elcome to the 1998 holiday issue of About This Particular Macintosh. We love this time of year! Sleigh bells a-ringing, iMacs at registers a-dinging and the all-important jolly guy in red and white who's getting ready to make his yearly rounds!

The good news is that while you've been busy making your annual contribution to the season's high level of consumer spending, the editors of ATPM have been compiling a sensational issue for your holiday enjoyment! This is our special "Holiday Extravaganza Issue" (affectionately known to the editors as "4.12"). But before we get to the really cool holiday stuff, we need to explore some darker, deeply relevant Mac-important issues…

What's Your Beef?

Readers may recall the Wendy's TV commercials from the early 1980s that helped kindle the fast food company's explosive growth. The commercials' tag line, "Where's The Beef?" became part of American political history when it was effectively used by former Vice-President Walter Mondale to question the substance of Gary Hart's campaign for the 1984 Democratic nomination.

From time to time, we receive e-mail from puzzled readers who wonder what ATPM is all about because they can't figure out what product it is we're trying to sell. A less-than-polite response to these inquiries would be "What's your beef?" ATPM was not created to be a commercial enterprise. We accept advertising simply because we enjoy keeping the money from our day jobs. If all content on the Internet is reduced to nothing more than a vehicle to sell products we'd rather unplug our phone lines and turn on Cartoon Network.

ATPM was created to celebrate the "Personal Computing Experience." We believe the most personal of personal computers is the Apple Macintosh. Our e-zine is provided free of charge to tens of thousands of worldwide readers because we take our mission seriously. We will never charge for ATPM or its content. We believe Macintosh evangelism is its own reward. If there's a profit to be made, we'd prefer it to be in the form of knowledge gained by our readers. There are plenty of places on the Web to buy stuff, but we believe the best things in

life should remain free. If you want to be treated like a "slab of beef," visit a fully automated e-commerce site. If you want the "real deal," check out this month's columns and reviews!

Brother, can you spare $29.99*?

While we don't believe there will be lines of high-tech panhandlers outside computer stores asking holiday shoppers this question, we do know there will be lots of bondi blue iMacs under holiday trees this season. Thanks to Apple's $29.99* financing program—we looked at what the asterisk means, but don't worry because you don't pay it until day 91—hundreds of thousands of new Macs will disappear from store shelves in time for Christmas. In this month's Apple Cider, Tom Iovino takes a look at Apple's new consumer loan program.

Windows License Renewal

Anyone who has waited patiently to get a driver's license renewed must wonder what the digital lines would be like if Microsoft went ahead with it's plans to charge computer owners an annual renewal fee for using its software.

To avoid long digital lines and constant Internet congestion, we recommend an alternative plan. Now that the floppy drive has become obsolete, the empty slot on Wintel PCs could be used for a digital card reader. Rather than pay a set annual renewal fee for the "privilege" of using Windows on your home PC, consumers could purchase prepaid Windows debit cards at convenience stores and other fine establishments. Cards could be sold with 15 minute, 30 minute and 60 minute prepaid usage amounts. When only three minutes are left on the card, a warning sign would come on advising people to back up their work before automatic shut down begins. Just before the screen goes blue, Microsoft could run an infomercial, advising computer owners about the latest releases from the software giant and advising people about the fees for accessing data they just backed up on Windows-formatted disks.

High-income computer owners could opt for an open-ended plan, secured by a major credit card. At random times during the month, Windows would automatically turn on the computer and call Microsoft to upload the time usage information. To avoid usage piracy, any personal computer owner who disables the auto billing procedure by unplugging the modem or otherwise severing the line, will have their license automatically terminated. Windows will fail to start their computer, and they will be charged an account termination fee.

With this kind of Windows "innovation," who would want to own a Mac? Silly us.

WYSI What?

