A nimble off-line reader

by Chris Taylor, Sysop

When I started this series of articles on off-line readers, my intention was to end with a comparison of the features available in a number of readers. Unfortunately, I have not had the time to do this. However, since I am an alpha tester for a new off-line reader, I decided to do a review of it. Since it is still in alpha, some things may change, but I think the basics are finalized now.

Jack be nimble, Jack be QWK

Jack Be (as in "Jack be nimble, Jack be QWK") is a Windows off-line reader written in Visual Basic by Mark Baker, a member of the OPCUG. A beta version should soon be available to the membership.

Jack Be is one of a growing number of readers that has a database to keep all your old messages. It uses the Microsoft Access database engine, but you do **not** need to own Access to use it as all database functions are included in the Visual Basic program.

Mark is firmly committed to the idea that everything belongs in the database. All of Jack Be's configuration infor-

mation is stored there. Mark and I have agreed to disagree on the benefits of this. I am not put off by Windows INI files and generally prefer to be able to make manual edits to such a file. Not owning Access prevents me from making configuration changes except from within Jack Be. I had one case where I could not start Jack Be because a configuration option was set wrong. If the configuration was based on an INI file, the fix would have been easy. To be fair, Mark has corrected the problem I ran into and it is easier from the programmer's point of view to ensure that only valid configuration data gets put in the database, rather than having to see if someone manually edited an INI file and put invalid data there.

Mail boxes

New messages are added to the database as soon as a mail packet is read. Messages in the database are read through "mail boxes". Jack Be comes configured with a number of mail boxes; Mail Box (all messages in the database), Unread Mail, Personal Mail (messages addressed to you), Sent Mail (messages you have composed in Jack Be and turned into reply packets), and Unsent Mail

(messages composed by you in Jack Be that have not yet been turned into reply packets). There are also boxes for Deleted Messages and Deleted Replies.

Jack Be provides a configuration dialogue for creating new mail boxes. This allows you, for example, to define boxes that capture either: only messages posted to the Windows

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SIG on The PUB; all messages in all message areas on multiple bulletin boards from a particular person; or all messages from the General area of The PUB with the word "puzzle" in the subject or body of the message. Once defined, these boxes are called from a menu at any time. While reading messages from any mail box, you
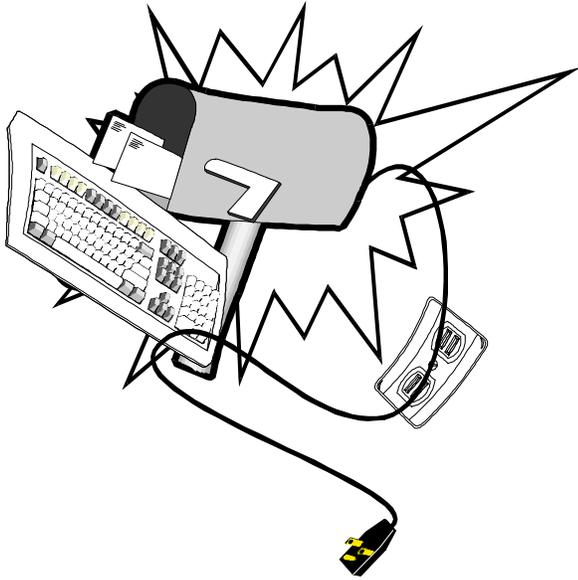
can reply to the message, delete the message, go to the next or previous message, or start a new message.

Pick lists help select the destination

When you want to write a new message, most readers depend on a packet being open in order to have information about the BBS (name, conferences, etc.). Jack Be, however, stores in the database all particulars about the BBS and user names from mail packets you have read in. When you go to write a new message you can choose the name of a BBS and conference from pick lists. In many cases you can also select a user name from a pick list. This helps

enormously when I go to send a message to someone like Jack Stekelenburg, whose name I would rarely spell correctly if left to my own devices.

