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Track



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Sneaking In the Back Door Dept.: If you think the battle of **platforms** involves only Linux, Mac, and Windows, you're in for a **rude awakening**.

Since 1995, a group of superstars working primarily in Europe has literally **morphed** the architecture of the we-all-thought-it-was-dead AmigaOS, probably the **slickest, tightest code** ever put on a desktop computer. With seven years of clean-room engineering, the new MorphOS runs on the PowerPC chip, and literally thousands of developers worldwide are working with it. The new OS is best showcased in the PowerPC-based Genesi Pegasos computer, which runs both MorphOS and various PPC versions of Linux.

If you start digging into this, you find remnants of the old **stillborn CHRP** (Common Hardware Reference Platform), which came out of the lost Apple/IBM/Motorola alliance. IBM and Motorola are all over this new project. Buried on each company's Web site are ominous details of a MorphOS PowerPC future. Did anyone following the history of semiconductors think that IBM and Motorola were going to sit on the PowerPC after **Apple pulled the plug** on third-party Macintosh licenses?

The new platform will surprise people. From what I'm told, it's fully USB 2.0-compliant and plug-and-play-capable with everything out there.

The first MorphOS systems are called A-Box machines, because they mimic the Amiga. The next batch are nicknamed **Q-Box**, which is what we'll see when MorphOS hits the U.S. The Q-Box uses a somewhat mystical **Quark microkernel** for the OS, hence the **Q**. What you are reading here is about six months ahead of the wave, so make a note. From the screen shots of the OS I've seen, I have to say that it's as **jazzy** as you can get, and you can run Windows (or Mac OS X) in a separate window if you need

to use those pesky legacy apps.

If this machine achieves critical mass, it could **reignite the dull computer scene**. There is a **weird—even freaky**—enthusiasm about this project. It's a community-based movement, which means that everything's **free**. Tools are **free**, the OS is **free**, applications that cost money for other OSs are **free** for MorphOS. The geeks are in high gear. This is much more exciting than the **pedantic Linux** world, which can't seem to consolidate, let alone compete with Microsoft on the desktop.

It's not impossible for a new platform to emerge. Remember how Nintendo and Sega dominated the game scene for so many years after the collapse of Atari? Look at the market today: Sony owns it. Nintendo fights Sony, Sega is gone, and the Microsoft Xbox is the new challenger. And recall that the dominant platforms on the desktop were once CP/M and Apple II. As far as I can tell, Microsoft and Apple are not taking this seriously enough.

That said, I witnessed the original emergence of the Amiga around 1984, after two years of rumors. It was an **incredibly hot box** and could have been a world-beater. Instead, Amiga sold itself to Commodore, where the company lost its way and **eventually died**. Much of the intellectual property from the original box went from hand to hand and ended up at Gateway, where it's apparently **in a locker someplace**, lost, I think. This time may be different. So far, I like what I see. For more information, check out www.morphos.net.

And Now for Something Completely Different Dept.: Have you heard the latest scheme afoot to deploy broadband to people living on the outskirts of town? Zeppelins. Yeah, dirigibles. **Blimps**. The idea is to position a bunch of blimps above rural areas with broadband transceivers hanging off them. There are actually **two harebrained plans** already in the



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works. SkyLinc, from York, England, wants to position **tethered blimps** 5,000 feet in the air over rural areas (with mile-long ropes?). That should be interesting in a storm.

Even weirder is the plan funded by the European Union called **Project Capanina**—the Stratospheric Broadband Initiative. (Check it out at www.capanina.org.) Apparently, a huge consortium of big spenders and **dingbats** wants to float a slew of blimps at 65,000 feet (yes!) over all of Europe. I'm laughing out loud over this one. Oh, the humanity! Who says they don't smoke **potent marijuana** in Europe?

Geosynchronous satellites are **wiggling around** in orbit on a daily basis, and most have to be rocketed back into position at least once every couple of weeks. They are kept up there only as long as the fuel lasts and are eventually abandoned to float aimlessly through space or burn up on reentry.

Can you imagine positioning a **gas-filled bag** at 65,000 feet? And what happens when the fuel runs out? Do these things float around or crash into the countryside, killing cows? The parties involved in this folly would do well to remember **Dvorak's Law Number 103**: If something seems like a silly idea, it usually is. Count von Zeppelin must be rolling over in his grave.