August.

We aren't really planning to take much of a break, however, as we intend to use July to do future planning.

If you have any suggestions for the newsletter please let us know.

Have a great summer!

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Caught in a fast stream? (UGH!!!)

by Julie Dustin

Attendees at the second meeting of the Desktop Publishing SIG on May 26th were treated to a comprehensive presentation by OPCUG member Terry Mahoney. Entitled "Streaming Your Publication", his talk covered every element of desktop publishing (DTP) in three broad categories: content, layout and the type of media.

Questions to ask

Some of the questions you might ask yourself when planning a DTP project follow.

What is your role? Publisher, writer or layout person?

Will the contents be only text, graphics or combination or both?

Will your final product appear on paper, film or in an electronic format? Terry suggested products to fit each need which helped put some of the technical pieces together.

Next month

Next month's meeting, scheduled for June 18th, will be a round table discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of PageMaker and Ventura. Panel members, volunteers from the ranks of the OPCUG and users of the two products, will be available to answer questions from the audience. Everyone is welcome to come and ask the questions that manuals and trade magazines never seem to answer well enough. Remember, this is an open dialogue, not a contest, so cheering for one side or the other must be done in a controlled fashion.

Come and check out the round table at 6:45 p.m. on Thursday, June 18th in Room 113.

Don't forget to check the DTP SIG message area on the BBS for interesting tips and tricks in desktop publishing.

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Avery Gimble's Client Database

OPCUG member Avery Gimble has produced an interesting piece of software which he he told us about briefly last meeting. Here are a couple of magazine excerpts about the product to provide you with more information.

Database for client info

Designed to easily manage client information on IBM-compatible PCs, the Client Database from Custom Computing Solutions, 1122 Millwood Crt., Orleans, Ont., will print mailing labels, do mail merge, produce customized reports and search and sort client records based on any desired criteria.

The software is designed for small- to medium-sized businesses and has the capability to store names, addresses, phone numbers and other information for up to 99,999 clients.
Canadian Datasystems February 1992

Software manages client contact

Client Database prints mailing labels, performs mail merge operations, produces customized reports, and sorts client records according to specified criteria. The options are selected from on-screen menus, and the user can create up to 26 macros and 10 output format files. software requires DOS 3.0 or higher with 512 Kbytes RAM and retails for $195.
Canadian Computer Reseller January 1992

Do your own Windows
Programming in VisualBASIC

by John MacManus

I never would have thought it possible. But yes, I have written a program for Windows. OK, I admit it, only one original one, but that's just so far.

I wrote this program to solve a problem. Unfortunately, I spend less time at my desk than I would like and my colleagues have been complaining that they do not know where I am. Being a Windows user — I have always liked Windows — I got to thinking that it would be efficient if, when I leave my desk, I could pop up a window containing a message as to my whereabouts.

I am no techie programmer, but I have used QuickBASIC for a couple of years to do graphics for my own amusement. The programs haven't been anything long and involved: some implementations of published algorithms for fractals, animations using commercial libraries, and, recently, some efforts with sound. After seeing the hype about Visual-BASIC, I thought I might try using it to solve my problem.

I found the manuals quite difficult to understand at first browse. What was VisualBASIC doing? Where did all the code go? The idea of an event which lead to an outcome was hard to grasp. The idea of a network of independent events like button presses or mouse clicks was even harder to perceive. Now I think that my linear structured approach learned from QuickBASIC was a definite hindrance to instant gratification with VisualBASIC.

Fun after all

So I started to work through the examples in the manuals and found that soon I was literally painting the user interface, putting buttons here and there, changing colours, attach-

ing a menu, dropping in a scrolling list box, and sticking on an icon. This was fun: no more bogging down with estimates of window coordinates. The program did all the hard work and presto, there was a window with the minimize buttons without even asking. Click, and the window was collapsed to the specified icon. This was quite amazing to see.

Message in a bubble

After a few nights working through the hoops I thought I was ready for the real thing. A few more nights produced results. I had an interface with a list box containing all the places I might be found. A click on this box pops up a bit map of a scanned photo of myself with voice bubble containing my location.

Lines are buzzing over VisualBASIC

VisualBASIC seems to have blossomed on line, producing a sharing of information in a style reminiscent of the good old days when a hacker was a nice guy. The local Synapse bulletin board has plenty of VisualBASIC hints and tricks, including spin controls, revolving buttons, rotating text

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"GONE FISHING!"