This is the question posed by ATPM's editor, Michael Tsai, in this month's Personal Computing Paradigm. WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) was supposed to change the way we look at and produce information with our computers. While there's no doubt that WYSIWYG has been a benefit in some applications, Michael Tsai explores whether or not it is the only solution.

QuickTime Means Show Time!

Readers may have wondered what's become of Mike Shields, ATPM's long-standing writer and former "Mac Man to the Rescue." Mike's been busy setting up his newly refurbished PowerPC Power Macintosh 8500 and preparing an in-depth look at Apple's QuickTime technology. Frequent readers know about Mike's ambition to be the next big-time Hollywood screenwriter. What many people may not realize is that Apple's upcoming changes to QuickTime may "rewrite" the way Hollywood delivers entertainment to our homes (and through our computers). The first installment of Mike's new column will be an exhaustive look at this all-important Apple technology. We hear the software's so hot even the Justice Department doesn't want Microsoft to disable it! Watch for Mike's report in an upcoming issue of ATPM.

iCons

Before Apple was known for the success of its iMac (sometimes it's hard to remember that the Mac's history predates August 15, 1998), the company was known for its OS with the superior GUI. For early Mac users, GUI meant icons and lots of them! In this month's trivia column, Ed Goss offers readers a chance to test their Mac history skills by matching icons with their application names. We're happy to report that Ed has returned from mid-Appalachia with a trivia column that will "bowl" you over!

We warn you, this contest isn't for the faint of heart and it's a grueling challenge for the heartiest of long-time Mac users. Check out Ed's icon competition at the digital end of this month's issue.

Leave It To Rob!

ATPM's older readers may remember the first-run episodes of the "Leave It To Beaver" TV sitcom while younger readers may remember the show from late-night/early morning syndication. The episodes revolved around the antics of a well-meaning, well-intentioned young man who had a habit of finding trouble while doing the simplest of things.

Robert Paul Leitao, ATPM's managing editor, has a habit of finding complex issues to discuss in the most light-hearted of subjects. In this month's Apples, Kids & Attitude, Rob looks behind the giddiness of our modern holiday celebration to talk about some kind of "deeper meaning."

It all started when a member of our staff mentioned something really cool about peace on earth at Christmas. All of a sudden Rob started e-mailing this story about a little boy in a manger who was visited by some kings. We're beginning to worry that he's sounding like one of those people who walk around on Christmas Eve singing songs on the doorsteps of strangers! Sometimes he's so…weird! Please read "A Melancholy Christmas" at your on own risk! Man, where does he dream this stuff up?

Holiday Reviews Just For You-se!

The ATPM staff has some great ideas for the hard-to-please Mac user on your holiday shopping list. This month's reviews include Ed's "snapshot" view of the Sony Mavica digital camera and Rob's offbeat (there he goes again!) glance at the soon-to-be-popular "Food Chain" shareware game. Please see all the reviews in this month's issue.

One of the best gifts a Mac user can give himself or herself is a membership in their local Macintosh users group. Many of the groups offer Mac-related products on their Web sites. The Los Angeles Macintosh Group <http://www.lamg.com> has a CD called "LAMG iMac Essentials." For the educator on your gift list, Washington Apple Pi <http://www.wap.org> offers "Pi Fillings—Goes To School." Both CDs are packed with worthwhile utilities, drivers and applications. They're great gifts for all your Mac friends and family members.

We've Been Gifted!

The staff of ATPM would like to thank you, our readers, for supporting our efforts during the past year. It's been an astounding year for Apple Computer and we're grateful for the opportunity to have been there with you. We'd like to give special recognition to Chris Turner, ATPM's copy editor. While Chris may be unknown to many of our readers, his hard work is evidenced on each of our pages. Due to a change in business, a geographical relocation and the loss of two family members, 1998 has been a challenging year for our "grammar guru." Chris, your gift of faith and fortitude has been a special blessing to our staff.

Merry Christmas and Happy Chanukah to all of our readers. Please enjoy our December issue!