



OTTAWA PC NEWS

Vol. 16 No. 4

The newsletter of the Ottawa PC Users' Group

April 1999

Software Review

Lost & Found *by Chris Taylor*

PowerQuest has come out with a new disk utility designed to recover files. If you have ever lost an important file due to accidental deletion, a corrupted File Allocation Table (FAT) or directory, or even physical disk damage, you know the sinking feeling.

What it is

There have been many disk utilities designed over the years to deal with problems like these. Most, such as Norton Utilities or Nuts and Bolts, are general-purpose utilities that include some file recovery abilities. Lost & Found is single-minded in its determination to recover your files. It is designed to work on FAT16 and FAT32 hard drives as well as FAT formatted floppy disks.

Lost & Found is distributed on a pair of floppy disks and licensing is based on a single machine. The distribution floppy is stamped with information about your computer when you first run it and you must have the program floppy in the disk drive to start the program. You'll be forgiven if you feel like this harkens back to the bad old days of copy protection. Since changes to your computer may cause the program to think you are using it illegally on a different computer and refuse to run, I recommend that you make copies of the original disks (yes, it is possible) before you run it for the first time.

What it does

Be prepared to spend some time for even the simplest of recovery tasks. Before you can even think about recovering a file, you must allow Lost & Found to go through an extensive analysis phase on the partition containing the files you are trying to recover. On a Pentium II/266 with a 6.4GB hard disk, it took over 30 minutes to complete the analysis.

Once analysis is complete, you are presented with a tree-style list of all directories found. Since the list is not sorted alphabetically, there is no search function. The tree listing is always fully expanded and it may take you some time to find what you are interested in recovering. Once you find the directory, you can drill down to the file level. All directories and files are colour coded to indicate the likelihood of recovery and deleted files are noted as such.

Once you have identified the files and directories you want to recover, you move to the actual recovery phase. Lost & Found will not write recovered files to the same physical disk they are being recovered from, even if you have a separate partition. This has the advantage of ensuring

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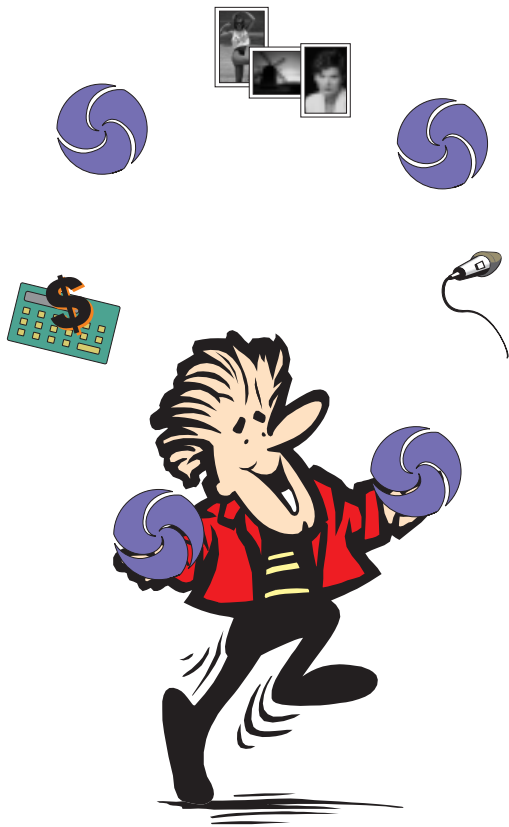
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Next meeting: **WEDNESDAY, April 7th, 1999**

Coming Up in April

Our feature presentation at the April 7th meeting will be a showcase of software products from Nepean based Vorton Technologies. Vorton has graciously acted as a feature presenter at previous OPCUG



meetings. The company's product line includes: financial utilities, image editors and graphics file conversion utilities.

This time, **Show Off** is the lead product. Now you can create your own self-running multimedia slide shows and distribute them by floppy or as an e-mail attachment. Recipients do not require the parent Show Off program; instead, a runtime player is embedded in the distribution file. Even file encryption is an easy-to-use option.

Also included will be **Home Soft Karaoke**. This is an opportunity for amateur entertainers to go "Big Time" in the comfort and privacy of their home. Remember, there is a members' night on the agenda! Vorton has invited a karaoke host to demonstrate the software and enticemembers to give it a try. Five singers from the audience will be taking home a well deserved copy of the software.

