



Apple Blossom Computer Club
A registered Apple/Macintosh User Group

Dec '08

still only

\$2.00

The

ROSE

BYTER

Next Meeting

Dec 18, 7 PM

American Legion

Post 16

406 SE Oak

Roseburg

Agenda

1. Meeting starts at 7 p.m.
2. Intro's of members and guests
3. Old business
4. New business - door prize.
5. Program: A look into alternative Operating Systems.
6. Questions & (maybe)Answers

YOUTUBYTER

by Dave Archer <dave@davearcher.com>



Fellow Members: I'm glad these things live in the ocean and can't get in my house. I call them: Matrix Lizards, from the movie. Just the sort of thing to be scuttling over Keanu Reeves' boots.

This month, after my last piece on *dinner at the Nelson's*, I had to find one "treasure of the sea," I am fairly certain Dad would have passed on by. Not

that he wouldn't have considered a nice bowl of sea lizards. Still, I do not think that even Palmer Stewart Nelson would have eaten these. He might have thought they were deadly. Well, okay. If Dad had ever been a tourist in Japan. Fine. A roasted skewer or two – don't be ridiculous.

Here Follow ABCCers; this month's YOUTUBES. Hope you enjoy them:

The **Apple Blossom Computer Club** (ABCC) is an Apple Computer Inc.. registered Macintosh and Apple][family user group. The ABCC publishes *The RoseByter* newsletter monthly; it is posted to each paid-up member and to reciprocating user groups. ABCC participates in user group newsletter content exchange. The ABCC also maintains a Web site at:

<http://www.abccmug.org>

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Send your stories and newsletter ideas to the Editor, Walt Pawley, at <walt@wump.org>. Plain text files are preferred, sent within the body of an email message or as an attachment. Mail physical media to:

**676 River Bend Road
Roseburg, OR 97470**

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<- 1 YOUTUBYTE

—**Man Showing Off Gets Run Over** ... if your intelligence is having a bad day, and, you want to feel superior again, just watch this very short video. It'll pick you right up again, so to speak.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=728WayF6CaM>

—**Micro artist sculpts from single grains of sand** ... sells collection for 20 million.

<http://www.maniacworld.com/art-in-the-eye-of-a-needle.html>

—**How To Hack RFID-enabled Credit Cards For \$8** ... A number of credit card companies now issue credit cards with embedded RFIDs (radio frequency ID tags), with promises of enhanced security and speedy transactions.

But on today's episode of Boing Boing TV, hacker and inventor Pablos Holman shows Xeni how you can use about \$8 worth of gear bought on eBay to read personal data from those credit cards – cardholder name, credit card number, and whatever else your bank embeds in this manner.

Fears over data leaks from RFID-enabled cards aren't new, and some argue they're overblown – but this demo shows just how cheap and easy the “sniffing” can be.

This episode is part of our ongoing series of interviews with some of the thinkers, hackers, and tinkerers at the O'Reilly Emerging Technology conference this year.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmaJlKJlT3U>

—**Guy Hacks Traffic Sign With Laptop** ... Puts Own Picture On Sign ... Man, I was a kid in the wrong age. Not really. My childhood was mostly good. But the tricks youngsters are playing on oldsters these days pale in comparison. At night we used to put a purse in the road, with a dollar sticking out of it. Cars would drive right over it, screech to a stop, then the dad would send the kids or wife back to look for it. Of course it was gone as we had attached a long piece of hair-thin copper wire to the purse, and pulled it into the bushes where we were hiding, trying not to laugh. People would get mad and yell, “I saw it. It has money sticking out of it!” Then the dad would get out and get down and look under the car. It was great in the rain. High tech was still Dick Tracy's wrist radio. We could not have imagined the geek possibilities of today. Babies born today, are being raised in a wireless apple orchard of Red Delicious. Blade Runner is here. This is worth a view. I make no value judgment on these criminal activities, as I plan to incorporate into my current living plan. Naw.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hzJZU5Nt2s>

—**Guy Hacks Bridge with PDA** ... There are hundreds of these “How To” computer geek videos on Youtube. Like a free Coke? There are so many Youtubes on how to hack soda, food, and candy machines I couldn't count them. Um...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lIMwFhsLQ-o>

— —
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Hey there, it's Martin writing ...