Enclosures

Jack Be handles enclosed files automatically and elegantly. Any enclosed files are automatically extracted from the mail packet and stored using a unique filename in a special directory. While reading a message that includes a file enclosure, clicking a button brings up a Save As dialogue box that allows you to save the file to the location and filename you want. Jack Be adds text to the end of the message indicating when it saved the enclosed file. Including a file enclosure in a message you are writing is simply a matter of clicking a button and using a standard Windows file dialogue box to specify the file you want.

Jack Be includes a BBS Viewer, which calls up a list of bulletin boards from which you have received mail packets. Information about the BBS and its conferences is displayed and buttons are available for reading the most recent welcome, news, and good-bye files.

Quoting on replies

For those who like their replies to be distinctive, Jack Be has configurable quoting on replies. There are four separate configurable areas: an introduc-

tion to the quote; the first line of the quote; subsequent lines of the quote; and an epilogue to the quote. Any section may contain the Name, Initials, Subject, message number, date, Time, Conference name, or BBS name of the original message, as well as any other text you specify. You also have the option of splitting quoted lines in two that can make messages much more readable due to the way line wrapping occurs.

You don't have to include the entire source message when quoting. If you highlight the text you want to quote before clicking on the Reply button, only that text is quoted. I really like this feature. I think far too many people quote material not relevant to the reply.

Tag lines

Any reader worth it's salt must be able to handle tag lines—those oh–so–cute messages such as "Press any key to continue or any other key to quit" used to conclude messages. As with configuration information, Jack Be stores tag lines in the database rather than the normal way of calling them from an external file. The current alpha release does not have the tag line manager yet, so I have been forced to be very boring—Mark only included six tag lines in the initial database—or manually paste tag lines from an external file. Since I am in Windows, this has been fairly easy. I have an icon that calls up an editor with a big tag line file and I simply copy and paste lines into Jack Be. I will reserve judgment on my preference of handling tag lines inside or outside the database un-

Internet

jdustin and lsimons. @opcug.ca

The first thing you will notice about communicating on internet is you don't have to go searching for that time-wasting shift key. the second thing you will notice is that it seems like you are in a comic strip with veronica (very easy rodent oriented netwide index to computerized archives), archie (archives without the v)

Calendar *(subject to change)*

General Meeting Location: Sir Robert Borden HS
131 Greenbank Road

General Meeting Time: 7:30 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Date and Time	Topic and Location
Monday, 25 April	See this page
Monday, 30 May	To be announced
Monday, 27 June	To be announced

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and jughead. the third thing you will notice is that it is very easy to get lost. come to the opcug presentation on monday, april 25th and listen to three excellent internet guides.

Aneurin Bosly and Lindsay Fraser of Strangelove Internet Enterprises will enlighten us on Internet and its current commercialization trends. Bill St. Arnaud of NSTN Inc. will outline the key offerings of a good Internet provider and list the important tools that NSTN provides to its clients.

Strangelove is a publishing and training firm based in Ottawa which publishes the Internet Business Journal as well as other books and newsletters on Internet topics. "Over 53% of networks currently connected to the World Wide Web (WWW) are commercial. Now developers are releasing software that supports hypertext, sound and graphics and really changes the way we use Internet." states Fraser, "Advertising is an good example. Although the networks do not sell advertising space, if your message looks like information on an appropriate subject it is acceptable."

NSTN is a subsidiary of Software Kinetics of Ottawa and provides regional service for Nova Scotia and is a core network of CA*NET, Canada's national Internet backbone. NSTN offers two levels of Internet access, either individual ($25/month) or business class service ($250/month).

