Desktop **doctor**

Even an Apple a day may not keep the doctor away. Chris Cain shows you what to do if you find yourself with a sick Mac. Plus, there's QuickTime movies on startup, more extensions, and the mania of Marathon 2.

By the time you read this, January's MacWorld Expo '96 in San Francisco will have been and gone. I didn't manage to get over to the show this time around but judging by reports that have been coming in, I didn't miss that much. Most of the software on show was apparently the same as it was last August, and the news centred on Apple posting a substantial loss for the final quarter of last year. Layoffs were certainly looming.

All this on top of the fact that Mike Newton is now former Managing Director of Apple UK has led to a large degree of uncertainly and speculation about the future of the company. Rumours abound that Apple is about to re-organise and drop its low-end models, which sold well over Christmas but don't bring in much profit and can't really compete in a price war with cheap PCs. Also, according to industry analysts, a takeover is once again imminent with Sun, Sony and IBM as the front runners.

Despite these setbacks, there is some good news. Apple is said to be releasing two new PCI-based Performa models towards the spring of this year. The details are sketchy, but according to reports the systems, code-named Elixer and Chimera, will use a 100 or 120 Mhz 603e PowerPC processor and be available in an all-in-one design, like the 5200, or a standard modular version. Both models will support up to 136Mb of RAM and have a slot for a 7-inch, 32-bit PCI card.

Chimera is set to replace the current 5200 series of Performas, while Elixer takes over the 6200/6300 series. Common specs include a 1Gb Enhanced IDE hard disk, quad-speed CD-ROM drive, 16-bit sound, and free slots for communications, video-in, and TV tuner cards.
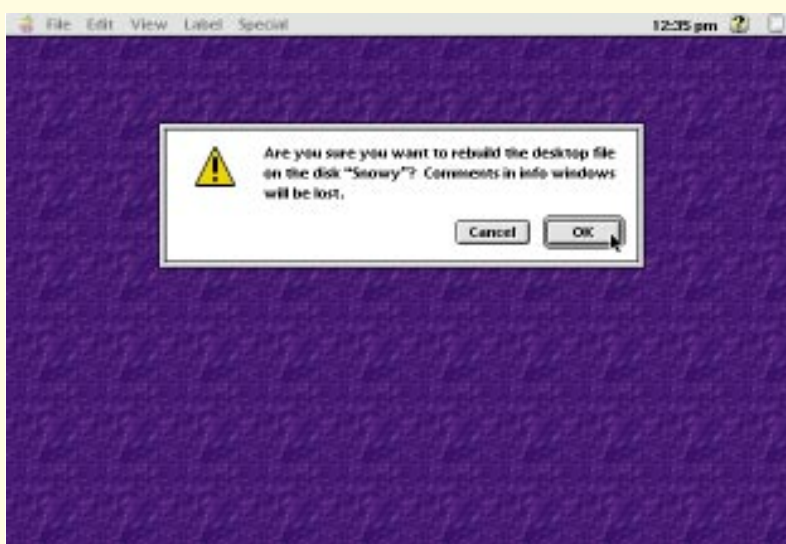
At the movies

This month while reading though some of my old Mac books, I came across a page that told me how to make a QuickTime movie that plays on startup. All you have to do is select a movie file, rename it Start-up Movie, drop it into your System Folder and away you go. The next time the Mac starts up, the movie will play as soon as the QuickTime extension is loaded. It's that simple.

Not being one to turn down a challenge, I made my Startup Movie and restarted the machine, eager to see it action. I now wish I'd never laid eyes on that book, because it showed up a problem with my System software that I'd never noticed before.

The process worked fine, the movie sprang into life, but after booting with a Startup Movie anything else that tried to use QuickTime failed. MoviePlayer died with an "Error of Type 1" and, worst still, mission critical applications such as Doom II refused to load. Eventually, I tracked down the problem using the three basic rules of Mac problem solving.

Step one when attempting to solve a problem of this sort is to rebuild the mystical desktop file. You rebuild the desktop by holding down the Command and Option keys on startup, then clicking OK in the dialogue box that eventually appears. The desktop file is a database where your Mac keeps information about all of the

Rebuilding the Desktop file can work wonders with a sick Mac

Extension List Part 2

To keep your Mac in tip-top shape, here's the second part of the latest Apple System Software revisions, as promised last month.