Financial PowerTools gives users of all levels the ability to understand and take control of their financial situations. Novice users and financial analysis veterans now have the tools to make sound financial decisions with confidence and ease. Over 50 Calculators offer answers to any potential retirement, savings, loan, mortgage and financing question you could ever have.

The savings calculator is designed to help users save for what's important by investigating insightful "what if?" and "how much?" savings scenarios. Additionally powerful financial calculators have been developed to help our users reduce mortgage-refinancing costs, make the most of lump-sum payments and create amortization tables in seconds. A bonus car leasing software is also included.

Come on out and see the latest offerings from a company that has created unique, feature-rich and yet reasonably-priced software to assist creative individuals.



Calendar

Meetings	Date	Time and venue
OPCUG General Meeting	April 7 th : Vorton Technologies See Coming up article above. May 5 th : to be announced	7:30 p.m. - National Museum of Science and Technology, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd.
Ottawa Paradox Users Group	Third Thursday of each month	6:15 pm - Inly Systems, 1221a Cyrville Rd.
FOX Pro/Developers SIG	To be announced	7:15 pm - Sir Jean Talon Building Conference room, Tunney's Pasture, Holland Ave. (north of Scott St.)
PIG SIG (or is it WING SIG?)	March 3 rd , after all the other SIG's - All questions, be they serious or not	"Good Times" cafe at Shoppers City West, Baseline and Woodroffe

nothing you do during the recovery phase will make things worse. When saving, you can maintain the original directory structure or place all files in single directory. If saving to a floppy, you can create compressed or uncompressed savesets, which allow you to save files larger than a single disk. A separate program, Renew, is supplied to extract files from savesets.

Put to the test

For my first test, I filled a floppy disk with files and wiped parts of it with a magnet. Lost & Found was able to recover the files.

Portions that were unreadable had blocks of "Disk Error(10)" replacing the missing sectors. With executables, this meant they were useless, but text files allowed you to at least recover the undamaged portions.

Lost & Found can recover files from deleted partitions. I created a 100MB partition, formatted it and copied 20 files to the root and 80 files to a subdirectory. I then deleted the partition using FDISK. Lost & Found had no problem finding and recovering the files.

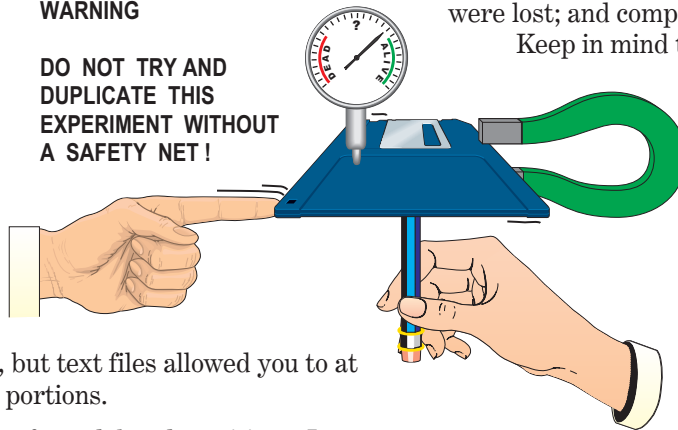
Next, I copied a series of files to a floppy, then created a subdirectory on the floppy and copied some more files to that subdirectory. I then started a format of the floppy, stopping at 5% completion: effectively wiping out the root directory and FAT. Lost & Found was unable to recover any of the files stored in the root (which is a problem with floppy disks that is noted in the readme file), but it found the subdirectory and was able to recover all of the files there.

Lost & Found seems to count on finding directories on disk and (it appears) to a lesser extent on the FAT. It does not permit you to search the disk for contents of files, nor can you browse the disk looking for snippets of files. While browsing the directory list, you can hit Enter on a file to see the contents of the start of the file, but you can't scroll to see more of the file.

I ran into a few oddities during testing. A series of files were flagged as "reasonable chance of recovery" although there were no disk errors and the files were not deleted. There were a number of instances of directory names having "É9" appended to them. I also had hundreds of directory entries with a name of "NONAME" During one of my tests on a floppy disk, I repeatedly had the program hang on me when I tried to restore an entire directory. I was able to recover the files only by drilling down into the directory and tagging the individual files.