Tools to help

Internet is promoted as a powerful connection to the world and all its information. However, as the authors of the **Ca-**

March 1994 shareware

by Norm Dafoe, Software Librarian

The following shareware diskettes were available at the March meeting:

EPIC BASEBALL: an inovative baseball game from Epic, which features colour, sound, animation, and movie clips. More than just a commercial demo. Also include BaseStat package for keeping statistics. (1.2 Mb)

FOXPRO GENX: a collection of recent versions of the GENX-series of third-party generators and extensions for FoxPro 2.5. Very useful to serious Foxpro programmers. Recommended by the Fox SIG. (1.2 Mb)

KITH & KIN v2.01: a good-looking Windows genealogy program, with lots of features, including import/export of GEDCOM-format files. Can include pictures, sounds, diagrams, as well as family relationships. (360 kb)

SOLEAU GAMES # 5: three more strategy games from William Soleau. PLIX (tiles on a board), Raku Master (tile-flipping in minimum moves), and Spider Run (keep him running). (360 kb)

CIA HYPERTEXT 1993: the updated hypertext version of the World Fact Book. Facts & figures on 267 countries at a keystroke. Use either as a 0k TSR or standalone. View, print, file, paste. (1.44 Mb)

SPEED READ v1.40: latest update to this popular QWK reader/message database program. Lots of new features.Shareware. (360 kb)

More new software at the April meeting. Hope to see you then.

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April meeting

by Larry Chop

The March luck of the Irish was not with us this month as the meeting fell the same time as the last major snow storm of the year (I hope). As a result, the presentation planned for that night will be held at the next meeting at 7:00 PM, Wednesday, 20 April 1994 at the Museum of Science and Technology, St Laurent Ave., Ottawa, in the Yellow Room.

Nick Potter will present the main topic of "Creating a Paradox for Windows Template Form—Part 1: ObjectPAL Code". This will be followed (to be confirmed) by the continuing saga of a case study in developing a Paradox for Windows application.
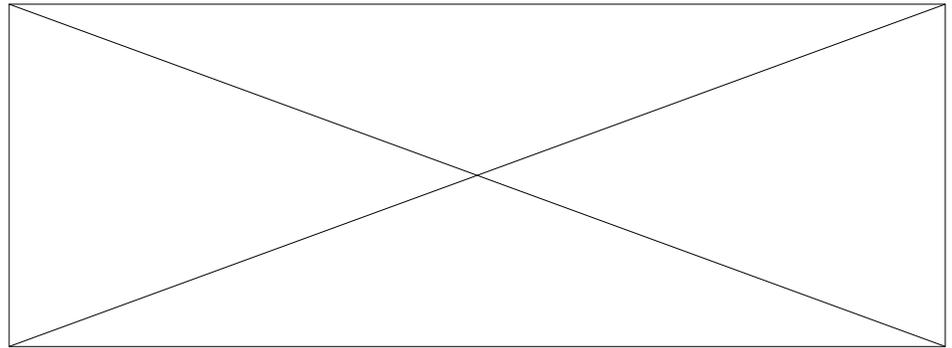
As an administrative note, to take advantage of this newsletter and its mid-month's publishing date for publicity of the meetings, it has been suggested that the OPUG meeting be moved to the last Wednesday of the month. The question will be put at the April meeting.

Looking forward to seeing you there,

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MS-Money—a database with a purpose

by Julie Dustin

What a way to prevent overdrawn accounts, or so I thought. I bought MS-Money 2.0 on the spur of the moment—after all it cost only $20.00. It has been the best software purchase, value-wise, that I have made in a long time.

The product is simple, window-based, and I use it daily. It does everything I need except mail my envelopes.

It asks basic information about each bank account that I wish to open and what its starting balance is. I can enter information as I pay cheques and it remembers every person or organization that I have paid money to. It allows me to add accounts and sub-cate-gories as I need them. It keeps track of cheque numbers and autofills if I have made similar entries.

The reports are also simple. I can use the pre-designed reports which display entries by account, payee, month, or add my own sub-totals where I need them. When it comes to balancing against my statements, it's a breeze—that is, if I remember to enter all the quick withdrawals that I made that month. But even better, if my numbers don't balance it asks you if I wish to postpone balancing my account until I find the mistake.