Extensions

Name	Version	Name	Version	Name	Version
MPW	3.3	PowerBook Display	7.5	Sound Control Panel	8.0.5
MPW C++	3.2	PowerBook File Assistant	1.0	Sound Effects	1.0
NetTrax	1.2	PowerBook Setup Ctl Pnl	7.3.1	Sound Manager	3.1
Network Control Panel	3.0.	PowerCD Setup	1.0.1	Speech Manager	1.1.1
Network Launch Fix	1.0.2	PowerShareCollaboration Server	1.1	StyleWriter	12002.1.1
Network Software Installer	1.5.1	PowerTalk	1.1	StyleWriter	GX1.1.1
Newton Connection (Mac)	2.0.2	PowerTalk for PowerPC	1.0.2	StyleWriter	II1.2
Newton Connection (Win)	2.0.3	PrinterShare	1.1.1	System Picker	1.0
Newton Toolkit	1.5.2b2	Quadra 950 Color Addition	1.0	System Update	3.0
Open Transport	1.0.8	QuickDraw GX	1.1.3	System 7.5 Update	1.0.2
Ofoto	2.0.1	QuickTake	1.0	System	7.5.2
OfotoColor	1.0	QuickTime	2.1	Printing Fix	1.1
PatchBay DA	2.0.1	QuickTime Conferencing	1.0	TeachText	7.2
PC Exchange	2.0.5	QuickTime Starter Kit	1.6.1	Telephone Manager	1.1.1
PC Net Exchange	1.0.1	Rename Rescue	1.0	Thread Manager	2.0.1
PC Setup	1.0.7	ResEdit	2.1.3	Token Ring Control Panel	1.0.1
PDD Maker GX	1.0.1	Responder	1.1.1	Token Ring	2.5.2
Personal LaserWriter	3001.2	SADE	1.3.2	TokenTalk	2.5.7
Personal LaserWriter	3201.0.1	Scanner	3.0	TV Setup Cntl Panel	1.0.2
Personal LaserWriter NTR	2.0	Screen	1.0.6	Type III Battery (Ext.)	1.0
Personal LaserWriter SC	7.0.1	Script Editor	1.1.1	Video (control panel)	1.0
PhotoFlash	2.0.1	Scriptable Text Editor	1.1	Video Monitor	1.0.1
PlainTalk	1.4.1	SerialDMA	1.1	VideoSync	1.0
Portable StyleWriter	1.0.1	Serial Switch	1.2	Virtual Monitor Switch.	1.0
PowerBook Control Panel	7.3.1	Serial Tool	1.0.2	Virtual User	2.0.1
PowerBook/DOS Companion		SimpleText	1.3	WorldScriptII	7.5
				Xmodem Tool	1.1

files it is exposed to, and it occasionally needs cleaning out and updating to keep things running smoothly. The whole process takes only a minute and can save hours of grief later on. A good habit to get into is to rebuild your desktop every Monday morning, or at least once a month to keep things in check.
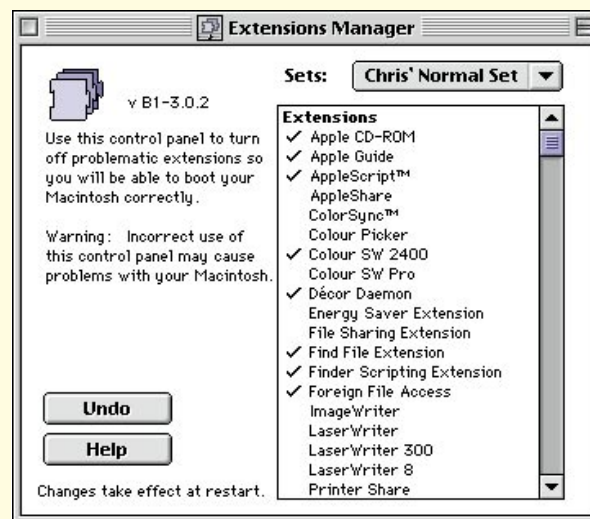
If the problem persists, step two is to eliminate the possibility of an Extension or Control Panel conflict. Sometimes if you have a number of third party system extensions on your Mac, a badly coded one can interfere with another and cause the machine to hiccup. To help you control the loading of extensions, Apple provides a Control Panel called Extensions Manager with System 7.5.

