



Episode 53

I'm In Love With IMs, Baby, or, What's the story, MorningGlory@aol.com?

Imagine, if you will, a world where everyone is in instant communication. Whenever you wish to say anything to anyone else, you have merely to utter the words, and they will hear you, no matter where they are. You can be standing in the same room, or as far apart as Casper, Wyoming, and Alice, Australia, and your message will go from here to there in the blink of an eye.

Welcome to the world of IMs. Instant Messages. Courtesy of America Online. [Reader's note: IMs have come a long way since this was originally written. And whatever happened to American Online? Anyhow...]

It is hard to believe that once upon a time a complimentary copy of the AOL software didn't come in every Cheerios box. Today it is the inescapable application, and that sheer inescapability has made it virtually de rigueur in the computer community. Find a personal computer without a copy of AOL on it, and you have found a very old computer indeed, probably a Commodore Pet or a Timex Sinclair. But while it is easy to understand the driving force behind AOL's marketing -- the old dears are in it for the money, darling -- it is less easy to understand their marketing success. In the context of its times, AOL competed with Prodigy and Compuserve head-on, and to unbiased eyes was no better or worse, with a leg up on some features, and a leg down on some others. So how did AOL end up battering the competition? Because of one easy-to-use feature, which had enormous appeal to one audience. It was an unsophisticated feature, but it was an unsophisticated audience; lord knows that true hackers to this day are embarrassed to claim "aol.com" as their domain name. So what was that feature? Chat. And who was that audience? Kids. Put them together, and you've created a whole new brand of communication: the chat room.

All right, there were probably additional business reasons for AOL's success. Better content, more attractive interface, competitive internet-access pricing. And that endless supply of free disks given away with every pack of chewing gum. But what is AOL's defining characteristic? For the longest time, it was the chat room. And those chat rooms were filled with kids, especially teenagers, bloviating about everything and anything. Who but a kid would have the patience to deal with the nature of that peculiar communication? To wit:

Moderator: Ferd69 has entered the chat room.

PollyWannaGlot: Hi ferd69

TappaTuba: Hi, ferdster.

Tim2394875: Yo, Ferdie.

Ferd69: How do I send a message?

ElNinoNut: How ya doin ferd

OogaBoogaBabe: Good to c.u. ferd.

PollyWannaGlot: You just did

TappaTuba: LOL

Tim2394875: ROTFL

OogaBoogaBabe: ;>

And it would go on from there, with pretty much the same level of intellectual depth, until the subject turned sexual, which would happen usually within four point nine minutes of your logging on because, well, what better subject for teenagers to discuss under a mask of total anonymity?

Chat still exists, but for the sophisticated teenager, it has been replaced by AOL's later breakthrough in communication, the Instant Message, or IM. If you are logged on to AOL, anyone else logged on to AOL can detect your presence and send you an IM, which pops up in a special Instant Message window. And you can respond, just as instantly. The average AOL teenager col-

lects the screen names of everyone in whom he or she has even the remotest interest, then puts them into a buddy bunch, which alerts them that their bodies are logged in. At which point, they IM them. So unlike chat rooms, where the attendees were random, now the conversation is between two people only, and the two people presumably know each other.

And to think, AOL is extending this service to cover the entire Internet. It comes as part of Netscape's new Communicator software, and you no longer have to be an AOL member to use it.

No one will ever be safe again.

That is the real computer revolution. Communication. And a generation is being brought up on it. Roll over, Beethoven, and tell Bill Gatesie the news.

On the average Sunday night, the average teenager, having postponed the inevitable, is finally getting around to doing some average homework. Dinner has just been input but not yet digested, and the teenager slumps away from the table to open a textbook and turn on the computer. To the teenager's parents, this does give the appearance of work being undertaken, but the teenager realizes that the book is merely subterfuge, and the real activity of the moment is logging in to connect with the rest of the teenagers in the world.

The IMs are about to begin.

Jasmine 43: Hi, Griot

Griotski: Hi, Jas.

Jasmine43: What's up?

Griotski: I find it like really amazing that Buglaroni actually took tin yesterday.

Jasmine43: Tell me about it.

Griotski: Have you seen his cases?

Jasmine43: Nobody's seen them, as far as I know. Camelia was shafted -- tab error. She should have gotten Bug's trophy.

Griotski: Welcome to the Bahamas.

Jasmine43: You realize he's half qual'd for states now?

Griotski: And this was his first debate. You know, there is a possibility that he might actually be good.

Jasmine43: Yeah. And the Pope's Parsi.

Griotski: Have you got your cases ready for the Vaganza yet?

Jasmine43: I thought I did, but the more I looked at them, the more they started to suck. I'm re-writing everything.

Griotski: I hate the vaganza topic. They should take Mr. Lo Pat out and make him immigrate. Preferably to Iraq. :)

Jasmine43: I'm logging out. I've got to do some bio homework.

Griotski: I'll be here. TTFN

DisneyDavi: Hi, Griot

Griotski: Hi, Dis. What's happening? You back at school?

DisneyDavi: I took the bus up this morning. I missed you yesterday.

Griotski: I needed a weekend off, even from NDLs. The Vaganza is coming up next weekend. Are you going to be there?

DisneyDavi: Oh yeah. Mr. Lo Pat already hired me.

Griotski: You're not judging for us?