Future transactions can also be set up. These transactions may be regularly-occurring or one-time payments only. All my loans and pre-authorized chequing withdrawals are logged (a definite time savings with all my mortgages, and tiny contributions to RRSPs and mutual funds). When the payment date is within 5 days of the actual day, MS Money asks me if I wish to enter them. In addition, I find MS Money useful now that I use electronic fund transfer and bill payments. Now if only it could
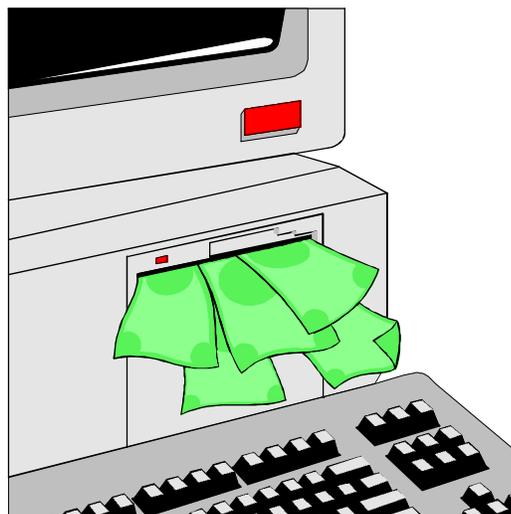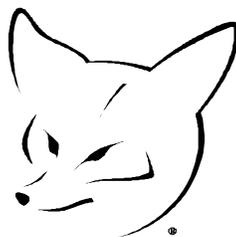
Summer meetings

by Andrew Ross MacNeill

The Ottawa Fox Users SIG is heading into the summer with two major meetings. The first one will be held May 5th and will cover two application development tools that are sure to turn heads.

FoxExpress for Windows is an application generator that makes it a snap to create complex event-driven applications using almost all of the features of the Windows environment, including the toolbar. We'll be putting together an application from scratch in the meeting. Foxfire! is a cross-platform (DOS, Windows, MAC) adhoc report generator that has garnered many awards in the Fox community. It's becoming so popular a lot of developers have given up writing their own reports. These are just two of the items that we have planned for our May meeting.

As well, FoxPro 2.6 has just been released for DOS and Windows. Dubbed the "smartest up-grade for dBase users yet", the product also offers something for regular Fox developers. A bounty of application "wizards" are accompanied with a new "Catalog Manager" which may be the predecessor to the application data dictionary promised for version 3.0. We'll be showcasing some of the new features in 2.6 in our June meeting, tentatively planned for June 23rd.

Once again, the May meeting will be held:

Thursday, May 5th

Jean Talon Conference Room

Jean Talon Building

Statistics Canada

Tunney's Pasture

(corner of Holland and Scott)

7:00 PM.

Hope to see you all there!!

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MS-Money *continued from page 4*

spit out money through my disk drive!

Granted you can change history pretty easily, but then one always could with a paper-based system too: accountants don't like the lack of a paper trail with these easy accounting packages. I like being able to correct my mistakes without having to do double-entries.

I am told that Quicken (for DOS and Windows) is also very good and, for the small business owner, there is QuickBooks which includes accounts payables and receivables. I surveyed my class one day and found out that 5 out of 7 were using either MS-Money or Quicken. One person uses MS-Money to manage the 30-odd accounts for a hockey association. Another loves the ability of Quicken to let her break out her credit card monthly bill into different expense categories. One OPCUG member uses Cash Control, a locally-developed product, and mentioned Cash for Kids which teaches children money managment. Unfortunately, they all agreed that these programs didn't prevent them from being overdrawn occasionally.

As soon as a direct computer connection with my bank is available, I'm signing up!

