Lost in cyberspace? Internet made easy

MARC LaFOUNTAIN
Technobabble

Have you ever struck up conversation with a stranger—in Australia? Have you ever read a book—that you couldn't even touch? Have you ever taken part in a debate—watched by the world? You will. And the service that can bring it to you—the Internet.

This is the first in what I hope will be a long-running series of columns dedicated to computer technology and the Internet. My goals are to get more people interested in computers and the Net and to help those already interested have fun with the vast array of information and resources out there.

First, a little bit about me. I'm not what techies call a "Power User," but neither am I a computer novice. I'm actually a sort of hybrid that I like to call a "Power Novice." I don't understand the ins and outs of programming, and I can't launch a nuclear weapon from my keyboard, but I do have a basic understanding of how computers work and what they do. I also am a dedicated Macintosh user, but I will do my best not to make my columns too "Mac-centric."

You will see that my electronic mail address will always appear at the end of my columns. Please feel free to e-mail me with questions, comments or even potential column ideas.

In case you haven't noticed the recent media blitz surrounding it, the Internet is a worldwide computer network made up of smaller computer networks. All of these computers have agreed to share a common form of communicating, and this makes the Net and its services possible.

I thought it would be best to take this first column to help people understand the basics of what it takes to get on the Internet at USC. My advice to students, faculty and staff is to get an account on the university's mainframe. Usage of the mainframe is free to these people and can serve as an on-ramp to the Internet.

Miriam Mitchell, a very kind woman in Computer Services who handles my endless mainframe questions, tells me about 12,500

people currently have accounts on the mainframe. More and more people at USC are using the mainframe, especially since University 101 students are now getting accounts as part of the class.

For those of you who still need accounts, the best thing to do is to take your USC ID to the second floor of the Computer Services Division Building. (It's that big, architectural-looking building at the corner of Blossom and Sumter streets.) Tell the nice people in Data Base Administration that you would like a mainframe account, and you can be exploring the Internet the very next day. CSD offers classes as well as printed and on-line information packets that can teach you how to use the mainframe's various services.

Almost all faculty and staff computers at USC have been wired into the university backbone, so these people can probably connect to the mainframe from their desks. Students can access the mainframe from computer rooms all over campus. They can ask CSD or their college where to go. Those with personal computers and modems can use a dial-up connection to access the mainframe.

Here is a quick run-down of the major areas on the Internet you can explore using the mainframe:

E-mail: This is by far the most popular area with students. You can use electronic mail to contact anyone, anywhere in the world, who has an Internet-accessible e-mail account. I write a friend in Japan from time to time.

Gopher: This service gets its name because it allows you to "tunnel" through a large amount of information to find exactly what you need. It's great for finding the phone numbers and e-mail addresses of people at other schools. Companies and schools keep a large amount of information on Gophers, from cal-

endars and course offerings to issues of electronic publications.

Usenet News: Newsgroups are electronic discussion groups about specific subjects which are read and posted to by people worldwide. Got a new theory on the JFK conspiracy? Want inside info on the next Star Trek movie? (I know I do!) There are newsgroups for almost every conceivable area of interest, so this is a great area to check out.

FTP: It stands for File Transfer Protocol. Basically, it involves transferring files from one computer to another. There are numerous sites around the world where you can download all kinds of applications, games, graphics, sounds, text files and more.

Telnet: Telneting involves connecting to another computer to perform operations. Using Telnet, you can access the card catalogs of libraries around the world, use Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs) on the Net, "talk" live with other users on "chat" BBSs and a variety of other things.

World Wide Web: In my humble opinion, this is the coolest thing the net has ever offered users. It's sort of like Gopher on steroids. WWW pages present information with text, color, graphics, sounds and even live movies. They also have "links" which allow you to connect to other Web pages, Gophers, Telnet sites and other services around the world. Unfortunately, mainframe users have to settle for text only when using WWW. If you want the full multi-media experience, stop by CSD's third floor computer lab and give WWW a try.

Those are the basics of how to connect and what you can do on the Internet. My advice to you, in the immortal words of MTV: Plug in.

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'Trial' tried, convicted

LIGHTSCAMERAREACTION
STEPHEN BROWN Staff Writer
TRIAL BY JURY
★★ (out of four stars)

Like twelve disciples selected to advise a great man on questions of high importance, the jury listens, absorbs and presents their unbiased analysis. But what if there's a Judas in the group, out to betray the very judicial fabric they have been charged to protect?

In the new courtroom thriller "Trial By Jury," the law-abiding, divorced single mother and small business owner Valerie Olston (Joanne Whalley-Kilmer of "Scandal" and the upcoming "Scarlett") fulfills her duty as a citizen to serve on jury duty but is forced to play devil's advocate when an unscrupulous villain manipulates her jury vote.

Armand Assante ("Fatal Instinct") plays Rusty Pirone, the crime boss accused of controlling a continuing criminal enterprise, forming an assassination team and personally contributing to eleven murders in three years. His henchman is a crooked ex-cop named Tommy Vessey, played by William Hurt, the perennial '80s yuppie actor ("Broadcast News," "The Doctor") who is a scruffy scuzzball in this film. Together they confront Valerie outside the courtroom to ensure she will vote to acquit Pirone or expect bodily harm to herself, her father and her son.

The bland Gabriel Byrne ("Miller's Crossing") plays Daniel Graham, who argues the state's case. He suspects jury tampering but doesn't act upon his impulses until it is too late.

Although it is painstakingly obvious to the other jurors that Pirone is guilty, Valerie is unswerving in her contention that the government has violated his right to a fair trial. She is forced to flirt, play the martyr and manipulate others as she brings about a hung jury.

Whalley-Kilmer is the true highlight of

the film, a stunning old-fashioned individual who believes in the justice system but is forced to compromise her principles. She is a strong woman trapped in a situation she can't escape, and she brings a likable presence to the film's core.

Heywood Gould, director and co-screenwriter, crafts his far-from-original film by weaving occasional spurts of style with a painfully stoic cast. The characters played by Assante, Hurt and Byrne could have been showy parts if they were played by A-list actors. While all three men have demonstrated ability in incredible performances before, they are pretty awful this time around.

One suspenseful sequence involves a nighttime visit to Valerie's room by Pirone himself, when in fear Valerie tells him, "You're in control—You don't have to prove it." Assante lacks the motivation for his evil and is therefore rendered ineffective as any more than just a threat to her safety. His passionless performance weakens the film's center as much as Whalley-Kilmer's star turn strengthens it.

The courtroom sequences of "Trial By Jury" have all the excitement of an episode of "The People's Court." Complete with a bald, bloated, antacid-chomping judge who looks like Friar Tuck, these sequences are quite miserable.

The villainous threats to Valerie become tiresome because she is powerless to seek help. After all her lies and manipulation to save her family, she has an empty, hopeless, sick feeling. Changed by evil men from a virtuous citizen (she was even the Sigma Chi sweetheart!) to an agent of the crime underworld, she must face a final showdown that tests her strength of character.

Despite a glossy coating, "Trial By Jury" is little more than an update on the female revenge drama. Thank goodness Whalley-Kilmer gets a chance to showcase her talent so she will be offered better films in the future.