First, I'd just like to say we will be announcing the winner of the Logic Remix Contest with Olav Basoski next Thursday. If you have not already voted for your favorite song, visit the [Logic Remix Contest](#) page and put in your vote!

In other news, I have a couple of new tutorials to tell you about. **Until December 19th (2008) you can save 20% on these new tutorials** using the coupon code below:

Coupon Code: [08MPVdec20](#)

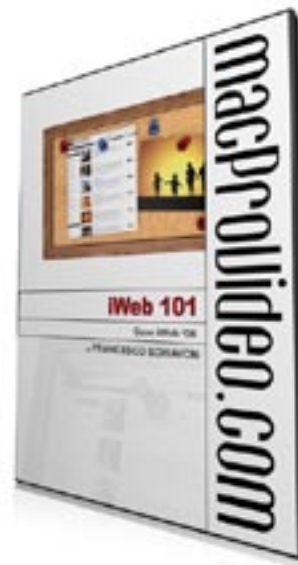
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See page 8 for details on \$50 prize -->

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Any trace of organization in these paragraphs is entirely coincidental

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The Waning Light of the Approaching Winter

According to a techno-rag report, a recent FCC order states, "... Comcast selectively targeted and terminated ... connections ... and ... this conduct significantly impeded consumers' ability to access the content and use the applications of their choice." One of the main reasons cited for this curious ruling (I think it's curious, given that our government is spending billions to watch what we're all doing with every means of communication) was that **Comcast was peering into the content of customers' data packets** to decide how to filter them. Just in case you think such behavior is unique to Comcast, have another think. While I've not heard of such egregious behavior on the part of any other major carrier, I can assure you that they all look at their customers' content to some extent. The insidious part is in what's done as result of that peeking. This slap on Comcast's wrist won't keep them at bay long, if at all. That same report ends with, "One just wonders when – not if – the broadband carriers will make their courtroom attack on the FCC's Comcast order."

Curmudgeonly old Luddite that I am, **I don't run the latest incarnation of Apple's OS on much of anything**, though I could. Why don't I? Well, I use my computers. I prefer that they work pretty much the same way every

day. I don't care to install things every few weeks, especially when doing so breaks things I've put in place and rely upon. Unlike most people, I groan with just about every new version of Mac OS X Apple puts out. This is not to say that they don't make improvements and necessary additions. But they also change the nature of the applications bundled with what reasonably constitutes the operating system proper. If these changes were immaterial to past activities, even that might not matter. Unfortunately, the mix of features tends to get badly shuffled. Apple is not alone in doing this stuff – there must be money in it. Adobe makes a habit of convincing Web site producers to use the latest version of Flash to do their flashy-flashy stuff; videos in particular. No big deal. Adobe is happy to provide the latest Flash player software for free download on a number of platforms. But just like Apple's applications, every new version won't work on old systems. You'd think that companies doing this sort of thing would make old versions of their software available for people with old systems. Good luck! It turns out that Adobe does provide some older versions of Flash ... but not to support old systems and not something they seem to have links to. According to their Web site, the old versions are provided "for testing purposes." So, I thought I'd "test" one of them. After seeing how big the current version was, I became concerned that the much larger old version must be some sort of developer source code thing. After it downloaded, it became clear that there were several different builds of "the" old version. Oddly enough, one of them actually worked.

I was surprised to see that the owner of **Other World Computing**, a primary nationwide source of stuff for Macs, **wasn't too thrilled with some of Apple's new offerings**. "Really cool Macs and all... but I'd personally wait.

