

ON THE LINE

Patching into the Internet

IT'S NO BIG deal. One personal computer, a standard telephone line, a little modem, a little software to link the two, and a piece of public-domain software. That's all it takes to get on

Liberty turns out to be a computer at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Va. That acts as a huge gateway to more than 2,000 other sites or servers—everything from university libraries around the world, to a full electronic text of the North American Free Trade Agreement on line, to a Swiss-based global information service



It doesn't really matter who you're connected to — IBM, IBM-clone, Mac, Atari, Amiga, etc. NEXT: new or old, just about any box that counts in zeros and ones will do. Some modems are faster and more accurate than others. And the communications software you can get for free isn't always as agile as the store-bought stuff.

But the bottom line is that patching into the Internet, or any corner of cyberspace for that matter, is easy. The trick is learning the lingo of the land you're out there. The Internet—the global network with more than a million separate computing locations in 75 countries—is growing so fast that no one knows for sure where the edges are. New machines are coming on line at the rate of 3,500 a day. No map can keep up. There are ways to keep track of things, of course. A giant e-mail address book maintained by the American military is a start. And there are automated services called ards and papers (more on these later) that can help you cover the 'net for materials that interest you. But the most important source of information about what's out there often comes in the form of treasury tables: anecdotes about sites and services that form a big part of the chatter in cyberspace's electronic meeting rooms and saloons.

called World Wide Web, to specialized databases on AIDS, alcoholism, archeology, Asia, auroras, and Australian military history (and that's just the A's). Type a guide number and you're browsing around the Bodleian Law Library at Oxford, or playing a game of backgammon on line, or participating in a worldwide conference on baseball.

to 605-5010; your modem should be set to 9600; no parity, 8 data bits, 1 stop bit. People who aren't on line yet will need to find a staging ground, a site that provides access to the electronic frontier in the same way that Kansas City was a staging ground for the Wild West.

British Columbia's corner of the Internet is a regional network known as BCnet, a web of local data links leased from B.C. Tel that link 60 educational institutions and companies around the province and tie into the world matrix through Seattle, Edmonton and Toronto. BCnet, established as a cooperative venture in the fall of 1987, is the oldest regional network in Canada. If you're lucky enough to work for a company with a standing BCnet connection, or happen to have a computing account at Simon Fraser University or the University of British Columbia, you're all set: the computer you log on to is already a site on the 'net.

The rest of one way to get an account at a facility offering public Internet access. There are four companies in B.C. that provide that: MIND LINK, Cyberzone Online Information Systems, and WIS21-Info Systems in the Lower Mainland, and Pacific Information Systems in Victoria.

Each takes a slightly different approach to dial-up access, focusing on different aspects of client service. Next week we'll take a closer look at these frontier outposts, and at the on-line communities that have sprung up around them.

"Have you stopped around this thing called Liberty yet?" an acquaintance asked in an e-mail message last week. "You have to go."

A TOY STORY

Some Christmas toys are best left to the children

BARBARA ROSSNER

Hollywood Reporter

I CONFESS: Crash Dummies are big in my house, which, considering the press they're getting, and Independence, Ma, were surprised to find I am a pedophile: an axe murderer or some combination of the two. But I offer no mere excuses for my dummy ownership, just this: Crash Dummies are toys. They aren't real. They're plastic. They're fake. They aren't flesh and blood. They're dummies.

Ever since I too introduced them, Crash Dummies have been exorcised as sick and warped, and a source upon young psyches. A few years ago, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles took the award for most likely to scar your child's life by this year. The Dummies are sweeping the scapegoat category.

For the annihilated, Crash Dummies are small, robotlike action figures that explode on contact: with their faces, necks and walls. They don't explode actually; their snap-on heads and arms and legs just fall off their torsos. Their accompanying vehicles—cars, trucks, motorcycles, etc.—and their accessories, such as steering levers, plastic tires, doors and engines to smithereens. The myriad and then gathered and re-attached.