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Coming up *continued from page 3*

nadian Internet Handbook (Carroll and Broadhead) state, "Discovering the information that you need isn't a simple, straightforward undertaking...a master directory to Internet resources doesn't exist. That's why there are books ... [and]... tools that let you "surf" the network". PC Magazine (April 1994) introduced two products which make it easier to browse through Internet. Both programs, Cello and Mosaic, are available for free through Internet (and NSTN) and have Windows versions. The reviewer does point out, however, that they are great navigating tools but aren't very good for finding a specific pieces of information (ed: figure that out).

For more background information on Internet, browse through Jerry Gault's articles in the past 6 months of the OPCUG newsletter.

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til after I have seen the tag line manager.

Threads

The current version does not support following threads (chains of messages and their replies) which is a big part of what interests me in a database oriented reader. Mark has indicated that it is proving to be rather difficult to follow entire threads. He is hoping to be able to add a "reply" option that will look in the current box for any replies. If there is only one reply, Jack Be will show it. If there is more than one, Jack Be will create a temporary box to contain them. Note that this may prove to be less than ideal because normally, messages are read out of the Unread Mail box and there are likely to be fewer chains of messages there than in the main Mail Box, which contains all messages.

In the current alpha release, The PUB's service files such as ALLFILES.ZIP or PUB30NFO.ZIP are extracted from the mail packet, but you are not given any notice of their existence. Mark intends to change this so that the user is notified when service files are included, and to allow them to be retrieved through the Jack Be file manager.

Jack be free

Two of the tag lines that comes with the initial database are; "You mean people pay for their off-line readers?!" and "Not just nimble—Free!". Several months ago, I asked Mark why he felt compelled to write an off-line reader when there were so many already available. One of the things he said was that he thought it was ludicrous for people to pay a registration fee for something as simple as an off-line reader. I find it pleasantly surprising after a couple of months and numerous messages from me reporting bugs and requesting enhancements, that he still feels that way. It is really nice to see people writing quality tools and making them available for free.

If you use Windows and the message areas of The PUB, I highly recommend that you take a look at QSO and Jack Be.

To run Jack Be, you need the runtime for Visual Basic (VBRUN3.DLL), which is available on The PUB as VBRUN3.ZIP.

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Learning opportunities in the club

Administrative skills

If you have a couple of hours to spare each month to help with club correspondence, please contact the club secretary, Lynda Simons. You don't need special qualifications, nor do you need to know much about computers: Lynda will be quite happy to provide training. This is a great opportunity to add computer skills to your administrative skills, and vice versa. Please call for more information at either (613) 739-9318 (7 pm to 9 pm only), or (613) 526-0542 (business hours), and ask for Lynda.

Writing skills

We are seeking club members to help prepare articles for the club's monthly newsletter. Don't worry if you think that your writing skills are not good enough, as we have some great editors who will gladly help you to improve them, and to get your articles into the newsletter. If you are already proficient, better still.

There is an immediate need for writers to help report on the club's general meetings. For more information, please call the newsletter editor, Chris Seal, at (613) 831-0280 (7 pm to 9 pm only).

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Batch files

by Eric Clyde

The sample AUTOEXEC.BAT file distributed at the SIG meeting illustrated the menu approach to obtaining the best environment for your applications. The major points to be noted were:

- it is used in conjunction with a corresponding menu type CONFIG.SYS file
- the lines at the beginning apply to all of the configurations
- the use of the environment variable, e.g. in the line: 'if %config.sys%=Windows goto windows' and the corresponding section starting with the label ':windows'
- the possibility of tailoring the PATH statement differently for each option
- the line 'PROMPT P_' to ensure that the current directory information is always available.

But the AUTOEXEC.BAT file is only one example of a batch file, all be it a very important one. Recall that a batch or ".bat" file consists of a sequence of DOS commands, normally one command per line. Any time that you find yourself frequently typing a sequence of DOS commands, you should consider making up a batch file.