To check if an extension is causing the problem, first boot with the Shift key held down to start the machine with all extensions turned off. If the problem is gone, you know its caused by an extension. If the problem only occurs when using an extension, as in my QuickTime case, you'll need to boot with only bone-fide Apple stuff switched on using Extensions Manager.
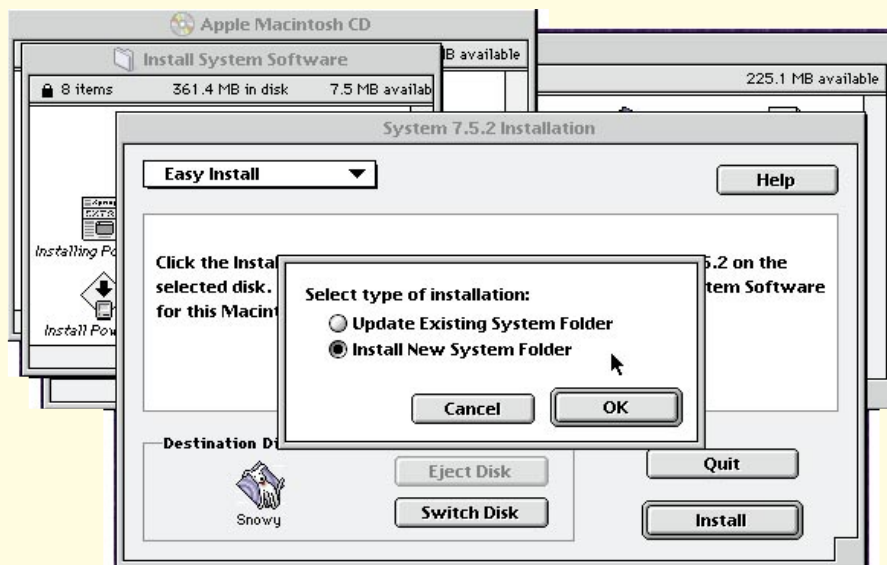
Utility of the Month

The winner of April's Utility of the Month award is Apple's own Extensions Manager, thanks to its sterling performance in helping me track down the system software conflict which gave me such a headache this month. As well as being dead handy for troubleshooting, Extensions Manager allows users to set up and save different sets of extensions so that the Mac can be customised to best suit the job at hand. For example, you could save a set called Fun with nothing but QuickTime, CD-ROM bits and Sound Manager turned on and switch to it when you want to make more memory available to games. When you've finished, you can switch back to having a full system again, complete with networking and printer drivers. Well done, Apple.

The wonderful Extensions Manager: handy, simple and efficient

A clean system installation is often the only way to fix a problem

Now if everything works well, you should place third-party bits back one at a time, restarting each time to check the results. A process of elimination will reveal which item is conflicting.

If this doesn't work and you're still having software troubles, the third and final step is to perform a Clean Install of a new System Folder. For this you'll need a copy of the system disks that came with the machine, or a least a copy of the version currently in use.

Now run the Installer from disk one, but before proceeding with the normal Install routine, press Command + Shift + K. Up pops a hidden dialogue box asking if you want to Update or perform a Clean Install. Select the latter and the Mac will install a new System Folder, and rename the old one to avoid confusion. When it's finished, you can add your third-party extensions again, as in step two.

Of course, this isn't the be all and end all of Mac troubleshooting but nine times out of ten these three steps will cure any ills. If they don't, you can try resetting the parameter RAM by holding Command + Option + P + R on startup until the machine resets. You'll have to go back and set your disk cache to the desired size again, but this will clear out any corruption lurking in the Mac's battery backed-up PRAM. In a future column I'll go into this subject in more detail.

Speak easy

Finally, while researching events at the Mac show I actually found my first real use for that Text to Speech software that comes with all AV and PowerMacs. According to the people who attended, one of the best things about the show was the opening address given by Apple America president, Jim Buckley. So I searched the Net for a copy of his speech, found a transcript and downloaded it.

Later, while working on something else, I decided I'd never get time to sit and read the speech, so I hit upon the idea of having the Mac read it to me. I opened up the text file in SimpleText, selected my favourite voice, called Zarvox, and then Speak All. I returned to the Microsoft Word document I was working on and listened to the machine while I typed.

Zarvox is a robotic voice and not perfect by any means, but to my surprise I was impressed by how much I could understand and just how easy it was to listen to the speech. I've always regarded MacinTalk as a bit of a gimmick, and used it just for silly demos, but now I'm convinced of its worth. It would be tremendously beneficial to the partially sighted or those with reading difficulties, not to mention people like me who are just plain lazy.

I'll be using MacinTalk more from now on and encourage users to give it another go. I'd also like to hear from anyone who uses it on a day-to-day basis.

Bungie jumps ahead

After all the problem solving and hard work that went in to this month's column, I decided it was time to treat myself. As luck would have it, the moment coincided with the UK launch of Bungie's long-awaited Marathon 2. After a lengthy playing session, I can reveal that it's the best game on the Mac yet.

Much more impressive than the early demo featured on the Power Computing CD from last year's MacWorld Expo in Boston, Marathon 2 sets a new standard in Mac gaming. Continuing the story about man's battle with an alien race known as the Phfor, it boasts an intriguing storyline and the best graphics and sound I've seen on a Mac title.

Bungie's new game engine is light years ahead of the competition, with smooth texture mapping in thousands of colours, realistic, ambiant 16-bit sound effects, and a variety of network options. There's also a built-in facility for adding new levels, graphics and sounds.

I can highly recommend Marathon 2, but you'll need at least a PowerMac to get the best from it.