

ello, and welcome to this month's edition of A Spider Speaks. My monthly column aims to provide you, the Mac user, with a wealthy source of tips, tricks, and tidbits of useful information. Comments or questions can be sent to me at erik@applewizards.net . I'm always looking for ideas, so fire up your email application and throw some bytes my way.

This month I am going do a little with SimpleText, discuss some recent advances in the Control Strip I know we've all come to know and love, and then get a little political on Aladdin's butt, all in the name of fun (and my own sanity)!

impleText Doesn't Need to Be So Simple

Everyone's got SimpleText. For that reason, it's no wonder that documentation, ReadMe files, and other information continues

to be bundled into SimpleText files — the developer is essentially assured of the fact that the end user will be able to read it.

But here's a question for you: how many people actually use SimpleText to do something other than reading files? More to the point, how many people create and save documents with SimpleText? I'll venture an answer: very few. But why? There are two relatively simple things which can boost SimpleText's power to new levels. Create cool(er) files with ease, and rest assured that your target can probably read them!

Extra Perk 1: Add Some Color and Stuff!

SimpleText, as it comes from Apple, is relatively bare-bones. Apple wanted to provide users with a free text-editing application, but apparently didn't

want to spend too much time beefing up the features. However, that didn't stop Alessandro Levi Montalcini from adding some extra perks to the venerable SimpleText.

Hop on over to <http://www.montalcini.com/> and grab SimpleText Color Menu. This patch (you apply this patch directly to your copy of SimpleText) modifies and enhances SimpleText with new functionality, including a Color menu and a Goodies menu. The Goodies menu provides functionality ranging from enhanced find/replace capabilities to document defaults, read-only options to window-switching shortcuts.

Extra Perk 2: A Picture's Worth 1k

You may have seen SimpleText documents with pictures. Have you ever wondered just how those pictures got in there? Well, it's actually pretty simple. If you're afraid of ResEdit, perhaps this teeny tiny hack will ease you into it...

First, create a new SimpleText document. Type the text which you wish to have in the final version. Using carriage returns, leave enough space in the place where your graphics will appear. Don't worry about getting it exactly correct — you can always adjust it later.

Now, locate the line on which you wish your graphic (or graphics) to appear. While holding the option key, tap the space bar key one time. Do this on each line you wish to place a graphic.

After saving the file, open it in ResEdit. Create a new resource (command-K). Type PICT into the text box (or select it from the list of available types). In the PICT resource, paste your graphic. Odds are, it will be assigned ID 128 — we don't want that. Press command-I to get information on the resource and change the ID to 1000. Subsequent graphics should be given consecutive numbers: 1001, 1002, and so on.

Finally, open your SimpleText file and verify that your graphics are as you wish. They will be centered — and there's nothing you can do about that — but you can control the spacing around them.

Extra Perk 3: A Simple ttro

We've all seen those read-only files. End users (without knowing what to do)

can't edit these files, so they make a great distribution method for legal documents and other important information. To create your own Read-Only files (which have a file type of "ttro"), simply open your file in ResEdit and choose the "Get Info for [filename]" from ResEdit's File menu. Where you see "TEXT," type "ttro." Save your changes and quit — your file's icon should change to SimpleText's read-only version and your document's security will increase.

he Control Strip Advances

I've been a control strip fan since I first found out that it wasn't just for PowerBooks. I've gone through a wide variety of control strip modules, put the strip in just about every location on my screen, and encouraged just about everyone I know to give it a try themselves.

With Mac OS 8.5, the control strip became an application supported by an extension. With this move, Apple has provided functionality that has gone unnoticed by many. Essentially, you no longer need to restart to add or remove control strip modules.

To Add a Control Strip Module

Drag it to the control strip and let go. It will automatically be moved (or copied) to the Control Strip Modules folder and appear in the strip (you may need to resize your strip to see it). It's that simple.

To Remove a Control Strip Module

Removing a control strip module is a wee bit more complex. But hey, we're talking about a Mac here, so "complex" things really aren't. While holding down the option key, click on the module you wish to remove. Begin dragging it to the desktop area while holding down the option key. To remove the module, let go of the option key before letting go of the mouse button.

orget Those Aladdin Folks

Aladdin Systems, makers of DropStuff, StuffIt Expander, and other

fine utilities, have dropped the ball. Without a hack, every file decompressed with the free StuffIt Expander displays a dialog box "urging" you to get StuffIt Deluxe. Plus, every time you decompress a file which was compressed with their 4.x compressor, you have to click the "OK" button to dismiss a dialog box. Fun fun fun. I'm all for commercialism, but this is taking it too far.

In steps a company named MindVision with their freeware product MindExpander. Run, don't walk, to <http://www.mindvision.com/> , and grab yourself a copy of MindExpander (version 0.91 was the latest at press time). MindExpander expands MacBinary, BinHex, StuffIt, Zip (soon), and other files. As the website says, MindExpander really is your one-stop shop for file expansion.

MindExpander requires only 700k of RAM and does not display a pitiful little "please buy our deluxe version" advertisement every time you choose to grab a file from Apple Wizards or any other website, email, or FTP directory. Upon launching MindExpander for the first time, the application offers to register itself as the default decompression utility for the file formats listed above — let it and say goodbye to a nagging StuffIt Expander forever.

That concludes this month's public service announcement. If you've got anything you'd like me to write about for next month's issue, email me at the address below! Until then...

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