



It's a bug that's going round...

There's a prank macro virus on the loose which affects some Word 6.0 users. Tim Phillips tells you about it, how to spot it and outlines a few simple safeguards.

As I write, we've just emerged from a profoundly uncomfortable time for all enthusiastic WP power users. Microsoft's "prank macro" problem needs addressing.

In case you missed it, Microsoft recently admitted that many Word for Windows 6.0 users had been suffering from what it called a prank macro — a macro contained in a WinWord document, that changes the Normal template to include itself. The macro simply displays a dialogue box with one option: a button that you press, with "OK" on it.

This one's not destructive and it's a good job, too, because what Microsoft calls the "prank" is really a new type of virus. Imagine that instead of a harmless dialogue box, the command the macro was running was more serious: it could alter your files without your knowledge. It doesn't have to trash the hard disk — in fact, it's more damaging if it doesn't.

Anyone who opens a document containing this macro gets the new virus. Infected documents contain a set of Word-Basic macros, one of which is auto-loaded when you load the document. The macros are then copied into the global environment and another macro is invoked when the document is saved. This allows the macros to attach themselves to clean documents. Finally, when you exit Word, the macros attach themselves to your global environment — it's immune to detection from most traditional virus-checkers.

How to check for the virus

You can check to see if you have the virus: look under Tools/Macro, and see if you

have macros called AAAZAO, AAZFS, AutoOpen, PayLoad and FileSaveAs. That's the virus. Delete these macros if you have them.

This virus is notable for several reasons, as follows:

- Viruses have so far only spread via exe-

cutable files and this has been a significant plank in company security policies. The virus affecting Microsoft spreads as part of a data file.

- Data files are shared more readily than executables. In fact, software companies have been telling us to share as much

Changing default file formats

A couple of months ago I suggested a nasty bit of hackery for changing the default lookup file in the DOS EDIT program, so that it would look for *.* instead of looking for *.TXT. As usual I've been out-hacked by a reader; in this case, Guy Simmons, who contacted me via CompuServe.