DisneyDavi: Nope. TJ's only sending the 4 usual varsity suspects, so he didn't need me.

Griotski: You wouldn't happen to have any ideas on this topic, would you, old buddy?

DisneyDavi: Immigration? Not really.

Griotski: So what did you think of the regular topic at the NDL, you old vegan you?

DisneyDavi: Everybody was running either that it was immoral to sacrifice a human for a lesser creature, or that it was anthropocentric to assume that non-humans are lesser creatures. Standard stuff.

Griotski: Ugggggh!

DisneyDavi: Hey, I didn't pick the topic. I think it bites because there's no real philosophical background.

Griotski: Why don't you eat meat?

DisneyDavi: Because it's immoral.

Griotski: Why is it immoral?

DisneyDavi: I don't know why, but I know that it is.

Griotski: Very helpful :)

DisneyDavi: Sorry. BTW, you wouldn't happen to know Chesney Nutmilk's address, would you?

Griotski: Sure. Chesneyroasting@aol.com.

DisneyDavi: Excellent. Thanks. c.u.

Griotski: c.u.

DisneyDavi: Hi, Chesney

Chesneyroasting: Hi, Disney. How's it goin'?

DisneyDavi: OK.

Chesneyroasting: How's Naggie?

DisneyDavi: Bites big time. Ches, could you do me a favor?

Chesneyroasting: Sure. Que?

DisneyDavi: That girl on your team. Gloria. You wouldn't happen to have a screen name for her, would you?

Chesneyroasting: Gloria Fudless? Good grief.

DisneyDavi: Hey, she's sort of cool.

Chesneyroasting: Cool? She's like death on roller skates. You like her?

DisneyDavi: Well, I didn't really talk to her. I judged her though

Chesneyroasting: You pick her up?

DisneyDavi: Yeah.

Chesneyroasting: More power to you. Anyhow, her address is FuddyDuddy@aol.com

DisneyDavi: Thanks, Ches.

Chesneyroasting: Good luck

DisneyDavi: Hi, there

FuddyDuddy: Who are you?

DisneyDavi: Disney Davidson. I judged you yesterday at the NDL

FuddyDuddy: Which round?

DisneyDavi: First round. You were up against some little dwarf kid.

FuddyDuddy: You were that vegan, right? Wool is rape?

DisneyDavi: Yep.

FuddyDuddy: Binko says he saw you smoking a cigar behind the auditorium.

DisneyDavi: Who's Binko?

FuddyDuddy: He's on my team.

DisneyDavi: I don't know him. I do know Chesney Nutmilk, though.

FuddyDuddy: You friends with Chesney?

DisneyDavi: Not really. I just know him. Why?

FuddyDuddy: He's sort of, I don't know, stuck up intellectual. I probably shouldn't say that.

DisneyDavi: I don't know. You're right. He is, maybe a little. Are you going to be at the Vaganza next weekend.

FuddyDuddy: What's the Vaganza?

DisneyDavi: Manhattan Lodestone's OriginalVaganza. A very major tournament.

FuddyDuddy: I don't know. Why?

DisneyDavi: I'm going to be there. I was just wondering if I might see you there.

FuddyDuddy: I don't know, I guess

DisneyDavi: You should go. Who's your coach?

FuddyDuddy: Chesney's mother

DisneyDavi: No kidding! Well, tell her to sign you up, if she hasn't already. It's a real cool tournament, although it is all varsity.

FuddyDuddy: I've only debated once in my life.

DisneyDavi: You did real good

FuddyDuddy: I went 2-1

DisneyDavi: That's great

FuddyDuddy: I don't think I'm ready for the varsity yet.

DisneyDavi: You should just go to observe, then.

FuddyDuddy: Maybe I will. Chesney's probably going, anyhow. I could observe him.

DisneyDavi: I'll look for you there.

FuddyDuddy: Okay.

DisneyDavi: OK. Bye

FuddyDuddy: GNSTDLTBB

Disney stares at the last message. GNSTDLTBB. That's a new one on him. Oh, well. At least he's made contact. That's the first step.

GNSTDLTBB?

He looks at the clock. It is after ten. He could use a decent night's rest.

ChesneyRoasting: Yo, Dis. I forgot to tell you.

DisneyDavi: Forgot to tell me what?

ChesneyRoasting: About Gloria. I think she's already got a boyfriend. I probably should have told you before.

DisneyDavi: Oh. Okay. Thanks for the warning.

ChesneyRoasting: OK. Later.

Disney puts his computer to sleep and pushes back his chair. A boyfriend?

His roommate is propped up in bed reading a geology text book.

"I'm going to hit the sack," Disney says, plopping down on his own bed. A boyfriend. He hadn't thought of that. He wonders if he would have even tried to contact her if she had known. She had been friendly enough...

GNSTDLTBB?

"Good night," his roommate says.

Sleep tight -- the words automatically come to Disney's mind as he turns out his light. Don't let the bedbugs bite.

GNSTDLTBB

Aha!

Boyfriend...?

Does Gloria really recall who Disney is?

Will Gloria compete at the Manhattan Lodestone OriginalVaganza?

Will Disney triumph over Gloria's present boyfriend, whoever that is?

How much Lindsay Lohan is more than enough?

Find out none of it in our next episode: "Nagano: An Olympics city in Japan or a poisonous new sushi dish?"