And if I had to get a new Macbook or MacBook Pro today - there's great deals on the non-Unibody models with which you'll currently get more bang for the buck out of too". Only in the Pro, or still available White, versions is Firewire retained. As he points out, the bang for the buck is in the previous models. It's a bit puzzling. There are lots of mainstream PC laptops available from \$400 to \$800 that would seem to be more or less competitive in performance and capacity. It's puzzling that Apple would find it necessary to throw out features to keep their margins up at \$1200.

One of things we don't often see, is engineers who talk about the realities of their work. Part of that is ego. Part of that is that they'd likely be fired immediately by their employers. Still, from time to time, there's one who's willing to stick their neck on the chopping block and give us things like, "**...SoCs have become so complex that even the designers themselves don't have the time or comprehensive insight required to write enough tests to cover all of the functionality...**" Face it, even very smart people are apt to forget things." (SoC = System on a Chip, ie. what most electronic gizmos are made of these days) This fellow was soft-pedaling the reality just a bit. Marketing pressures force products out the door that employees are embarrassed to be "supporting." How many calls to a support person that don't fix anything does it take to convince the support person that what they're supporting is garbage? The people responsible for this sort of thing don't seem to care as long the load of crap they purchased in China makes it into the sales channels in the rest of the world. They get paid: everyone else gets taken to the cleaners. They bail and start up a brand new company to do it all over again. Good racket. But I exaggerate the average plight of the engineer. The basic 5 -->

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issue is generally applicable but varies greatly from the really sleazy outfits to the mainstream technical firms. But all of them push stuff out the door with far less than certainty that the product is really sound.

According to a recent post, Suneet Gupta's "certified small business," Guident Technologies, Inc., will help DHS (Department of Homeland Security) keep track of their projects. Interestingly, Suneet is only one of several Vice Presidents – Guident seems devoid of a CEO, though they have plenty of people with expansive titles on their "management team." Here's what bothers me more than anything else: **DHS is supposed to be keeping track of all manner of things to aid our security, but they can't even keep track of their basic activities.**

Admittedly, the 2.5 megabuck contract with Guident pales along side the billions (trillions?) DHS has squandered annoying the bejeezus out of us by "keeping us safe." It must be a wonderful thing to be a member of the Bush administration viewed with presidential favor – gobs of money to play with and no need to account for it. Certainly there's been no need to accomplish anything of real value to the citizenry with it. There's been huge amounts of carping from DHS that the problem they face are just too big. Perhaps. Perhaps we'd really be better off if we simply disbanded DHS and held the bureaucrats remaining responsible for doing their jobs. We could accept the fact that we are at risk, both from within and without, and live with it. DHS did not change that fact very much - perhaps actually making the situation worse. In any case, I fail to see how an outfit that can't keep track of what it's doing for itself is going to do a good job at much of anything, much less ascertaining your "security."

I recently read a blurb about some chemical research that may offer some hope at arresting both Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Should they prove

to be workable, the value of early detection would be raised even more. Rather curiously, the work stems from recognizing that a generally toxic molecule had the side effect of protecting remaining healthy brain cells from further degradation. Since then, scientists have been working on crafting chemicals that have the protecting feature but lack the toxicity of the original. They now have some things that may work well and are non-toxic at very large doses. Testing and development continue. In a somewhat related article, there's a claimed "Breakthrough in Cell-type Analysis..." This article struck me as more hypeful than hopeful. There's a claim that extremely fine differentiation amongst cells can be achieved, to wit: "... (TRAP), uses genetically engineered mice to capture these messages as they pass through the protein production factories called ribosomes. Because the mice have been made to express a specially tagged ribosome in only one particular cell type, the TRAP method can identify all the genetic messages that give that cell type its unique identity..." OK. So, how many different strains of mice will be required for this? Last time I checked, the number of proteins that cells synthesize would require **well over a 1,000,000 different strains of mice to differentiate amongst them.** Something tells me we'd have better luck chemically analyzing the protein and then looking it up in a data base.