Crash Dummies at the top of his annual list of "warped toys for Christmas," claiming they desensitize children to violence. In fact, he labels them "the most disturbing toys" of the season. "Occupation," he proclaimed, detaching a dummy's head for the benefit of a 10-year-old. "Amputation," he declared, as he removed a leg, then an arm. In short, he claimed, the Dummies promote "torture."

Well, I admit I've become more or less insured to the phenomenon of exploding motor vehicles. For the past dozen years or so, my life has unfolded against a human-made smorgasbord of revving engines, skidding tires and crunching metal. But I think I can still recognize sodium when I see it, and I don't.

The beauty of Crash Dummies, from a child's point of view, is that they break apart quite spectacularly. And then, voila, they snap together and are all ready for another display. Not just one of those myriads of kid oh-ohs—wreck it, then make it whole again.

The real downside of Crash Dummies is that they last about 48 hours max, whereupon the arms disappear into the revolving arms, the heads roll behind the couch and the legs get lodged in the dust balls and move having behind the refrigerator. In other words, they're a waste of money, not a psychological plague.

It's not that I don't understand it that Crash Dummies bear no resemblance to real human beings. In fact, they're more disturbingly so: the dummies feature in U.S. department of transportation's public service announcements promoting seatbelts. And while the feds' willingness to commercialize "Safety and Air" may be warped, it's that any reason to condemn the product of their public-private collusion.

A Hartford, Conn., clergyman thinks so. The Rev. Christopher Rose, calling for a congressional investigation into what he calls "dummygate," Rose has placed the

HOROSCOPE

OBSTACLES IN disguise today as the moon in Cancer smooches over

weekend, people are deep from the past will pop up at the oldest moments. Serious lovers get much to go on. Parents to consider marriage (but why?), keep away from the news. Beware of events that could promote financial loss. JOYCE LILLISON news improves, and you might splurge on a holiday vacation.

ARIES (March 21-April 19): Get proof of ownership and document any important agreement today. This evening, call a former lover. Send overdue letters by Saturday, or you miss a financial benefit. A trial separation could be your best risk right now. GAMES Sunday.

Taurus (April 20-May 20): An amorous dream has been postponed. Lines back and let a so-called friend do the talking today. Wait until Saturday before you make requests of a pal or lover. Love with a Libra on Sunday could lead to marriage. GEMINI (May 21-June 20): A new partnership is just what you need. Spend time with friends, new or social connections. Select someone with specific abilities for business. You'll need a Libra on Saturday to help you get your act together this weekend.

Cancer (June 21-July 22): You may be getting away with doing less work or being paid more. You'll have to be the one to set the pace to happiness, and you do much while others play. Delegate today. Wait until Saturday before you get your act together this weekend. Leo (July 23-Aug. 22): Trust your instincts. On Saturday, curtail your socializing with your family. Your jealousy erupts Saturday afternoon, although this may be a good thing. Consider a new job or client by socializing Sunday when people are impressed with your perseverance.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Trust your instincts. On Saturday, curtail your socializing with your family. Your jealousy erupts Saturday afternoon, although this may be a good thing. Consider a new job or client by socializing Sunday when people are impressed with your perseverance.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY: From now through Jan. 18, you will discover your life's mission. New jobs and possibly new careers come in your tomorrow. Until then, you'll have busy business lines. February from a distant client or foreign-based company. In March, you'll be ready to go in May for sticking with your ethics. By June, the rest of the year holds financial promise, and this year will take priority over money goals. Promotions come in March and April. In April, travel in singles. Find love in March through June. Love is in the air. The best signs for romance are Leo and Aries.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): A new partnership is just what you need. Spend time with friends, new or social connections. Select someone with specific abilities for business. You'll need a Libra on Saturday to help you get your act together this weekend.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): You must develop more organized work habits to improve your love. Doing something at the same time each day brings out your creativity. Consider a new opportunity or person this week on Saturday morning. Be willing to say "no" to Saturday.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21): A financial slump is over, celebratory this evening. Don't flash this newfound luck on Saturday, or others take advantage of it. Turnover and Libra are great advisers. Saturday or new pals; seek them out this evening.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): An old flame comes back but is not what he/she seems. Look at this realistically on Saturday morning. By afternoon, you may not wish this person any more. Power through on Saturday, letters and hold business presentations on Saturday and Sunday. CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Power today; seek out new jobs. Develop new ways of dealing with demanding family demands by Saturday, or you get upset. Walking in a fabulous way to clear your mind on Sunday.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): You may be sabotaging your own effort to back up next Monday. This evening, don't volunteer information about yourself to a former partner. By Saturday, prominent people side with you. Romance with a co-worker anytime on Sunday.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Be a more selfish and ask a lover for what you've been wanting. Respect yourself, and others will too. Call a parent on Saturday.