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and help files. You might also check out the WinBas Conference on the RIME Network. On CompuServe, the VisualBASIC Forum has been so busy that trying to browse through all the messages every week results in large connect charges. Here the old hacker ethic is very evident, and there are heaps of goodies in the library.

What the magazines say

Also very useful, BASICPro magazine, published by Fawcette (Palo Alto, CA), always has gems, such as how to use DDE (dynamic data exchange) to link user interfaces to Excel or Word for Windows. (Although VisualBASIC keeps the arcane heart of Windows hidden, it is also possible to query the underlying Kernel, User and GDI DLLs [dynamic link libraries] directly.) The magazine has lots of reviews and advertisements for a mesmerizing choice of commercial add-ons for every conceivable task.

Alternative programming languages

There are of course other choices for Windows programming, even among just BASIC varieties. A recent article in BASICPro compared and contrasted the other offerings, namely Realizer and GFA BASIC. The June 16 issue of PC Magazine also reviewed these products. These others may be more powerful, but VisualBASIC is undoubtedly the way to go for the non-professional programmer.

Spring crop of books

Another sign of the popularity of VisualBASIC is the Spring crop of new books on this subject (seven on last count). It seems that every publisher has a how-to recipe book, some of course including a disk of tempting gems of code. I have bought a few, but still have to find the one that will show how to do graphics, animation and sound in Windows the way I want.

Now what should I do next? Should I write the next killer app, or shall I be the one to write a better File Manager?

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Making your computer suit your needs, part 3
AUTOEXEC.BAT and Batch files

by Eric Clyde

If you have been following this series of articles and developed the CONFIG.SYS file that best suits your needs, your next step is to set up your AUTOEXEC.BAT and other batch files.

What is a batch file?

As I described previously (April '92), a batch file consists of a series of DOS commands, which are carried out by the computer, one at a time.

What is AUTOEXEC.BAT?

AUTOEXEC.BAT is a special batch file which DOS executes automatically when you power up your computer. At a minimum, your AUTOEXEC.BAT should contain both a PROMPT statement and a PATH statement. The PROMPT command changes the default prompt c> to show which subdirectory you are currently using (e.g. c:\dirname>). The PATH command tells DOS which directories to search for executable commands.

A sample AUTOEXEC.BAT file

Let's assume that you are using a hard disk with subdirectories \dos and \utils. Your AUTOEXEC.BAT file could look like this:

```
path c:\;c:\dos;c:\utils
prompt $p$g
doskey
```

The PATH command

The PATH command in the first line lets you use .COM, .EXE, or .BAT files that are in the subdirectories listed in the PATH line of the AUTOEXEC.BAT file, no matter which subdirectory or drive you are currently using.

The PROMPT command

The PROMPT command character combination "$p" gives the current drive and directory; the "$g" adds > (the "greater-than" sign) so that your prompt looks like this:

C:\{dirname}>, with the cursor on the same line. If you want the cursor to appear on the line below the prompt, use

```
prompt $p$_.
```

You can add other text information to your system prompt, such as the time and date, by using other command characters. See your DOS manual for the list of options.

The DOSKEY command

If you are using DOS 5.0, including DOSKEY in your AUTOEXEC.BAT lets you recall and edit previously issued commands using keys such as the cursor keys (up/down/left/right arrow keys), Page Up and Page Down, and F1 to F10 key. Older versions of DOS don't have this capability. However, there are utilities with similar capabilities(such as CED), available in the library, and you can run these from the AUTOEXEC.BAT file the same as you would a DOS command.

Starting programs from AUTOEXEC.BAT

The ideal AUTOEXEC.BAT file for you depends on the software you want to use. For example, if you have DOS 5.0 and want to load the DOSSHELL when you boot up, you should add the line

```
dosshell
```

as the last line. Similarly, if you always want to start up ready to use a particular program, the last line of your AUTOEXEC.BAT file should include the command to load it. For example the command WP in your AUTOEXEC.BAT file will automatically start WordPerfect based on the following batch file.

This batch file, WP.BAT, starts Word Perfect and, then when you exit from the program, automatically copies any changed files in compressed form to a diskette on drive b:, using PKZIP. Start this batch file by typing WP at the DOS prompt, c:>.

```
cd\wp51
wp %1
pkzip -u b:wpdocs *.
c:\wp51\doc\*.
cd\
```

Note that this assumes you save your WordPerfect files in a directory called DOC, and your compressed backup files in a directory called wpdocs on the diskette in the b: drive.