Batch files are ascii files, which means that they have no special formatting codes, such as bold face or italics. They can be prepared using the DOS EDIT command or, if you are using a word processor, by saving them as ascii, or text, or non-document files. For most convenient use, they should be in a subdirectory in your PATH.

Consider the following simple example, which makes a new subdirectory, and then puts you in that subdirectory. It is called MDCD.BAT:

```
rem MDCD.BAT
md \%1
cd \%1
```

To produce a subdirectory called, e.g., temp, you simply issue the command:

```
mdcd temp
```

The new subdirectory is created if it does not already exist, and you are put into that subdirectory. The "%1%" is called a replaceable parameter—in this example, it is replaced by "temp", as if the batch file was actually:

```
md \temp
cd \temp
```

The following example shows how useful a batch file can be. It loads the program, Quicken, then, when I have finished using it, I am asked if I want to back up my account files. If I want to, it compresses them using PKZIP into a file called ACCOUNTS.ZIP, then copies that file to drive b. It would be possible to compress only the updated files, but I prefer to make a complete backup each time.

```
rem Q.BAT
@echo off
c:
cd c:\quicken5
rem Load the program Quicken
q
cls
choice 'Do you want to backup the account files?"
if errorlevel=2 goto end
pkzip -es e:accounts acc*.*
xcopy e:accounts.zip b:
:end
cd\
```

The CHOICE line in the above produces the message:

```
Do you want to backup the account files?
[Y/N]
```

The key pressed is translated into a variable called ERRORLEVEL. In this example, "Y" or "y" would be ERRORLEVEL=1, and "N" or "n" would be ERRORLEVEL=2; any other key produced a "beep" and the message is repeated. ERRORLEVEL is unusual; the "=" really means "is at least". "=1" for this variable means "is at least 1". Thus, for this variable, the highest errorlevel has to be tested first.

Batch files make a very useful tool in saving effort and in helping to avoid typographic errors in complicated commands. A detailed discussion would require more space than is available here. If you have any questions, bring them to the next Beginner's SIG on April 25. In the meantime, if you have any questions on this or on any other topic, phone me at 749-2387.

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Ottawa PC News

Ottawa PC News is the newsletter of the Ottawa PC Users' Group (OPCUG), and is published monthly except in June and July. The opinions expressed in this newsletter may not necessarily represent the views of the club or its members.

Deadline
Deadline for submissions is the last day of the month prior to publication.

Mailing Address
3 Thatcher St., Nepean, Ontario, K2G 1S6
Telephone answering machine   723-1329

Bulletin board—the PUB (BBS)
Up to 14.4 kbps v.32bis   228-0665 (6 lines)

Chairman
Harald Freise   828-3411

Past Chairman
Doug Poulter   745-8768

Treasurer
Stan McRoberts   722-0849

Secretary
Lynda Simons   739-9318

Membership Chairman
Mark Cayer   224-8031

Convenor
Jack Stekelenburg   838-5985

Software Librarian
Norman Dafoe   723-1909

BBS Sysop
Chris Taylor   723-1329

Hardware/Software Broker
No appointment

Newsletter Editor
Chris Seal   831-0280

Assistant Editors
Julie Dustin   823-1552
Lynda Simons   739-9318

Newsletter Mail Coordinator
Herb Kelland   733-4259

Beginners' Corner
Eric Clyde   749-2387

DTP SIG coordinator
To be announced

Fox SIG coordinator
Andrew Ross MacNeill   (voice/fax) 596-3313

Internet SIG coordinator
To be announced

Paradox SIG coordinator
Larry Chop   236-8761 (days)

Windows SIG coordinator
Philip Baker   247-9555

Group Meetings
OPCUG meets monthly except in June and July. Check the answering machine, the PUB and the newsletter for the date and place. Meeting times are 7:30 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Membership fees
$25 per year

Disk-of-the-Month
$25 for 5.25 in. diskettes and $35 per year for 3.5 in. (for 10 diskettes)