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Mopping up the consequences of turning on my high pressure kitchen tap directly above an upturned spoon, I was dwelling on the analogy with software accidents: disasters triggered by a misplaced mouse click or key press. I reckon much of today's PC software has a lot to answer for here: there's far too much of it that quietly lets you make a pig's ear of things. I want software to protect me better from my own stupidity, or at least from my own impatience.

I had one such software accident on my PC. Nothing terminal, luckily, but it gave me a salutary shock. A bit like spinning your car on black ice, hitting nothing, and emerging still travelling at the same speed in the right direction.

I wanted to open my WP folder, the last of 130 alphabetically listed sub-folders, and the one where I keep all my writing. I'd intended to use my normal shortcut of holding Control while I double clicked. But I inadvertently held Shift instead, which triggered a veritable explosion of Explorer windows. Every folder on my hard drive opened successively, like a prematurely ignited firework display, heavy on star-burst shells.

After closing down 129 unwanted windows, I analysed what had happened. When you open a container folder, the first item is selected – not highlighted, but with a faint rectangle around it. Selecting any other item and pressing Shift then selects every one. So by pressing Shift I'd accidentally selected every single folder, and a fraction of a second later my double-click then opened every one of them in Explorer.

Of course, modern software is brilliant at preventing such accidents, compared with the stuff we used a few years ago. We've come a long way since the days when one hasty move could irretrievably reformat your entire hard disk. Yet a really sharp program could detect virtually any potentially hazardous situation and prompt you accordingly. My car won't let me select reverse gear at 70mph, so come on Microsoft! In those few milliseconds between my seeing all the folders unexpectedly highlighted and clicking my mouse, Windows 95 had time to do a few hundred thousand clever things. Couldn't one of them have been to display a warning: 'Do you really want to open 130 folders at once?' I wouldn't have been offended.
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The Complete PC Upgrade & Maintenance Kit (Fourth Edition)

Mark Minasi. 1,246 pages. Sybex. £37.13. ISBN: 0-7821-1660-4

Upgrading and maintaining a PC isn't something to be entered into lightly and so it's appropriate that any book claiming to cover the subject should weigh several pounds. This book is thick enough to cover everything and its contents pages reveal that almost no area is left untouched. Lucid and often witty in style, *The Complete Guide* describes the functions of the various components found in a typical PC. It goes on to cover tools needed for PC maintenance before some general advice on removing cases, drives, expansion cards, motherboards, and the like. A CD-ROM contains instructional video clips and useful utilities.

As befits its brief, *The Complete Guide* is highly technical in parts but it never fails to engage. If you want to know more about upgrading or fixing your PC, or are simply curious as to how it all works, this book is perfect.

Microsoft Windows 95 Internet Kit

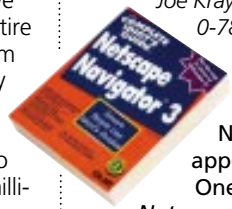*Bryan Pfaffenberger. 219 pages. Microsoft Press. £27.99. ISBN: 1-55615-885-8*

As the Internet bandwagon continues to roll, more and more companies are jumping on. But this leaves inexperienced PC users stranded beside the rapidly clogging telephone lines that form the entrance to the information superhighway. If you've decided to make the leap, then, as always, Microsoft is ready to help.

Internet Kit, unlike many other books on the subject, dispels the myth that you need knowledge of FTP, Gopher, WAIS and Telnet services to use the Net.

As a guide for the first-time user, this book is ideal, but let's not beat about the bush: *Internet Kit* is littered with thinly-veiled recommendations to sign up with MSN's (the Microsoft Network's) Internet service rather than another ISP (Internet Service Provider). So, if you want to get on the Net easily and don't mind doing so via MSN, buy this book; otherwise you'd be well advised to buy a less biased, somewhat broader tome.

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Netscape Navigator 3

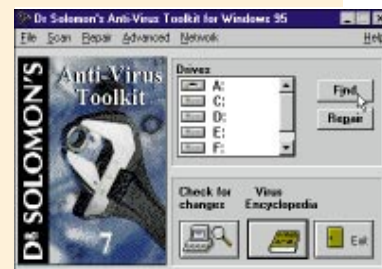*Joe Kraynak. 327 pages. Que. £18.49. ISBN: 0-7897-0958-9*

There was a time when hardly a month would pass without Que launching another book in the *Idiot's Guide* series. Now, however, a new guide seems to appear at least once a week.

One of the best parts of the *Idiot's Guide to Netscape Navigator 3* is the section that lists interesting Web site addresses from around the world. Unfortunately, as is often the case with such lists, several of the sites are already out of action. There's also a glossary of Internet-related terms, and this is great for those looking to brush up their bluffing techniques.

This book, like most of the *Idiot's Guides,* offers an excellent and detailed guide to its subject. Unlike most of the series, however, the subject really doesn't warrant such an in-depth text. We await the Idiot's Guide to Internet Explorer 3.0 with resigned expectancy.