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Embedded Resources

Andre Felipe Machado passed along this URL: http://www.ultracad.com/tech.htm, which has an index of app notes for creating circuit boards for high speed systems. There's some interesting advice here, well worth a gander.

Another resource is www.sigcon.com. This is Dr. Howard Johnson's home page. He's the author of the best book about designing high speed circuits around: High-speed Digital Design, a Handbook of Black Magic (ISBN 0-13-395724-1). On the site you can sign up for his email newsletter.

A Budding Programmer

Recently my 11 year old son told me he'd like to learn to program computers. I was stumped for a bit trying to decide what language to teach him.

C? No way. C is a bit like UNIX. You can do all sorts of cool things in it, but you need to know everything to do anything.

Visual Basic? VB is a wonderland to play in. It takes little effort to build cool Windows apps. But VB's environment has all of the evils of the C language. You spend an eternity clicking on "property" menus to get things to work right.

Eventually I uncovered a musty old copy of MTBASIC, a DOS Basic that supports unstructured, GUIless programming that came out of my youth. We fired it up and had a working "Hello world" program in seconds. No configuration issues, and no language impediments to learning.

For an older person, one who is willing to dedicate some serious time to learning programming, surely C and C++ are logical choices. But their obscure syntax and quirky environments do seem to widen the gulf between programmers and non-programmers. Basic and Fortran did bring programming to the masses; there was a time when most college students got some exposure to writing code.

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I did discover that the perils of programming are innate, built into our DNA. He struggled with a bit of code, wanting to show it off to the girl who lives on the boat next door. She arrived; with "no time to test" (a phrase this industry seems to take as a mantra) the demo collapsed entirely.

Ah, a chip off the old block!

Thought for the Week

For fans of the Lord of the Rings trilogy:

Recently one of my friends, a computer wizard, paid me a visit. As we were talking I mentioned that I had recently installed Windows 98 on my PC, I told him how happy I was with this operating system and showed him the Windows 98 CD. Too my surprise he threw it into my micro-wave oven and turned on the oven. Instantly I got very upset, because the CD had become precious to me, but he said: 'Do not worry, it is unharmed.' After a few minutes he took the CD out, gave it to me and said: 'Take a close look at it.' To my surprise the CD was quite cold to hold and it seemed to be heavier than before. At first I could not see anything, but on the inner edge of the central hole I saw a inscription, an inscription finer than anything I have ever seen before. The inscription shone piercingly bright, and yet remote, as if out of a great depth:
5E6F7D78E78BEDE8209450920F923A40EE10E58E132

'I cannot understand the fiery letters,' I said. 'No but I can,' he said. 'The letters are Hex, of an ancient mode, but the language is that of Microsoft, which I shall not utter here. But in common English this is what it says:

One OS to rule them all,
One OS to find them,
One OS to bring them all and in the darkness bind them

About The Embedded Muse

The Embedded Muse is an occasional newsletter sent via email by Jack Ganssle. Send complaints, comments, and contributions to him at jack@ganssle.com.

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