WARNING

**DO NOT TRY AND
DUPLICATE THIS
EXPERIMENT WITHOUT
A SAFETY NET!**



Should you buy it?

I have little doubt that Lost & Found is an effective solution for recovering files from most situations. Fortunately, I have very seldom needed something like Lost & Found. And that's my dilemma—do I recommend that people spend money on a program they probably will never need? I guess you have to decide what your files are worth; how much it would cost to replace them if they were lost; and compare it to the cost of Lost & Found.

Keep in mind that Lost & Found should not be considered as a replacement for proper backups.

The list price of Lost & Found is CAN\$99.95. User Group pricing is CAN\$45.00. You can order it at www.ugr.com/order on the Web. Enter the user group code UGFLYC99.

Last word

Late breaking news! According to the February issue of PowerQuest's e-mail newsletter—The Partition Magician, PowerQuest has responded to customer complaints about the registration process that stamps the original disk and prevents its use on another computer. The licensing remains the same—one computer only. They just count on their customers to be honest. I am not sure if I should condemn them for coming up with the stamping process in the first place or commend them for eliminating it, but it is nice to see it gone. If you own a copy of the program that stamps the original disk, by the time you read this you should be able to download a patch from www.powerquest.com to remove the restriction.

Club life

Reuse, recycle



Bring your old computer magazines, books, or any other computer paraphernalia you want to GIVE AWAY to the general meetings, and leave them in the area specified. If you don't bring something, you may want to TAKE AWAY something of interest, so look in on this area. Any item left over at the end of the meeting will be sent to the... recycle bin.

Almost Perfect *Chris Taylor*

I have always been fascinated by the titanic struggle between competing software vendors. The decisions they make can have a profound effect on how you end up using your computer. Quite often, it is not necessarily the best product that wins the mind-share necessary to ensure survival or dominance. Sometimes, it is not the best individual product that works best in an overall computing environment. It is an interesting weave and dance that makes up the fabric of our computers.

I found myself captivated when I was browsing the Web and came across the manuscript of the book *Almost Perfect* by Pete Peterson—of WordPerfect fame. When Pete Peterson started working for Satellite Software (which later became WordPerfect Corporation) in 1980, the company had six employees and monthly sales of \$20,000. By 1991, when he was forced out of WordPerfect Corp, there were over 4,000 employees with annual sales of over \$500 million.

Satellite Software started as a producer of word processing software for Data General computers. They slowly expanded to cover other platforms and products. While arguably their greatest triumph came with WordPerfect for DOS, they also

developed products for Windows, OS/2, Macintosh, Unix, Amiga, Atari, VAX, Apple II, and even IBM 370. Their product line expanded to encompass graphics, databases, spreadsheets, e-mail, and more.

It is interesting to read the insider view on how they struggled with issues such as copy protection, marketing strategies, going public or not, expansion of their product line, and the inevitable battle with Microsoft. You can browse to www.fitnessoft.com/AlmostPerfect/ for the complete manuscript.

☆☆☆



Speech Recognition Software

The Last Word *Queen's University Computer Club Newsletter*

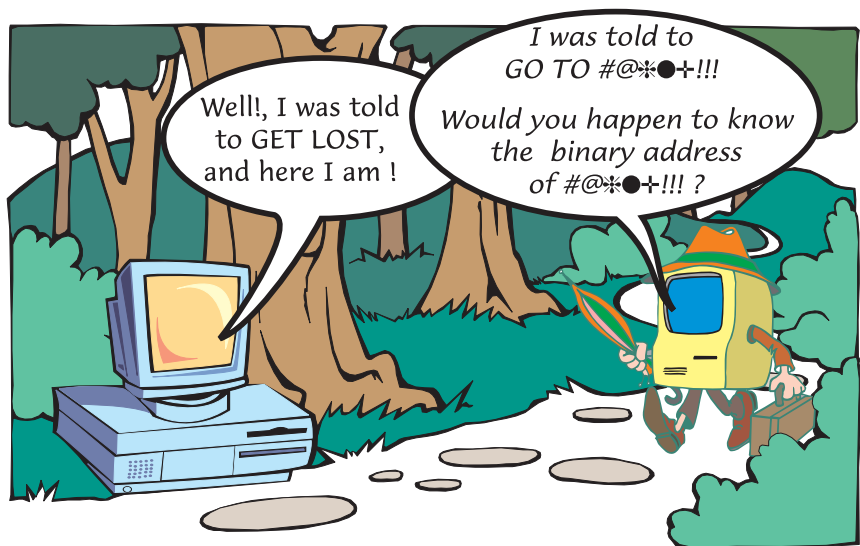
[Editor's Note: This apocryphal tale appeared in the March 1999 issue of *Queen's newsletter*. It seemed apropos given the feature presentation at our club's March meeting.]