Ah ... science. Especially the fictional kind. It's gnarly stuff; that. Take a recent commercial for the next episode of Stargate Atlantis. I rather like the original Stargate SG1 series, but the Atlantis series has always been just a bit too disconnected from anything that makes any sense whatever for my tastes. Anyway, this episodic preview talks about how to "...collapse the matter bridge" Hmm... pretty difficult. **How does one destroy something really high tech like a bridge made of matter?** After all, it's made of stuff. You know; like concrete and steel. You

don't suppose they could use something like dynamite, do you? Worse coming to worst, I suppose they could just nuke it. Just to give them a bit of slack, maybe they're referring to some esoteric form of matter such as neutronium; the stuff of which neutron stars are made. It seems unlikely to me that neutronium would support the shear forces necessary to make a bridge, but what do I know (answer: not much). The energy to disrupt a hunk of neutronium is pretty high. A cubic foot of the stuff could probably soak up a good sized H-bomb's worth of energy. There are even tougher sorts of matter, at least in theory, like gravitationally collapsed matter, ie. black holes. Pretty hard to make a bridge out of black hole matter - manipulating the stuff is quite likely impossible without becoming part of it. Black hole stuff has a tendency to join together in the shape of an infinitesimal sphere. Inside the event horizon of a black hole, an H-bomb would be aptly referred to as a Hush-a-boom. But, of course, the problem here is me. They refer to a "matter bridge" as a means of transporting matter across interstellar or intergalactic distances, not as a bridge made from matter.

I was reading a bit in a federal government IT rag and a couple of thoughts welled up from what was there. First, **we have an arrangement in most of our federal government departments that strikes me as extremely stupid** or, at the very least, an expensive way to do things. With every change of administration, there's a wholesale change of top management in these institutions. Thus we have two effects: departments are run by the politics of the last election – not necessarily by their stated reason for existence – and no one in departments' upper echelons knows what their department is doing. This may not be a bad thing, since career employees in these departments most probably play lip service to the politic *du jour* while going about their business pretty much as they see fit – or, so I

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hope. If they don't, the implication is that we're dumping mountains of tax money into pits with names beaten out of stone over the entrances. Second, it's apparently considered to be big news that two departments are going to join forces to purchase software in an effort to save money. I have to wonder what sort of software is up for purchase. About the only thing I can think of that would be amenable for general use by a diverse group would be generic stuff. So, how many copies of Windows Vista do they need? Perhaps it's like so many other organizations: they've "standardized" on some expensive email client or database software. For example, I rather once rather liked Panorama – and it still retains much of it's operational value – but, when ProVUE decided to making every copy require separate licensing, I rather lost interest. It used to be that one could use a client's license on a development machine. With their current scheme, they believe they're fighting piracy by making the program useless if it doesn't have a unique license. This rather puzzles me as Panorama is not exactly something high on the list of software pirates' "want lists" but, far more importantly, ProVUE disenfranchised their unpaid field sales force. Why do I say that? It's simple, really. Lots of software "pirates" just crack stuff to mess around with it. If they like it, when someone is seriously interested in such stuff, the "pirate" has ready advice based on some experience. ProVUE loses no money to "pirates." Indeed, they lose money by not enabling such pirates.

Have you seen the "FinallyFast.com" commercials? I really enjoy their public stupidity (of course, I may just be displaying my own by pointing it out). **They open with people complaining that their Macintoshes are no longer fast like they used to be.** You did see the Macs, right? Then they segue into their spiel of all the things their product fixes ... all of which are

Windows things and have nothing to do with Mac OS X at all. Well, unless you happen to be a Windows user via Parallels, or its ilk. Even sillier, you bought a Mac to run Windows via Bootcamp (well, this might not be extremely silly if you need the very highest performance Windows' box). The product is PC SpeedScan Pro. It's Microsoft certified. The commercial goes on to tout the repair and optimization of all kinds of Windows stuff. So, why show Macs? It turns out that if you hunt around a bit on their web site, you can see a little link to a page for something called MacTuneUp. As near as I can tell, it's built by interfacing to stuff that basically comes in your Mac at the outset. It provides a single GUI to do the stuff, which might be a decent reason to use it. In any case, I'd be leery of using the Internet Acceleration. While all these functions are mostly what amounts to fluff, Internet Acceleration is almost certainly bogus – there's just not that much inefficiency in the Internet packet protocol to take advantage of.

