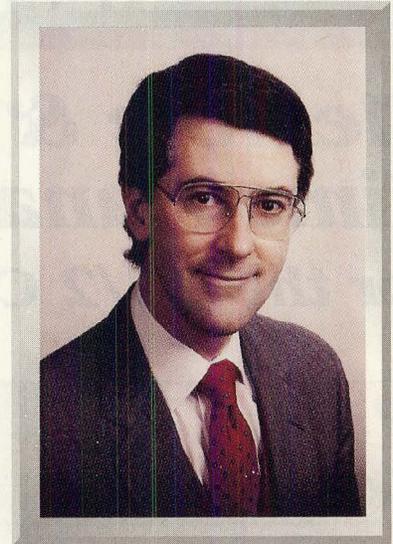


Blue Ninja: The Movie

By Douglas A. Hamilton



There was a time when IBM could dominate the market by the simple device known as the FUD factor: fear, uncertainty and doubt.

You never really knew what IBM was talking about when they introduced some new indecipherable acronym or so-called “architecture” but by golly, you knew you needed it. Things have changed and now they’re being beat about the head and shoulders with their own club. When Bill Gates introduced DOS 5.0, he argued repeatedly that, sure, OS/2 was okay, but really just for people who wanted SAA. One thing you have to give Mr. Gates credit for: he’s a sharpie. He knows that most people really have no idea what in the world SAA, or Systems Application Architecture, really means except that apparently anything IBM sells is, by definition, SAA. So when Mr. Gates labels OS/2 as SAA, he might as well call it a plot for alien mind control. Those IBMers may not look like pod people but you really can’t be too sure, can you?

Enter the Blue Ninja, as Lee Reiswig, IBM’s head of the OS/2 software effort, has been dubbed by his troops. Enough is enough. It’s time for IBM to tell its own story rather than watch as others garble it beyond recognition. Dismissing Windows as merely a “DOS extender,” he seems ready to slice and dice any doubts about the future of OS/2 as neatly as any ninja warrior. People who’ve seen Mr. Reiswig’s demonstration of 2.0 have described it as a religious experience. No kidding. They go in satisfied that Windows has won and come out convinced that OS/2 is the one true way to desktop salvation and application harmony.



Before I saw the tape of it, I thought I knew everything Mr. Reiswig was going to show. From earlier press coverage and reports on BIX, I knew he’d be showing it running unmodified Windows applications. I knew that individual Virtual DOS Machines (VDMs) could be booted up to emulate several different releases of DOS all on the same desktop. I’d heard the claim of “a better DOS than DOS, a better Windows than Windows and a better OS/2 than OS/2.” Still, I was not prepared for what I saw. This tape is incredible.

You have to see it. And fortunately, you can. For a free VHS copy, send a postcard to

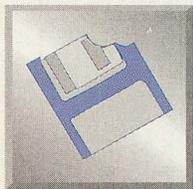
John Tiede
IBM Corporation
Blue Ninja Division
Route 100
Somers, NY 10589

What you’ll see is a very impressive OS/2 2.0 story. The VDM technology is outstanding. All the usual alphabet soup of DOS memory expansion mechanisms — XMS, EMS, DPML, etc. — is supported. Every DOS application will see 620 kilobytes of low memory even with network and other drivers compared to only 570 kilobytes (best case) with Windows. Each VDM will get its own 48 megabytes of extended memory, compared to a maximum of 16 megabytes shared between all applications under Windows.

Exotic DOS device drivers should work. For example, in the demon-



stration you'll see DOS MIDI (music), FAX and scanner devices running just fine under OS/2. And for those applications like Norton Utilities that insist they will run only on particular releases of DOS, individual VDMs can be booted up to emulate those releases.



DOS applications are preemptively time-sliced along with genuine OS/2 applications right there on the desktop.

All the I/O is handled by the OS/2 kernel, meaning that all the I/O can be overlapped rather than causing the whole machine to stall while you wait for the disk. The result is visibly and dramatically better, smoother performance.

Finally, system integrity is impressive. If a DOS or Windows application crashes, only that VDM (i.e., that window on the screen) terminates. Everything else keeps on running with absolutely no chance that an errant application can scribble on the memory space of an application running in another window. What a difference from the fragile Windows environment, where many people find that rebooting their machines several times a day is a way of life.

From everything I can see, the claim of a better DOS than DOS and better Windows than Windows is absolutely deserved.

For OS/2 1.x developers, the transition should be quite straightforward. One area that concerned some of us were those functions that were not going to be supported in 32-bit mode. Examples were the KBD (keyboard) and VIO (video) calls in text windows. When the news first spread, it sounded as if that meant that all those text mode applications (which outnumber the PM applications by roughly 10 to 1) might be stuck forever in the 16-bit world. Later, word came out that those functions could be used by 32-bit applications but they'd need to

go through a "thinking" layer to translate from 32-bit to 16-bit addresses and back again. While workable, I suppose, it evoked nightmarish images of loads of special-case assembly language "wrappers" around any 16-bit functions you needed.

Now it turns out that the distinction between 16- and 32-bit API entries is a non-event. There's a new keyword, `_far16`. Use it in the header file to identify the 16-bit entries and you're done. The compiler hides it completely as you recompile in 32-bit mode. And when you recompile, performance should increase by 5 to 60 percent.

Other good news for developers: the rumored IBM OS/2 2.0 development kit is nearing reality. By the time you read this, it should be

generally available and nearly free to anyone in the IBM Developer Assistance Program, open to all U.S. software vendors. (If you're not a member and need information, call 407-982-6408.) IBM wants you to write code for OS/2.

Still, there's that lingering question: will they really deliver? Personally, I'm betting it'll happen. But one Microsoft executive is reported to have promised that if IBM ships OS/2 2.0 this fall, he'll crawl down the hall on his hands and knees and eat a diskette. *Bon appetit!* ■

Douglas A. Hamilton is the founder and president of Hamilton Laboratories in Wayland, Massachusetts, and the author of Hamilton C shell, an advanced interactive command processor and tools package for OS/2.