At a recent PC User's Group meeting, a company was demonstrating its latest speech-recognition software. A rep from the company was about to start the demo and asked that everyone in the room please quiet down. He then shelled out to a DOS prompt to demonstrate how well the software would work in all applications.

All eyes were turned towards the huge monitors showing the infamous C:\ that was on the computer.

Just then, a wag in the back of the room yelled: "FORMAT C COLON RETURN." And, someone else chimed right in: "YES RETURN." Alas, the software worked just fine.

☆☆☆



Bring a guest to OPCUG!

All club members are encouraged to bring along a guest to one of our coming meetings. We hope to introduce computer enthusiasts to the OPCUG who might not otherwise consider attending a meeting.

What's in it for you? Well, apart from making your club meetings a more vibrant experience, you could win something! Every guest you bring into the April and May meetings gives you one ticket on a special draw to be held at our June meeting. Prizes so far include CorelDraw 8, Partition Magic 4, and a free year's club membership. When you come to a

meeting, see contest registrar Stephen Hickey at the door with your guest. Sign your guest in and you will be given a ticket for the big June draw.

The guests you invite are under no obligation to take out a membership (but they may anyways if they like what they see!). Plus, if your guests do take out an OPCUG membership by the end of the May meeting, you qualify for an extra three tickets. You can bring more than one guest to any meeting. Your guests are invited to attend General Meetings and the SIG sessions afterwards.

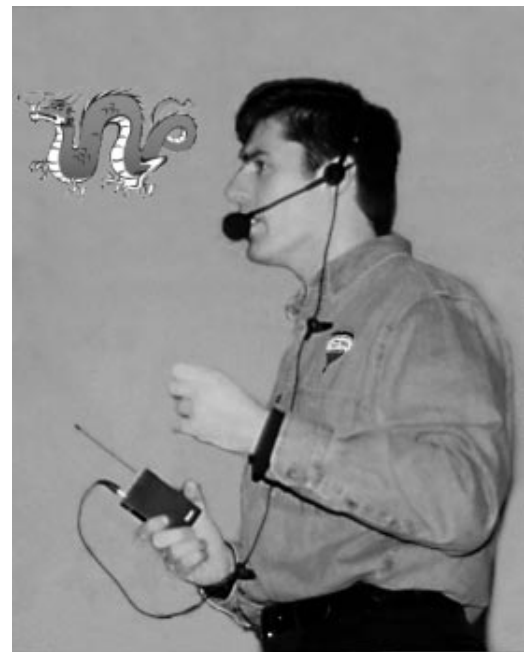
March meeting highlights

A brave few came to the March meeting despite horrible weather conditions. Those who braved the snowstorm were rewarded with two exciting presentations on computer-voice interaction.



With Martin Lontaigne from Corel (right), we learned that it was indeed possible to speak to a little dragon inside a computer and have it spell out the words on screen. This impressive demonstration opens wide ranging possibilities.

A well trained computer can also automate a lot of functions in the home, from diming lights... to brewing coffee at just the right time. Serge Perras (left) from Newtech Home Automation will be demonstrating this product again at the Ottawa Spring House Show (March 24-28).