WEEKEND COUPLE: As units of signs, Cancer and Capricorn, will prove that opposites attract. While you don't want to fall in love just because you're new love, existing differences won't be a noticeable.

CLOSE TO HOME JOHN McPHERSON



"Yeah, I know she shouldn't play with her food. But that's pretty good!"

ADVICE

Ann asks: Is it too easy to split?

EARL ANN I just read a letter in your column that began, "I'm a 33-year-old divorced mother of two children. The writer then described the usual problems that face divorced mothers with children who are contemplating a new marriage. Ann, let's hear from your divorced readers who are willing to admit they have worked it out. It's harder to make their marriages work. Almost always there are inequities on both sides. There are a lot of people who are over again, would they have given more thought to what divorce might do to their children."

You've said it in your column dozens of times—it's the children who suffer the most. So please, Ann, throw out the questions. You just might touch a chord in some people who are thinking about splitting up. They need to ask themselves, "Will this divorce be better for everybody?" —N.S., GRAND JUNCTION, COLO.

DEAR GRAND: With one set of every two marriages today ending in divorce, we need to take a closer

look at what this is happening. Are divorces too easy to get? Should there be a mandatory cooling-off period for couples who have children? Here's the question: Looking back, do you regret having moved ahead to be divorced and do you now feel that had you waited a bit, the marriage might have been salvaged? Write YES or NO on a postcard and send it to Ann Landers, P.O. Box 1154, Chicago, IL 60611-0156.

DEAR ANN: I realize we are living in an age of high technology but it is possible that too much "progress" can make us less civilized, rather than more! I am referring to the current electronic device known as cell-waiting. In my opinion, it is extremely rude of you to ask me to wait while you decide if I am more important than the person who is calling. The phone rings, and you say, "Wait a minute, I'll be right back." I wait for what seems to be a very long time. You return and say, "That was Susie. She wanted a recipe. I gave it to her because she was in a hurry, and I knew you wouldn't mind. Sorry it took longer than I expected."

"Oh, damn!" There's another call. Hang on, please. I'll be back in a second. "What was my sister-in-law. I told her I'd call her back.

"Holy Moses! Another call. Hang on for just a minute, okay... I'm back, but I simply MUST take this call. It's very important. Do you mind if I phone you back in about five minutes or so?" There you have a sample of what a lot of people are asking to put up with. I, for one, refuse to be subjected to this nonsense. When I receive a phone call and suddenly the person says, "Just a minute, that was calling," I will hang up. I'm hanging up. That's it.

I've been criticized for being impatient. Am I? —BAO IT IN HONOLULU.

DEAR HON: Some people have a higher tolerance for long minutes than I do. I'm hanging for three or four minutes while a caller talks to the "interceptor." I would not argue the point, on my part. I do not have call-waiting for the very reason you stated. When a caller puts me on hold to respond to a incoming call, I will wait for about 20 seconds. If he or she isn't back on the line, I don't get steamed. I simply hang up. Life is too short to get upset about such trifles.

Answers care with Ann Landers on the Vancouver 17 Nov. 1992. E-mail: Vancouver.V1302

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