

rrrr, me Buckoes! Pass me a bottle of rum and I'll share with ye the story of pirates and buried treasure!

OK, it's hokey, but living in the Tampa Bay area, I can't escape the fact that the place is awash in pirate legend and lore. You don't have to look too hard to see the evidence. The city's newly-rejuvenated football team, the Buccaneers, is the first example of this love for all things pirate. Every January, Tampa is invaded by a pirate ship during the Gasparilla Festival, named after Jose Gaspar, a pirate who prowled the local coastline. It's sort of Tampa's version of Mardi Gras, and the fierce pirates may just be local businessmen who have had just a little too much to drink, but the spirit is still there.

Besides drinking rum and raiding commerce ships, the activity most closely associated with pirates is burying treasure. In fact, one of the local beach communities is named Treasure Island, due to the once-rumored pirate treasure buried there.

I've always wondered why the pirates buried their treasure. Why not divvy it up among the crew (with the captain keeping the lion's share, for sure!) and go out for a night on the town? I guess they did that with some, if not most, of the booty they took. But burying the rest? Seems like a lot of work!

Pirate treasure is always rumored to be very valuable. There's gold and silver and gems of all types which have been snatched from the ships that have had the misfortune of falling under the pirate's attack. Now, this sort of activity always drew attention from the navies of the world, and pirates have been targeted for immediate capture—and execution. With the threat of dangling from a yardarm if they got caught, speed was probably one of the best friends the pirates had. Since heavy ships have never sailed faster than lighter ones, I guess burying the treasure was a good idea.

Of course, getting back to the treasure they buried presented a whole new set of problems. The pirate captains had to carefully mark where the treasure was buried, or all of the crew's hard work and risk was for nothing. So they drew up maps. And, popular fiction has us believe that each pirate captain marked the location of their treasure with an X.

Now, the dread pirate Cap'n Jobs comes to us Mac devotees with a new map for us to fancy. This treasure promises to be valuable beyond our wildest dreams. And, just think, Captain Jobs has marked the treasure with an X.

Operating System Ten, or OS X (the X being the Roman Numeral for 10) is the latest incarnation of the planned operating system of the future.

Why should this matter to us? Well, you have to understand a little about the Mac OS to know what all of the hubbub is about. The Macintosh Operating System has grown from its early days into the OS 8.1 of today. Through the years, the OS has become somewhat of a pack rat. If you were to sift through the OS's architecture, you would notice that some of the commands, or Application Program Interfaces (APIs), were necessary for some very ancient programs, or were developed before more modern and efficient commands were created.

In effect, the OS is like a closet stuffed with clothes that are out of style or no longer fit. Sure, the clothes that are worn regularly are kept to the front, but what is that leisure suit doing in there? Just taking up space.

The new, Modern Operating System of the Future is supposed to eliminate the clutter and offer features to take advantage of the newest, most modern hardware. Apple's OS engineers have approached this task in several ways, but the beauty of OS X is that it actually makes sense.

Oh, sure, Apple has teased us before. The first time this new, revolutionary OS was envisioned was Copland—the first OS 8. In this refit, Apple's engineers attempted to clean out the OS closet by just rebuilding it from scratch. A novel idea, but the execution was never going to work. Copland would have essentially made legacy programs ineffective and alienated those Mac users who had not upgraded to the PowerPC. Software developers were also wary when it came to reworking their tried and true programs for a non-existent operating system.

In early 1997—when Cap'n Jobs came on board, he saw to it that Copland would walk the plank. He introduced the new scheme, his NeXT-based Rhapsody. This rather complex plan, akin to building several closets to handle your clothes, made things about as clear as shovel full of chocolate pudding. In Rhapsody, there was going to be a yellow box. And a blue box. And I think even a shoe box. And, if you were running legacy Mac applications, the nifty features of the yellow box couldn't be accessed from the blue box. Or was that the other way around?

However, after this May's World Wide Developers Conference, it looks like Rhapsody is due for the pine box. Bits and pieces of this once-touted OS will be salvaged and incorporated into server software and worked into Apple's Java strategy, but the grand dream of a cross-platform Mac OS is now kaput.

OK, so where does Apple chart its course from here?

The newest vision of the Operating System of the Future was unveiled in late May. Named OS X, this new system strategy seems to make a lot of sense.

How so?, you ask. Welcome to the Carbon age.

What is Carbon? Just like a diamond (which happens to be pure carbon), this approach is truly a gem.

Well, remember those APIs I was talking about—you know, the ones that were like outdated and ill-fitting clothes crowding your closet? Well, Apple's OS gurus sat down and analyzed the roughly 8,200 APIs that comprised the current OS. They determined that about a quarter of them were too old or just didn't function right, so they were scrapped.

The remaining 6,000 or so—which are called upon most frequently by modern applications—were reviewed, slightly modified, and became the basis of Carbon. Carbon will become the “running gear” of the new OS X and OS 8.5.

Software developers can get their hands on a program called Carbon Dater, which will show them which APIs in their existing software are no longer going to be supported, and even suggest work-arounds for those soon-to-be-deleted APIs. This will speed software development dramatically over the prospect of rewriting software from scratch in the Rhapsody and Copland schemes.

And, of course, shorter development times for software producers means a better bottom line. And a better bottom line means happy developers who will continue to produce for the Macintosh.

OS X itself brings to the table all of the things which the modern OS needs as well—protected memory and preemptive multitasking, among others. OS X is really going to take advantage of the advances made in Mac hardware since the introduction of the PowerPC chip.

And, for those of us who don't have the G3 chips in our Macs, Carbon will still offer improvements. With fewer APIs to consider, the OS should be even more stable and run more quickly. That will be a real boon to everyone who upgrades their OS.

Of course, we still have to remember that this is Apple's vision of what they want to see their new OS look like. And, just as with Copland and Rhapsody, all of this is subject to radical changes. Who's to say from what direction the new winds of change may steer the ship? Should Cap'n Jobs decide to jump ship, maybe a new OS course will have to be charted. It wouldn't be the first time this crew of Mac enthusiasts has had to tack to a new course, anticipating the promise of another modern OS.

While the OS strategy now is just an X on our treasure map, it promises riches beyond our wildest dreams. I have a feeling that there just might be something there. I know for sure that this salty dog is going to grab his shovel and prepare to dig when the lookout cries, "Land Ho!"

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