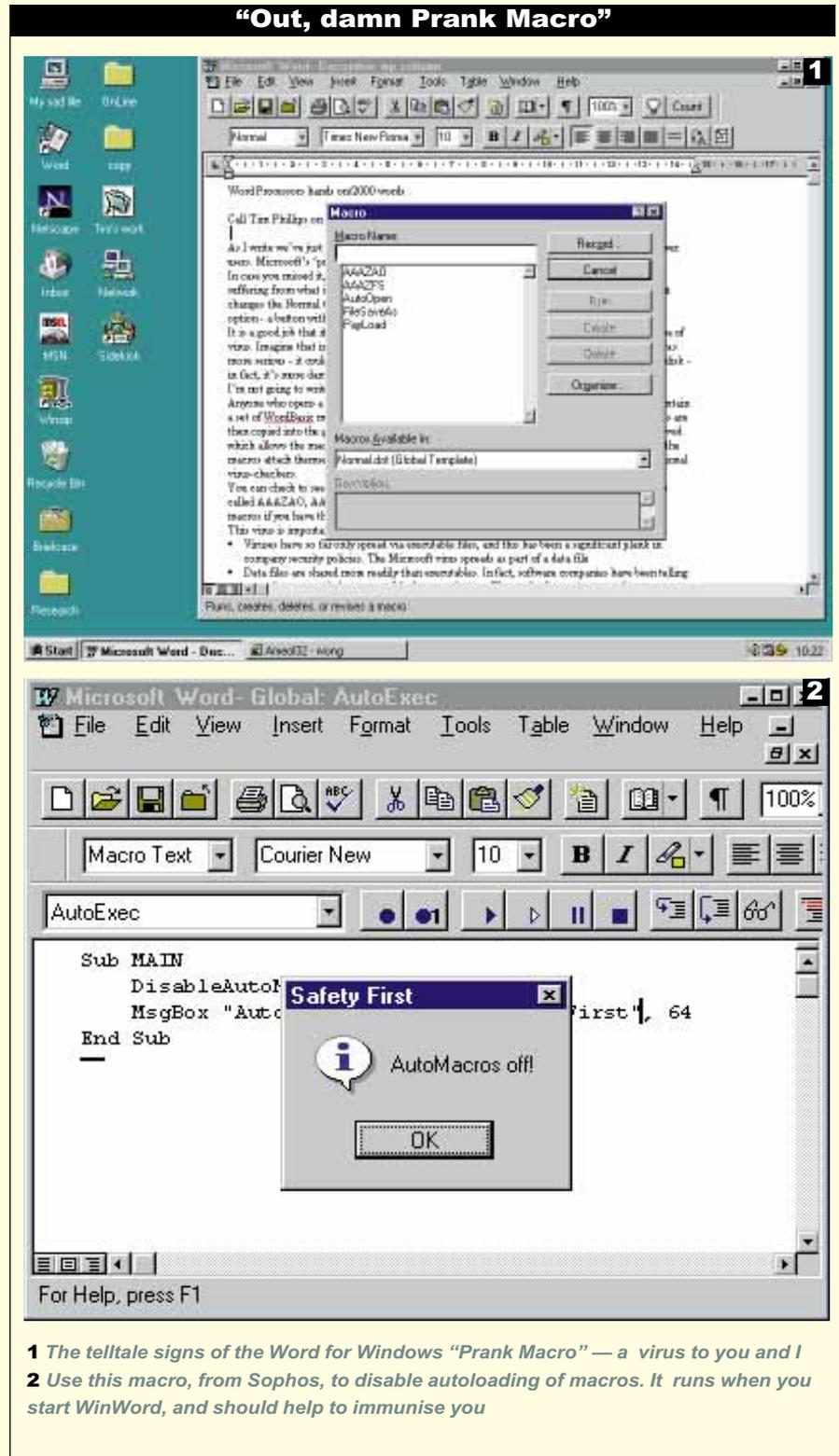
"I did this a while ago but didn't use DEBUG, in fact I've never used it," he says. "If I recall, all I did (after backing up QBASIC.EXE) was to load it into WRITE, not converting it to WRITE format, and did a search and replace operation, substituting [space].* for *.TXT. The space is important. I've similarly modified NOTEPAD and have several versions on my disk. It seems to be a lot easier than using DEBUG <g>."*

I've tried this, and it works. Remember to always back up your executables before modifying them. (I've carried this forward to Windows 95, just to check, and it doesn't work for WordPad.)

Furthermore, Tim Goldingham emailed me with the following query: *"Thanks for the edit to QBasic in the October issue Hands On column. I don't suppose you could manage the same thing for Works — to stop it looking for *.w*?"* Guy's quick and dirty fix doesn't do the trick here and I'm sure I don't know enough about DEBUG to consider helping, so I'll throw this one open to you readers. Do any of you possess the detailed knowledge to help out?

And, there is help for an Ami Pro user. Ami has always been a little erratic, and here's a problem that has a bug fix file available from tech support. James Mendlin of Southport has an erratic spell checker: *"In AmiPro 3.0, when Ami Pro finds a word and you choose to 'Skip All', my file occasionally gets corrupted. Is this something to do with the size of my document, or the hardware setup?"*

The happy answer is no, it isn't. This falls into the category of "known behaviour" — that is, call tech support and they've had this reported before. They'll send you a file. If you use CompuServe, then you can get the file from there. Actually, that's where I found the solution, as there were a couple of other users in exactly the same position as you. Of course, you might want to upgrade to Word Pro, because it's a big improvement. It's even quite good at stripping out carriage returns. Aaarrgh!



1 The telltale signs of the Word for Windows "Prank Macro" — a virus to you and I
2 Use this macro, from Sophos, to disable autoloading of macros. It runs when you start WinWord, and should help to immunise you

data as possible for several years.