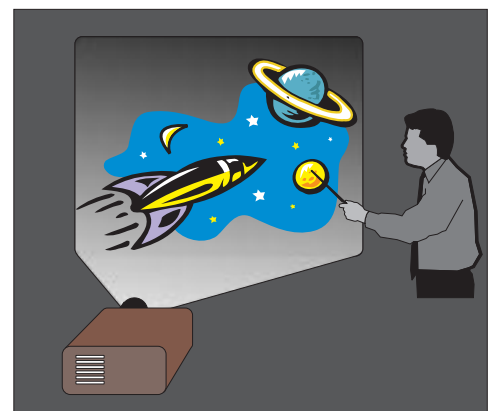


Members' presentations at June meeting

Last year, the club reserved a general meeting for members to present their own projects or interests. That evening was a great success and we hope to repeat it at the June 2nd meeting.

If you are interested, please talk to Bert Schopf or Dunc Petrie at the April

meeting or contact either by e-mail or by phone **before April 12th** (See the info in the newsletter masthead.)





WINDOWS

DUNC PETRIE'S CORNER

BEGINNERS



O tempora ... o mores!

You should get what you pay for

[Editor's note: The following was seen in the March 1999 issue of *Publish* magazine, page 20.]

Umax has run afoul of the law in the USA...

As scanner aficionados are aware, the trend is to increasingly higher bit depths. Instead of 24 bit (16+ million) colour, scanner manufacturers are increasingly touting 30 and 36 bit machines. These assign, respectively, 10 or 12 bits each to the Red, Green and Blue colour channels. (Of course, 24 bit uses 8 per channel.) Now, all other things being equal, one can make a genuine case for the higher colour fidelity.

Deep within the electronics of a scanner are analog-to-digital (A-D) converters. These chips have the job of converting the analog electrical intensity of the signal generated by the pixel sensing elements to the equivalent digital "colour" that is seen on the monitor as representative of what the scanner "saw." One A-D converter is assigned to each colour channel (Red, Green, Blue).

Now, to properly perform 36 bit operations, it would be logical to assume that the A-D converter must be 12 bits wide for each colour. Indeed, a persuasive case could be made for over-sampling: using a 14 or 16 bit A-D converter in concert with an algorithm that would select the best (most significant)

12 bits and discard the remainder (on the assumption that the discarded bits represented electrical noise or image artefacts).

Umax tried to pull a bit of an end run. It claimed 36 bit colour (Model: Astra 1220) but the A-D converter for each channel is only a 10 bit device (for a total of 30 bit colour). The missing 2 bits are magically "restored" courtesy of a software interpolation/enhancement algorithm.

Result: Umax is guilty of false advertising.

Bottom Line: *Caveat emptor*—Consumer beware! Umax will now employ the phrase, "36 bit colour quality." There was no suggestion that this Umax model is an inferior scanner; in fact, it may deliver excellent images. (Personally, I am not saying one or the other; I have not used it.) The criterion here was: "Truth in advertising."

Expect that the competition will (must) adopt similar tactics to remain competitive. Read the fine print!

[Editor's note: The title, loosely translated from Latin means: "The tricks they get up to, these days!"]



Windows 9x tip

Passwords

Are you the only person who uses your Windows 95 or Windows 98 system? If you are, do you really need a password? If not, remove the default password prompt and Windows will start without prompting you for a password.

Windows stores your password in \Windows in a file that has the extension PWL. The first part of the filename will be the same as your user name.



To remove the password prompt, begin by deleting your PWL file. Restart your system; the Enter Windows Password dialog box will appear. At this point, simply click OK—do not type anything in the Password text box.

Lose the key, lose the files!

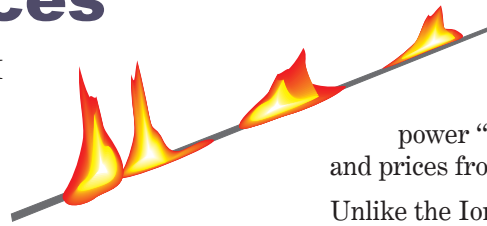


Hardware Update

Firewire Devices

In an earlier newsletter (February 1999) I introduced Firewire and lamented that it was, at least for the PC, a niche architecture that was confined to video applications.

No more: VST Tech, www.vsttech.com, has introduced a series of light, compact, high-capacity, external hard drives that receive power from the Firewire connector. The Firewire standard supports hot-plug connections, Plug-and-Play compatibility and as further conveniences—unlike SCSI—no device identification or termination. Iomega may have claimed the colours green and purple for their peripherals; however, kudos to VST Tech for a highly-visible, bright red case that measures a compact



3×5.5×0.80 inches
(76×142×20mm)—remember, no power “brick.” Capacities range from 2- 6 GB and prices from \$300 - \$500 (US).

