omputers are very important tools.

Without computers, satellite telecommunications would grind to a halt. Stresses on building components would have to be calculated by hand, adding expensive labor delays during the construction process. The advances provided by medical diagnosis through the use of Magnetic Resonance Imaging would never have been realized without the computer…

Aww, the heck with all that. Let's talk about the thing most of us use our computers for in the first place…

Games.

Yeah, I know what you are thinking. "Tom, I only use my Macintosh for cost/benefit analysis of the future production of the soybean crop in the South/Lake District of Chile before investing in agricultural futures."

Sure you do. But, let's face it, once all the dry stuff you have to do is done, somebody in your family—perhaps even you—likes to crank up the latest first person shoot 'em up, lob laser-guided precision munitions at the 'enemy,' or pound the keys frantically trying to get all of those little multi-shaped blocks to fall in the right place making complete lines.

Hey, there's nothing wrong with playing computer games. It's a great release. Where else can you put on the guise of a fighter jock splashing bogies left and right or a Brigadier General commanding troops in the field? It's an excellent release after a long, stressful day of meeting work obligations, driving the kids to and from ballet practice, or scrubbing Hawaiian Punch stains out of your carpet.

Besides, doesn't it seem as if the folks who use Windows-based computers are playing Solitaire on theirs all the time? It's a shame that they only know about Solitaire, though. There are lots of cool games which are available for the PC market. Actually, there have been plenty of times when I have cast an envious glance at my PC-using friends who landed the latest and greatest games for their platform. Why was it that these designers were only producing PC versions of these great games?

The problem which has faced us Macintosh users has been the perception of our beloved Mac platform as being too small a market for game designers to cater to. Let's face it, if you are a start-up game designer, why would you try to develop for a market which the media says is not much longer for this world?

And, since these games were developed for the PC platform first, and were (much) later ported to the Macintosh as an afterthought, they were clunky at best. My wife bought me a copy of Doom for the Macintosh last year, and I was not very pleased with the game play.

Of course, there have been exceptions to the rule. For instance, I remember picking up a copy of Tac Ops from Arsenal Publishing when my wife and I bought our first used Mac IIsi. There's nothing like commanding an Armored Calvary Division going against the OPFOR on a simulated battlefield. Retired Marine Corps Major Holdridge, the designer of the game, put a great deal of effort and forethought into this product, and it was just for the Mac. And, when we bought our LC 580, it came with a free copy of Marathon from Bungie Software. I was blasting the P'hor out of the Marathon with my standard issue .44

caliber handgun like crazy. And, it was only available for the Mac.

Apple floundered during the mid 1990s when dealing with game manufacturers. I can vividly remember when Apple brought out their Game Sprocket technology. It was supposed to be the technology which was going to make Mac the ultimate gaming machine. Spotty developer support, however, severely limited the efforts of game developers. And, thought the game developers, if it's going to be difficult to program games for the Mac, and there is a huge installed market of PC users out there, why don't I take the path of least resistance and develop my game for the bigger market?

Enter the iMac.

The multi-colored, cute computers with the translucent bodies have done a number of things which this former skeptic thought would be impossible. First, it has converted a number of PC users to the Mac platform. Second, it has grabbed a sizable number of folks who were buying their first computer and saw that, gee, Apple really isn't dead after all. And, three, it has encouraged many older-Mac owners to ditch their old machines and upgrade to the fun world of G3.

At first, Apple had underequipped the first generation iMacs for gaming. The graphics processor wasn't quite robust enough for the latest and greatest games. The VRAM was inadequate as well. This was addressed in the Revision B iMacs and the Second Generation 'Life Saver' iMacs which feature beefed up graphics support. Soon, people began to realize that these iMacs were not only cute and functional, but they made great game machines as well.

I am encouraged by the news that Apple has reinvested itself in the gaming market. I was heartened by Phillip Dyer's article "Apple's Money, Mouth Merge at GDC (Game Developer's Conference)". Apparently, Apple made a big push at this year's GDC, held in San Jose, California. According to Dyer, Apple was one of the largest presenters at the conference. This is a great sign, since so many game developers attend to get a feel for the market. A bigger Apple presence demonstrates that Apple is serious about pushing support for the gaming market.

The game market is vital for the Mac platform. I know several people who made the decision to go PC because, "They just don't have enough games for the Mac." I can pontificate as much as I wish about processor speeds, unified system architecture, and ease of use, but that will have no effect on these guys with the itchy trigger fingers.

And, since I have all of your attention…for all of you game developers who may have swung by the ATPM site and are reading this, can you answer one question for me? Can you please explain why there are so few sports games for the Mac? I mean, OK, there's golf, and there's bowling, and even pool. But, what is wrong with developing a basketball game? How about a football game? Why is it that EA Sports or one of their ilk can't be persuaded to put out some games like these? I mean, with the NCAA Men's Basketball Final Four taking place down the road a ways from my house (OK, Tropicana Field is about 15 miles from my house, but who's counting?), I'm seriously looking to drop some monster dunks on the competition or tickle the twine from the perimeter. Since I'm only about 6 feet tall, have a vertical leap of about three inches, and my shooting percentage from the floor is about 3%, I'd like to take on the persona of some of the big stars of the college game and make myself feel better by dunking on my neighbor's nine-year-old son.

So, even though us serious Mac Users don't like to admit it, we love to sneak a game or two into our daily regime. All I can say is, "Play Ball!"