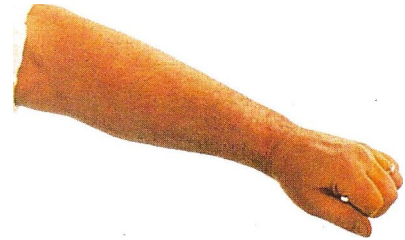
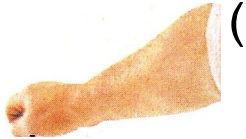


WHAT IT'S LIKE TO FREE-FALL 130,000 FEET: PAGE 128

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SHIFTS HAPPEN



Your body. Get over it.

(Think
mind over
matter.)



THE NEXT BRAINIACS

By John Hockenberry

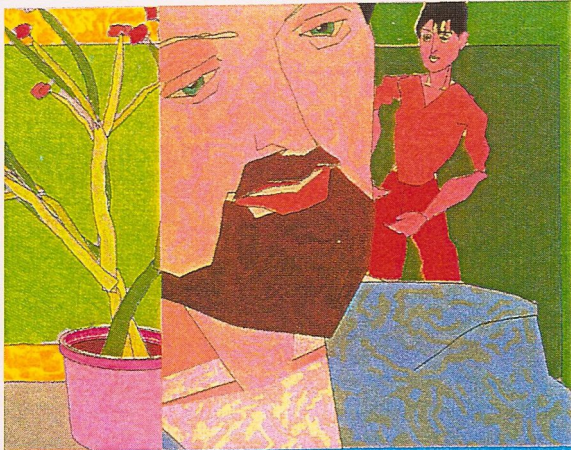
INFINITE SMACKAGE! Check Out Gaming's New Smash Hits

MUST READ

themselves more than any other nationality (51.9 percent), fewer Americans give it the thumbs-up (15.3 percent), and Norwegians like it the least (8 percent) (www.wired.com) + India's

A Brush With AI

DIGITAL CANVAS Artists don't often get to distribute their work to thousands of paying patrons and retain full artistic control. Then again, Aaron - a 9,16-11:11:11 AI screensayer sold on futurist Ray Kurzweil's IVEbsite (www.kurzweilcyberart.com) - isn't your typical artist.



Aaron's artwork has appeared in London's Tate Gallery and at San Francisco's MOMA.

Created by Harold Cohen, a retired UC San Diego art professor, Aaron is a Lisp program that creates paintings from scratch. The application generates abstract images by assigning parameters to each element, such as anchoring a subject's position to a grid, while sketching HOWrill'On "imagines" the real world in two dimensions.

Kurzweil, who licensed the program and engineered the \$19,95 screen saver, calls Aaron a milestone in digital AI - programs expert at a particular task. By December, he plans to release an upgrade with improved color modeling; instead of drawing an image's outlines, it will color-cast goes, Kurzweil is also developing an app for creating original art with intelligent feedback (stored data about the work and skills of human artists as well as those of the AI).

"Aaron is a precursor to nonbiological machines that have a reputation for their own art, that could abolish their art and the significance of it without reflecting a I'm-old Cohen," says Kurzweil. - *Jack* 11(1)

ASK DR. BOB



Dear Dr. Bob: I've got a stack of business cards to file. I know there's a pricey little machine that will scan them into an e-address book, but I can't justify the expense. What are my options? - *Sal Giuntini, Newmarket, New Hampshire*

Dr. Bob: That \$249 gadget is CardScan by Corex, the firm controlling 98 percent of the card-scanning market. Its latest software (version 6) offers some amazing features - color images of each card, better text recognition, and a secure Web page that lets you access all of your contacts.

There are a couple of cheap alternatives to Corex's dedicated scanner. I've had lots of luck using the company's stand-alone \$49 software with a \$129 CanoScan N656U scanner. I load eight business cards into a CardScan plastic holder, place it on the flatbed, and scan. Unlike the Corex, the Canon scanner draws power from the USB cable, so there's less hookup.

If you're really on a budget and already own a scanner, download Corex's software from www.cardscan.com. The free trial package (good for 30 days) is identical to the commercial release. You'll have to make your own card holder with black construction paper and a 10-pocket clear plastic sheet (easily found at most stationery stores). Staple the paper to the back of the plastic sheet, load in the cards, and you're good to go. See how fun belt-tightening can be?

Got a tech question? Ask Dr. Bob at askdrbob@wiredmag.com.

High-Voltage Connectivity

POWERLINE TECHNOLOGY Hype, or soon-to-be reality? With communication via power-line technology, it's hard to tell. Simply plugging your computer into an electrical outlet for Net connectivity has so far been as likely as pigs sprouting wings. This is especially true in the States, where PLTissues are more complicated than in Europe (which has greater housing densities, more conducive voltage levels, and fewer issues with transformers). But two American companies have spent much of the summer quietly conducting tests with utility clients in the East and Midwest, and plan to roll out services next year.

New York-based Ambient - which will partner with Cisco and Bechtel on future projects - is working with the utility Consolidated Edison of New York to expand its testing to several hundred homes by early 2002. ConEd wants to use PLT to sell additional services to clients, says GJ!org.e Jee, the utility's director of planning. The revenue from tacked-on features could bring in \$300 million a year for ConEd if only 5 percent of its 3.3 million customers sign up for \$150 in

monthly services, which could include Net connectivity, video-on-demand, concierge offerings, smart appliances, and IP telephony.

Meanwhile, Powerline Technologies in Reston, Virginia, is trying out its system with two utilities in the East and one in the Midwest. Earlier this year, the company finished initial PLT tests in suburban Atlanta, where a handful of households accessed the Net through a specially designed modem that can hit speeds greater than 1.5 Mbps.

As utilities nervously eye electricity shortages, they can't confidently say they'll be able to supply power, let alone Net connections. Yet, some analysts see PLT as the coming killer app - if, of course, it lives up to its promise.

"While everyone is focused on the stars, or at least on a satellite, the solution is right in front of us," says Morgan Stanley senior adviser Judith B. Warrick. "I'm seeing the light at the end of the tunnel with power-line communications. By year-end, we should see products shipped and announcement of last-mile testing coming out of beta." - *Frank Jossi*