Unlike the Iomega drives, these are not removable media; instead, they are conventional hard drives in an external package. The Firewire connection, compactness and capacity are useful for transferring applications or multimedia presentations among computers, allowing off-site backups or lock-up security of sensitive data.

Hopefully, this marks the beginning of a trend that will see Firewire join the mainstream.



Windows 98 tip

File Information

I came across a useful utility in the Windows 98 Resource Kit. Microsoft has included a sampler that contains a subset of the full Resource Kit on the Windows 98 CD-ROM (in \Tools\Reskit); however, it is not installed by default during a routine installation. Presumably, this allows Microsoft to avoid providing support to those unfortunate enough to have gone “exploring.” You could purchase the full version; however, it is a “brick” that runs to some 1800 pages—give or take. For most single, non-networked users this sampler is most adequate.

The File Information utility lists every file on the distribution CD; it provides a brief description, the CAB file that archives it, its size, the creation date and its directory location within Windows 98. This is an ideal means to answer the question: “What file does ‘what?’” The source of this information is the file Win98.mfi.

To access it, first install the Resource Kit sampler. Once installed, go to: Start... Programs... Windows 98 Resource Kit... Tools Management Console. In the left pane click on the plus sign adjacent to the Windows 98 Resource Kit folder and then select the Tools A to Z option. Look within the ‘M’-containing section for Microsoft File Information.

I tried to find the executable file that implemented this utility without success. You could, albeit inelegantly, open the file in WordPad and view the raw information with the Edit Menu’s “Find” option.

As an aside, you can examine a file (this includes .exe, .com and .dll files among others) in either NotePad or WordPad. While much is gibberish, you could view the on-screen prompts or file associations. (In this context, “associations” refers to files that are requested to provide some type of assistance to the primary file. For example, an application—an .exe file—might require several .dll files to perform various tasks.) Once you have opened the file try initially scrolling downward from the beginning of the file. If this is unsuccessful, then scroll upward from the end of the file. These seem to be the most likely locations; however, I suspect that any location is possible.

Luckily, while browsing the web (I don’t recall where) a reference suggested that the .mfi file is merely a disguised Microsoft Access database. If true, powerful options are available. If you have Access 97, you can manipulate the data within Access and view it in entirely new contexts. This site suggested copying the file and renaming it to conform to an Access file: namely, “myfile.mdb.” What is essential is not the “myfile” portion but the extension (.mdb). Then open it in Access and organize away!



OTTAWA PC NEWS

Ottawa PC News is the newsletter of the Ottawa PC Users' Group (OPCUG), and is published monthly except in July and August. The opinions expressed in this newsletter may not necessarily represent the views of the club or its members. Deadline for submissions is four Saturdays before the general meeting.

Group Meetings

OPCUG normally meets on the first Wednesday in the month, except in July and August, at the National Museum of Science and Technology, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd, Ottawa. Meeting times are 7:30 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Fees

Membership: \$25 per year.

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Club life

Graphics SIG

By Jean Vaumoron

Interested in improving your graphic skills on the computer? Want to PhotoPaint the world around, open a PhotoShop, or become a PaintPro?

We have taken a first step: the Colour Supplement is there for you to show your work and look at everybody else's. You are all invited to post images, be they "artistic" or technical—colour, line art or otherwise. A few words about the subject matter are welcome, so are tips and tricks to help improve techniques (any longer text can be published as an article in the Newsletter).

The Graphics SIG should also be of interest to former members of the DTP SIG. In order to find out if this arises enough interest, I shall be heading a first group meeting after the next general meeting. Bring your work and your ideas. There are lots of issues to be tackled, from hardware and techniques to the sheer enjoyment of looking at somebody else's work... and showing your own. I have found most solutions to my problems, not in the books, but more often than not by asking other users. This is certainly an area in which users need all the help they can get from other users.



Club Life

Fly West



The "Good Times" cafe at Shoppers City West, Baseline and Woodroffe, for chicken wings and a drink after the General meeting: may be the best and most informative SIG meeting of the evening. See you there!

Club News all about Club Life!

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