Meta

From the Publisher

Why *Meta*?

Meta is one of those word-roots that few people have a firm grasp of, yet it seems vaguely cool, so everyone abuses it. Consider all the buzzwords, companies and products with *Meta* in their names: Metanoia, Metaware and Windows Metafiles, to name only three. Now, whenever you see one of these, you will be reminded of this magazine.

Why *Meta*?

The idea of publishing *Meta* came to me in March of this year. It was a

Adobe s much-touted document format, is more sophisticated than Replica or Common Ground. However, Adobe s viewing program isn t freely redistributable, so making *Meta* available as an Acrobat document is a fairly low priority at the moment. Still, expect to see an Acrobat version of *Meta* sometime next year.

by the mainstream media, such as cryptography, electronic publishing, free softwa
development, intellectual property, Internet commercialization and privacy.

This issue focuses on free software development. We interview Linus Torvalds, the primary developer behind what is probably the fastest-growing operating system today: Linux. Linux is a freely redistributable, full-featured and

unmoderated Internet mailing list. For several days, everyone so unlucky to find themselves on the “new.country” list was bombarded by “How do I get off this list?” messages.

◆◆ Hurd, an operating system that has been under development for several years at the Free Software Foundation, is apparently finally ready to

Wiring the Backwoods

by R. David Murray

There are considerably more rural and impoverished places than Keene, New Hampshire. But Keene is not New York, nor is it Philadelphia. It isn t even Springfield, Massachusets, the nearest city with an Internet provider point of presence.

Moving from Philadelphia to Keene was like moving from the Outer Beyond of Vernor Vinge s *A Fire Upon the Deep* into the Slow Zone.

performance since it dominated the game market with the 2600 has been dismal. Atari s ability to market, distribute and attract developers to the Jaguar is in doubt.

If Atari, Commodore and Philips are not effective competition, then 3DO-licensees, with the high-end game market all to themselves, should sell many units, right? No. Three reasons:

- The market for $700 game consoles will be tight, competitors or not.

includes a section called the GNN Marketplace. In this section companies may include information they think might be useful to potential customers. They pay for this privilege, and this allows O Reilly and Associates to offer GNN as a free service to the Internet community.

I visited the GNN Marketplace, and was disappointed. There were only two real advertisers for one thing, but more important than that was the content. An article (I can only call it that) from ZCode software consisted, basically, of a well done tutorial and sales job for MIME. Well, I know what MIME is, and I pretty well know its advantages. The single glimpse of one ZCode product screen image was like a teaser. What I really wanted when I entered that marketplace was a more thorough presentation about ZCode s products (for example) than I could get from a

Curl Up With an E-Book?

by Mike Linksvayer

I m not easily impressed by CD-ROM products. Most are utterly worthless they are so tedious that someone would have to pay me large sums to use them. But ClariNet Communications (the people who sell USENET feeds of NewsBytes and UPI) has put together a great value.

Electric Science Fiction is an anthology containing all of the science fiction works nominated for this year

Meta:

assemble the Linux 16-bit startup code), and we had some interesting discussions by E-mail.

Aside from getting me started, net access also kept the development going and accelerating: up to about version 0.12 or so, I wrote most of the code myself, but in the current kernel, only about 50% of the code is mine or very closely related to code written by me. The SCSI drivers, the networking code and the new floating-point emulator code is completely written by others.

Even when people haven t sent in patches or new code, just the fact that I ve had access to a lot of testers has meant a lot for Linux development; they ve found

L: While Linux has a very reasonable development environment and a lot of

I think it s entirely possible that the Linux community (or some other group of net.persons) will get a good word processor going, but while having net access helps some parts of development a lot, it

followed the 386BSD discussion and development from the side. As far as I can tell, it s a good port of BSD that is plagued by some problems (mostly non-technical).

Clark Internet Services presents ClarkNet

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It s also quite legal by the copyright, and so far I haven t seen any major developer stand up and say he doesn t like his code being sold, so I don t see the problem.
M:

In fact, the main goal of Linux might be called usability. I want the kernel to remain clean as far as the implementation is concerned, but when it really matters, a kind of pragmatic approach has generally been the main design issue: the most important thing is that it works well and people (which most emphatically includes me) want to use it. As an example, I ve always wanted Linux to be POSIX, but that wasn t really as much a goal as a way to make porting user-level software easy. POSIX is just a small part of that

Internet Services News

Netcom On-line Communications, in an attempt to expand beyond its California base, has installed local Points of Presence (POPs) in a number of non-California cities in recent months. What has raised the eyebrows of other service providers is that Netcom has been expanding into already highly competitive markets such as Boston, Washington DC, and the most recently announced POP, New York City. But some Netcom users have also been raising their eyebrows at

virtual office spaces within their Virtual City. The Objective Virtual City will be text-based, although specialized Mac and PC clients are planned for next year. ■■

The other project claiming the name Virtual City (this one claims to have trademarked the name) is being developed by the Virtual City Network (vc@virtual.net). This Virtual City will be based on LambdaMOO. Unlike Objective s service, the Virtual City Network will be free to access for individuals and has been designed for multimedia from the ground up. Virtual City Network developers are planning to have a basic system running by the beginning of next year for a Virtual New Years Party. ■■

The Voting of Reality (LambdaMOO)

by R. David Murray

Multimedia interfaces to fancy virtual realities present interesting challenges for researchers and developers. But right now the text based virtual realities are grappling with an equally (or more) important aspect of virtual realities: the social dimension.

Take LambdaMOO, for example. LambdaMOO is the MOO developed and maintained by Pavel Curtis (and others) at the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center. The technology developed at PARC has

When the fancy graphics virtual worlds become affordable, there will already be a significant store of practical knowledge about how (and how not to) run virtual worlds. There will also be a significant segment of the market who will already have experience interacting with virtual worlds. In fact, today s text based virtual worlds are probably defining some of the standards and social conventions that will determine the characteristics of tomorrow s more fully realized virtual worlds. And today s virtual worlds are one primary place where the research is being done to build tomorrow

THE MARKET FOR THE NEXT MILLENIUM

The Hawthorne Exchange

As Internet-based business activities begin to proliferate, the Hawthorne Exchange will be there.

- Freedom from architectures: NEXTSTEP has been ported to the Intel 80x86 architecture, MS Windows NT has been ported to DEC s Alpha processor, and the Macintosh OS has reportedly been ported to a RISC CPU. More ports are in the works.

Of course, this new architecture-independent world isn t exactly *new*, in spite of what the marketing hype says: Unix users have been enjoying a certain amount of compatibility between systems for years now. But by 2001, this may have caught on to such an extent that the common operating systems will be mostly written in machine-independent code. And I think we owe that, in part, to Unix.

I remember one of the things that impressed me the most about Unix when I first saw it. I d been heavily involved with other operating systems for some years,

By 2001, the line between Unix workstations and microcomputers will

The *Meta*