- Existing safeguards don't work.
- The viruses aren't hard to write...
- ...and now they can be passed on-line, and cross-platform to the Mac.

Safeguards

So how do we stop the sky falling on our heads? There are a few simple safeguards:

1. The simplest way to avoid stray macros is to load all your documents that might be suspicious, in text format. This isn't practical on a network though, because you never know whether someone else has introduced the virus and, of course, because you'll keep losing your formatting.
2. Use a switch to load documents without their associated macros. To do this, you hold down shift while loading Word or

Tim's macro club

Here's another bumper crop, but in future I will positively discriminate in favour of Ami Pro and WordPerfect macros — you Word Basic programmers are just too prolific.

● Jonathan Payne has the first good solution for scrolling two word processor windows: "This macro will scroll two windows for Word 6.0 together. This copy scrolls down a line and with a simple change to the 'vline 1' it could be made to scroll up a line, or lots of lines."

"It could also be modified to scroll down every few seconds — maybe by using the very useful On Time command to call itself (although this would require you to write a second macro to issue another OnTime call to stop it!)" he says, adding that "To make it usable, it's probably best to have a macro for up and a macro for down assigned to the keyboard, or on the Toolbar. To arrange the windows, I use the TileVertically macro from WINWORDMACROS\ LAYOUT.DOT."

(Send in your comments, please.)

```
Sub MAIN
ScreenUpdating 0
For Windows = 1 To CountWindows()
    VLine 1 'Change this line
    NextWindow
Next
End Sub
```

● Lee Curtis from the delightfully-named town of Idle, near Bradford, has a fine hint here:

"When using tables, pressing TAB takes you to the next cell. What if you want to put a TAB inside a cell? This macro does it." (I'd like versions of this for Ami Pro and WordPerfect, please. I could do them myself, but that's not the point, is it?)

```
Sub MAIN
Insert Chr$(9)
End Sub
```

● Another development from Storm Dunlop: "In your October column you give a macro to reverse letters. I find one to switch words as useful. Here's mine: 'TransposeWord'. You position the cursor in the second word, then run. I've assigned shortcut keys of

Ctrl+Shift+C to TransposeCharacter and Ctrl+Shift+W to TransposeWord."

```
Sub MAIN
WordLeft 1
ExtendSelection
ExtendSelection
EditCut
WordLeft 1
EditPaste
WordRight 1
End Sub
```

● I know I said no more carriage return stripping macros, but this one's an Ami Pro macro so it's an endangered species (joke). Thanks to Chris Wright of the Bradford Diocesan Computer Group, who will receive his reward in heaven: "As soon as you try stripping carriage returns on a biggish document, Ami Pro crashes out with a 'Maximum Paragraph Size Reached' message. Often a reboot is the only way out. Much angst. My solution is to write a pair of macros as follows:"

```
FUNCTION PARAS()
loop:
TYPE("[ctrldown]")
c=CurChar$()
TYPE("[RIGHT]")
IF(AtEOF())
EXIT FUNCTION
ELSEIF(c=CurChar$())
TYPE("[DEL]")
ENDIF
GOTO loop
END FUNCTION
```

```
FUNCTION PARAS1()
loop:
TYPE("[ctrldown]")
c=CurChar$()
TYPE("[RIGHT]")
IF(AtEOF())
EXIT FUNCTION
ELSEIF(c<>CurChar$())
TYPE("[LEFT] [DEL]")
ENDIF
GOTO loop
END FUNCTION
```

PARAS.SMM removes double returns, while PARAS1.SMM deals with the single ones.

