

Peace

By Douglas A. Hamilton



It's easy
to fall
into
the trap of
thinking of
this as war.
OS/2 versus
Windows.
Win or lose.
Take no prison-
ers. Fight to the
death.
Good and
Evil.

I'm beginning to think that may not be the way it'll play out at all. One increasingly likely outcome may be simply a segmentation. Windows may continue to dominate in pure number of installations and the Windows API may be a convenient least common denominator for commercial applications. OS/2 could become the preferred platform for "power users," including those who spend most of their day inside Windows applications. Not exactly an unconditional surrender for either one, it might not even be a 38th parallel.

On the one hand, I think even the most ardent of us OS/2 supporters would agree that if the hard choice for someone is between a typewriter and a PC, OS/2 is not part of the answer. Just so you know I'm not trying to make this characterization a put-down, let me say that my father is a good example. He's a bright man, was a mechanical engineer before he retired and now has bought a computer. He has fun writing letters, uses it to keep track of his taxes and has built a little database of his videotape library.

Naturally, he has a fatherly interest in what his son does for a living and does try to listen attentively as I tell him about the advantages of OS/2 and how I've made use of them. But let's be honest: it doesn't take long for him to glaze over like a piece of pottery.

My dad should not buy OS/2. He might, however, like Windows. It's simpler and even if it can't do as much, does it matter? Would he even know the difference? My guess is that my father is not all that unusual. Even in a lot of very serious business situations, there are a lot of people who don't care about better, they do care about simpler.

One of the basic problems any vendor faces in offering a product is finding a

large enough market that he can make any money at it. Certainly, if you've been writing for OS/2 so far, you know that's not been a way to do it. If OS/2 2.0 explodes next year and, as some of us project, does sell upwards of four, five or six million copies, things will change. But even then, I suspect we'll see vendors considering quite carefully the cost benefit of using OS/2's clearly superior facilities but limiting their potential market. So just as we saw applications designed for CGA as a lowest common denominator long after EGA had overtaken it, my guess is that one possible fallout of OS/2's "better Windows than Windows" might be longer legs for Windows applications.

On the other hand, there will be other cases where the benefits of OS/2 will be clear and the intended users able to appreciate them. Development tools, complex data base systems, networking facilities and high-end desktop publishing systems all come to mind as areas where I think we might expect some very unique and potentially very successful OS/2-only products taking advantage of threads, true interprocess communication, and a flat 32-bit memory model to provide capabilities that simply could not be offered on Windows.

We'll also find OS/2 being favored in larger installations. If you talk to folks responsible for administering big networks in large organizations, many of them are not satisfied with Windows. They can't afford to have their machines going up and down like yo-yo's. Windows' propensity for UEs positively scares them, and its inability to act as both a client and a server is too limiting. Granted, the UAE problem may be fixed in Windows 3.1, but the other limitations remain.

Finally, I think we'll see OS/2 take its place as the ultimate DOS multitasker.

Neither Windows nor OS/2 is going to dry up and blow away. Both will likely be very successful in 1992 and both will be far more complementary to each other than I think many of us may be imagining. Windows (and DOS) will define and drive the applications; OS/2 will be the high-end platform for running them.

Finally, a correction: in a previous column, I mentioned IBM's \$175 OS/2 2.0 toolkit offer. Turns out that was just for a single beta version, the license for which expires the moment OS/2 2.0 ships. The actual price of the released 2.0 toolkit, announced at Comdex as Developer's Workset/2, is \$895. IBM does still want you to write for OS/2, but I guess they also want your money. ■