An interesting example

If you use DOS 5.0, you can use the batch file below to check directory sizes on your hard disk. It will give a listing on the screen of all the directories on the default disk drive, together with their sizes. Note that the calculation can take a few minutes. Call it **dirsizes.bat**.

```
@echo off
echo Examining this disk
drive ...
dir\ /s |find "i"|more
```

As given, it will display the list on your monitor, one screen at a time. If you want to prepare a file, e.g. temp, which you can examine at leisure, substitute '>temp' for '|more' in the last line.

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At 7:00 p.m., prior to the regular monthly OPCUG meetings, Eric Clyde holds special sessions for new users in Room 110. If you have a topic you would like Eric to discuss, or questions you would like to ask him, call Eric at 749-2387.

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Computer Fair

Mom, it's like this.....

by Julie Dustin

Do you think our mothers knew that we would become computer junkies when we were born? Not likely, but they had an inkling on May 10th when we had to forego Mother's Day festivities with them and participate in the Ottawa Computer Fair. Yes, we know it was the first beautiful sunny day we had seen in months. Was it worth it? We think so. Our exposure to the computer community was well-presented, thanks to our members and outside donations; and showed in the increased activity on the BBS and larger audience at last month's meeting.

OPCUG talent

The list of stars at our booth included Neil Fraser and his robotic arm and Hugh Chatfield with his MIDI music system. The list was rounded out by a FoxPro corner, a GEOworks demo, the Mahoneys' plethora of software, great slide demos and our shareware offerings.

Speaking of shareware, it seems to be the most popular small pop-up business these days — the show was full of such vendors. We were able to see that our prices are comparable though the variety of our "competitors" was more game-oriented.

A tour around the floor

There were no show-stealing products there though the video board which essentially turns your computer into a television was interesting. It made me wonder, considering how we could all use about three more monitors hooked up to our CPU, why not just use a television?

Beware of midnight callers

Warning! I did receive a call from a "travel agent" who tried to convince me I had won a discounted trip to the Bahamas along with 100 other lucky people in the Ottawa region. I had filled out a ballot at the show but instantly became suspicious when they asked me for my credit card number over the phone. I have a phone number if anyone wants to check it out.

Thanks for the memories

Thanks to Jim Cummings and his company, Skyline Displays, for donating the booth backdrop and counter (a donation worth over $500). If there had been an award for best booth design on a near-to-zero budget, we would have won it.

Thanks to everyone who helped make the show a success. Thanks especially to you, Harald, for reminding me what "trade-show feet" felt like.

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Leaving Us?

We want to continue sending you newsletters: however, if your membership expires this month this will be the last newsletter you will receive...until you renew. Check your mailing label for your expiry date.

To renew your membership, simply fill out the form on the back of the hand-bill enclosed with the newsletter and send it in with the fee or see Paul Green at the next meeting.

OTTAWA PC USERS' GROUP
NEXT GENERAL MEETING

presenting

Logitech's

Fotoman

and

OS/2 V2.0

Thursday June 18 '92 8pm
In the Auditorium
at Sir Robert Borden High School
131 Greenbank Road, Nepean

The Ottawa PC Users' Group

3 Thatcher Street
Nepean, Ontario
K2G 1S6

Membership Application

(renewal)

VOICE (613) 723-1329
BBS (N,8,1)(613) 228-0665

Please Print

Last Name:	First Name:
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Are You: ❏ A New Member? ❏ Renewing your membership?	Membership I.D.#_____	MEMBERSHIP FEE $25.00
Do you wish to subscribe to the Disk of the Month and/or Software Library disks? (10 disks per subscription regular price $3.00 per disk)	❏ Yes ❏ No	Disk Format: ❏ 5.25" @ $25.00 yr. $. ❏ 3.50" @ $35.00 yr. $.
		Total: ❏ Cheque ❏ Cash $.

Can you help in Group Activities? Check those that apply.

		Hardware Used:	Modem?
❏ Programming Instruction	❏ Hardware Techniques		
❏ Newsletter Input	❏ Meeting Locations		❏ Yes
❏ Memberships	❏ Agendas & Speakers	❏ XT	Baud:
❏ Software Library	❏ Advertising	❏ AT - 286	❏ 300
❏ Promotion/Publicity	❏ Bulletin Board	❏ 386	❏ 1200
	❏ Other _____	❏ 486	❏ 2400
			❏ 9600

What in particular interests you in the Group?

Date Rec'd:	db Entry:	Membership Card:	❏ CASH
By:			❏ Cheque
Notes:			No._____

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