A phenomenon I find perplexing is that corporations buy into "solutions" like Oracle and SAP (whatever that stands for – I choose not to research that) and then can't find qualified people to pay exorbitant salaries to operate the mess. I'm not really surprised. Oracle and SAP are nothing more than database programs. What makes them special is that they are surrounded by oceans of rhetoric that would be the envy of any televangelist. Small wonder so-called "experts" are hard to find. One who actually knows how to run these systems must either suffer through the trip across all those oceans until enough of the reality seeps through so they can do meaningful things or be apprenticed to one who has and doesn't really care to do the work. **Corporations spend billions of dollars buying into this stuff – despite the fact that they're just working with databases.** Database technology has been around for a very long time. It doesn't really require an

6 understanding of "rocket science" to mess about with databases, though it probably helps to have a good mechanical aptitude. Most computers today have considerable ability to deal with masses of data straight out of the box. People who know how to program these computers in their native form can't find work but they could do all the stuff SAP or Oracle are generally used for without spending those billions.

Apple is advertising their new MacBooks as "green." One of the really great statements in the advertisement is that **the new MacBook uses only a quarter of the power of a light bulb.** Sound good? All I can say is that, without question, the statement is not false. Of course, the statement is also meaningless. Notice that they don't say what light bulb the MacBook's power consumption is a quarter of. Maybe they're referring to a small flashlight bulb – perhaps as much as 3 Watts, which would make the MacBook use under a single Watt. I rather doubt that. Or, maybe they mean one of those quartz glass enclosed kilowatt light bulbs. Certainly 250 Watts is not outside the realm of reason for a computer these days, what with plenty of Intel processor chips doing that sort of thing all by themselves. Clearly Apple doesn't need to lie to make such a statement true. But why make it if it's really meaningless drivel? I suspect it's mostly because Apple chooses not to inflict technological meaning on its customers any more than absolutely necessary: perhaps not even as much as actually *is* necessary. Even Apple's on-line store doesn't try to specify power usage in any direct way. They point out that the small one should get five hours of computing on a battery charge from the 45 Watt-hour lithium-polymer battery. They point out that the AC adapter can provide 60 Watts. I suspect that nine Watts is on the low side of power used – perhaps typing into a simple document: I don't think even Apple's salespersons would refer to sleeping time for power 7 -->

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usage. It doesn't really matter. Their ad is designed to create "warm fuzzies" and most people hear it just that way.

My ears are deceiving me as much as my eyes these days. I was peeling a grapefruit for an evening snack when I heard the TV say, "**Here are ... farmers who grow vegetables in Campbell's soup.**" This struck me as strange for a several reasons. For example, Campbell's soups are notoriously salty and I suspect most vegetable plants would find it a bit too much like brine to grow well. But, perhaps it's just used as some sort of additive. They didn't say. It didn't sound like it. Then there's the problem of cost. Would it really pay to grow vegetables in soup - even Campbell's? Even as a fertilizer additive, it strikes me as being a little expensive. But as a thickened liquid, one would have to use some form of hydroponics enclosures to hold the soup while the plants were growing in it. That's also expensive. Of course, the investment might be worth it if growing plants in soup is some sort of extreme advantage. Somehow, this seems unlikely, even though we oft refer to the origins of life being in "primordial soup." So, I'm left with the conclusion that my ears deceive me ... or American TV is officially speaking Murkin.

