The System Folder.

Ten years of using the Macintosh, and this is the one place I still fear to tread. There are so many files with cryptic names and bizarre icons that my palms get sweaty when I open the folder. What I really need is a guide to get me through the twists and turns of this no-man's land.

One of the most comprehensive guides to the Macintosh OS, in its current and many of its former incarnations, is Dan Frake's InformINIT. In fact, this stand-alone DOCMaker document is used as a reference tool by Apple's support staff.

InformINIT provides a listing of Apple and third-party extensions and control panels with their current version numbers, tips on startup file management, a history of previous versions of the Mac OS with a hardware compatibility chart, step-by-step instructions on how to upgrade your system software, and reviews and suggestions of helpful software packages that do certain things for your system.

While at first you may be intimidated by the sheer amount of information contained in InformINIT, you have to remember that you don't need to read all of the information in one sitting! This guide just about has it all, and I'd be hard pressed to find a jam that it couldn't help you out of. I'm sure the majority of Mac users out there may not really give a hoot as to —say—the exact loading order of startup files. But, if you ever find yourself completely frustrated by a problem at startup, this level of detail becomes an asset.

If InformINIT just did what I described above, it would be an almost indispensable tool to keep on your hard drive. But, the author takes the service provided by InformINIT one step beyond. If your browser is running while you have InformINIT open, and you see a link near the topic you are reading, you can click on the icon and your browser will retrieve the page. This is a very handy feature—eliminating the need in some cases to have to cut the URL and

paste it into your browser. OK, it saves only a few seconds, but hey, time is money, right?

If I had to make a wish list for InformINIT, it would be pretty short. I would add descriptions of systems older than 7.5.3. While the author focuses on the latest versions of the software which support all of the older Mac platforms, you never know when you may stumble across an older Mac running 7.1, 7.0, or, heavens forbid, System 6, and need some documentation.

I would also have the author add icons of the control panels and extensions. I know it would jack the size of InformINIT, but it would prove invaluable to those of us without Conflict Catcher identifying the icons. Perhaps the author could provide InformINIT in two flavors, the graphics heavy version and a 'light' version for those of us who still have hard drives measured in megabytes or who surf below the 28.8 threshold.

Finally, I would recommend that the author add a list of system errors and their numbers. I mean, who knows what the heck a -23 error is offhand (openErr Requested read/write permission doesn't match driver's open permission, or Attempt to open RAM serial Driver failed, for those of you playing at home)? Maybe a quick primer on what you should know about system errors and how to avoid them would be nice too.

All in all, InformINIT is a solid piece of shareware that I would love to have with me when my Mac starts act funny.