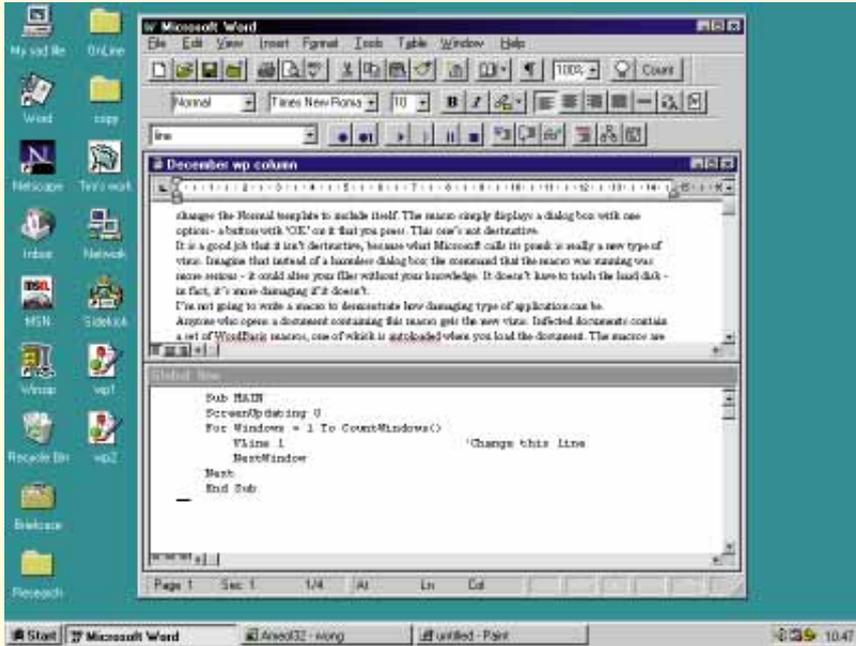
when clicking on a document icon. Unfortunately, I tried this with the macro and it didn't work. The text equivalent is WINWORD/M as the command line.

3. A basic precaution is to go to Tools/Options/Save and enable "Prompt

to Save Normal.dot".

4. Word's AutoExecute macros can help too. Thanks go to virus protectors, Sophos, for this macro:

```
sub MAIN
DisableAutoMacros
```



The scrolling macro may be simple but it works. Tile your two files manually first

The upgrade question

As we wait with baited breath for 32-bit versions of our fave word processors, a question arrived, via CompuServe, from Kevin Fox: "I am at present using Windows 3.1 and SmartSuite. I can easily get around in Ami Pro 3 and it does most of the things I want. However, I am considering upgrading to Windows 95 and I like the look of WordPro, which will presumably be part of SmartSuite for Windows 95. However, the thing that concerns me is that as Microsoft Office is out first, is Lotus SmartSuite liable to become the poor relation, with poor take-up and poor support? My experience with Office, and particularly Word 6, is of a slow program that hogs system resources. Will the Win95 situation be the same?"

My opinion is yes. Word for Windows has a dominant market share, but this has been a problem for Microsoft in providing support since Windows 95 came out — the volume of calls has overwhelmed the company. WinWord 7.0 is mostly similar to 6.0; so for 6.0 users, don't upgrade your hardware and operating system because you think you are missing a great deal.

Word Pro does have an excellent set of group-working functions, which is great if you work on collaborative documents. Microsoft Office does hog system resources, but as Kevin is one of the Pentium rich with pots of RAM, this may not be an issue.

Apart from these considerations, word processors are becoming functionally very similar. In if in doubt I'd go for WinWord because then, at least, all the helpful people who deluge me with WordBasic macros can help you out.

```
MsgBox "AutoMacros off!",
"Safety First", 64
End Sub
```

Call it AutoExec, and it will trigger when WinWord starts to disable AutoMacro loading.

Ami Pro and WordPerfect users shouldn't be smug — this is a potentially serious problem. Andy Campbell, managing director of virus specialist Reflex tells me he's seen another similar virus and is taking it seriously. And WordPerfect admitted its product was vulnerable too.



PCW Contacts

And that's that for this month. Surface or airmail to PCW, otherwise I'm on email at wong@cix.compulink.co.uk and CompuServe 100436,3616