An interesting admission: **Tyson chicken nuggets are now made with all natural ingredients.** Makes me wonder what they made them from before. While I'm on the subject of what makes up foods, did you catch the one about China recently? No, they're not killing us with something new, at least not that we've noticed yet. Apparently they need to have others to mess up and people are a primary resource in China; bettered only by India. So, why not use toxic chemicals as filler for baby formula? They're apparently less expensive than

7 what's normally used in baby formula. Is it time for Soylent

Green yet? But that's not a blanket indictment of the Chinese; not by a long shot. It's more just the reality of some peoples' willingness to see others as just some means to acquire wealth for themselves. It's just that in China, they've not had enough modern problems of this sort to begin to deal with it. Our case is quite different. We think we've dealt with all this stuff. But we haven't, really. We're very good at putting up defenses against the effects of such greed ... that are very easy to simply go over, under and around. We are amazingly stupid about it. Just one example: we enable wholesale pollution in the name of providing jobs (rather than the real reason: making the wealthy wealthier) and dismiss the need to clean it up. At the same time, if you get in a wreck and your vehicle dumps a few quarts of oil in the gravel, space-suited hazardous materials teams descend on the site and give you a five or six figure bill for hauling away the environmental contamination. Which, I suppose, just goes to show the truth of the old adage: if you're going to be a crook, be a really big crook.

I've been swearing silently to myself that I would not write about the movie, Idiocracy, but Jay Leno forced the issue. He brought on another **Battle of the Jaywalk All Stars** tonight. Now, I'm not particularly surprised that they can find people who can stand and walk along sidewalks, fully dressed - even personable - who seem to know as much about the world they've lived in for over twenty years as a 4.5 billion year old rock. But I am concerned about a part of this presentation: these people are usually in some sort of school to do thing likes medicine, law enforcement, etc. This, despite the likelihood that building burgers may be at the furthest reaches of their ability. Do they seem to feel that they may not make the grade? Not at all. This has me wondering why. This has me seeing the scenario of Idiocracy just around time's corner instead of well down its freeway. If you've not seen

Idiocracy, I strongly suggest renting it.

I happen to be one of those "commie pinkos" who doesn't watch Fox News. Still, I occasionally manage to flip through the Fox News Channel when doing some minor channel surfing. I happened to glance up and see the "ticker" scrolling by on the bottom to the screen. It was apparently about the **terrorist event in Mumbai, India and an interview with the the one perpetrator who was captured. It was said that this fellow was saying he'd been "trained by Fox News."** This struck me as a rather odd thing, especially for Fox News, to be saying. Of course, it was really just a break in the text where they periodically insert "Fox News" in white instead of the "news" data that's in a sort of orange.

My wife just read me a quote of Harry S. Truman's, published in Woman's Day. It goes, "**It's amazing what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit.**" I believe that works pretty well in government circles, at least. There's a corollary that I've noticed in less lofty organizations. One might put it something like, "It's amazing what you can fix if you don't spend all your effort assigning blame for it's being broken." I've worked in a few corporate cultures that truly were far more interested in pointing fingers at perceived do-baders than making their products work. These cultures almost never survived very long. Sooner or later, regardless of who broke what or who's mistake the bad decision was, either the product gets produced or the organization fails. Sadly, a lot of managerial personnel fall squarely amongst the finger pointers. I suspect it's a part of The Peter Principle. But it's been a long time since I read Laurance J. Peter's analysis of how organizations function. It should be required reading for anyone in charge of the activities of others. After reading it, they should take a long look in the mirror of their mind.



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PS: the videos really work well!



Coming Soon to an **ABCC** Near You!

2009 is just around the corner. While some ideas for programs for meetings have surfaced (not nearly enough, though), none seem certain as of the moment.

Worse, after months of asking for input from you — the reason we have meetings in the first place — about what you'd like to see at meetings,

only a very small number of you have even bothered a grumbling “mind your own business,” much less an honest answer of what you'd like to see. Even an “I don't know. What do you want to do?” sort of thing would be an improvement. So ... let us know, eh.



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