Personal Computers â€“ 25 Years and Counting â€“ Part XI

Description

Part X wrapped up discussing the lead in to the Great Leap forward to the Mac II worldâ€¦

But before going on to Mac IIs, a little side track. So, there I was with a Mac SE at home. It was coming up on Christmas and one of the guys in the Mac Club, who had left his family â€œback homeâ€• while at War College, didnâ€™t want to leave his Mac in his BOQ room, so he asked if Iâ€™d keep it.

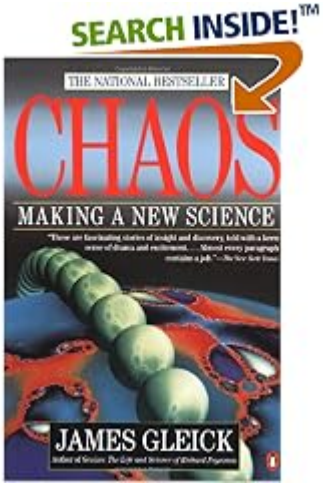
Now I had two computers in the same house, and there was an inexpensive network system called â€œPhoneNet,â€• which used a network protocal called â€œLocalTalkâ€• or â€œAppleTalk.â€• it used standard phone wires to connect two computers. I picked up two of them and built a home, peer-to-peer network, where we were able to play â€œSmash Hit Racquetballâ€• with two players, each at separate computers. That was December, 1987 and my first journey into networking.

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During this time, several of us found out we all also were using the GEnie Bulletin Board System (BBS), each of us downloading the new Mac offering each week. At that time, you paid a monthly service fee, then by the minute for your time logged in. On top of that, the nearest access number was in the next zone, so it was a toll call on top of that. we put our heads together and came up with another use for Excel. On Saturday morning, Iâ€™d log into GEnie and download the listings of new Mac files. Iâ€™d scan the list and see what looked like it had universal appeal to our group. Then Iâ€™d import the file into Excel, complete with file sizes, and assign each of us a set of files to download. The Excel spreadsheet kept a balance of downloads by file size, so in the long run, while you might download a large file one week, someone else would do that next week. Later in the week, weâ€™d get together and pass the floppies around with the files we procured. That saved us all money. I seem to recall it was five of us doing this, so it certainly took the edge off the costs, yet got us all the files we wanted.

Mac II

Anyhow, early the next year, I was able to buy a Mac II. This was the first â€œopen box,â€• where you had slots to put in interface cards. Using the Motorola 68020 series chip as a CPU, operating at 16Mhz (so I doubled my CPU clock speed, YEAH!), it was a great leap forward. I went from greyscale graphics on a 9â€³ screen of the SE, to 256 colors on a 12 monitor. It, as did the SE, but I never messed with it then, had built in 8 bit sound, so there was more to life than a series of essentialy monotoned â€œbeeps,â€• like the PC could do.



It was on this machine I found out about â€œfractional dimensionsâ€• or â€œfractalsâ€• from some programs I found on GEnie. I bought the book â€œChaos: The Making of a New Scienceâ€• by James Glieck and studied the subject. Iâ€™d set in parameters for a very small area, deep indie a Mandelbrot fractal and go to bed. In the morning, Iâ€™d wake up to find a picture on the screen that took 2-3 hours to draw, showing the subtle changes in the repetition of the shape. The understanding I took away from al this is what we would view as chaotic processes are most likely ordered, but the order is to the right of the decimals we have chosen to round off at, leaving us scratching our heads in wonder.

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It is also that understanding that was the genesis of the title of this blog.

More on Mac IIs and doing serious graphics work at home later.

Category

1. History
2. Technology

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admin