

# Disney and Simpsons and Trek. . . . Oh My!

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Computers are amazing tools with an amazing capacity for the storage and processing of data. They are also, however, toys. No matter how practical the device, mankind will never miss an opportunity to put an amusing screen on it (this from a writer who recently discovered to his glee that his Macintosh had the ability to quack like a duck).

Take, for instance, screen savers. This tool is rooted in practicality: a screen saver program automatically shifts the picture on the screen after a certain interval so as to prevent images from burning into your screen over time. That's all well and good, but screen savers have evolved into a veritable entertainment medium. Software companies produce more inventive and entertaining screen savers for bored computer users, and few creators of this art can rival Berkeley Systems.

Berkeley secured its fame with the After Dark screen saver packages, whose titles include the company's whimsical trademark flying toasters. These and other such pictures made the After Dark program a favorite with computer users and spawned numerous spin-offs, some of them specialty programs like *Disney*, *Marvel Comics*, *The Simpsons*, *X-Men*, *Star Trek*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and more.

The Disney edition is sometimes amusingly cute, and occasionally both amusing and scary. The animation is nicely rendered but it has a tendency to seize up or freeze in mid-motion. In short, the animation (especially in scenes like the Little Mermaid and the Garden of Eatin' flowers) looks choppy. The musical accompaniment is a real treat, and crystal clear. Some of the settings (like Donald Duck and the Little Mermaid) are rather nice-looking but a tad on the slow side. Funny stuff includes Goofy

rearranging your desktop, and cute stuff includes those 101 Dalmatians we all love so gosh-darn much. My favourite display is the Mickey Mouse *Haunted Screen* setting (though it also tends to freeze in mid-motion now and again): it's a tribute to one of the first talking

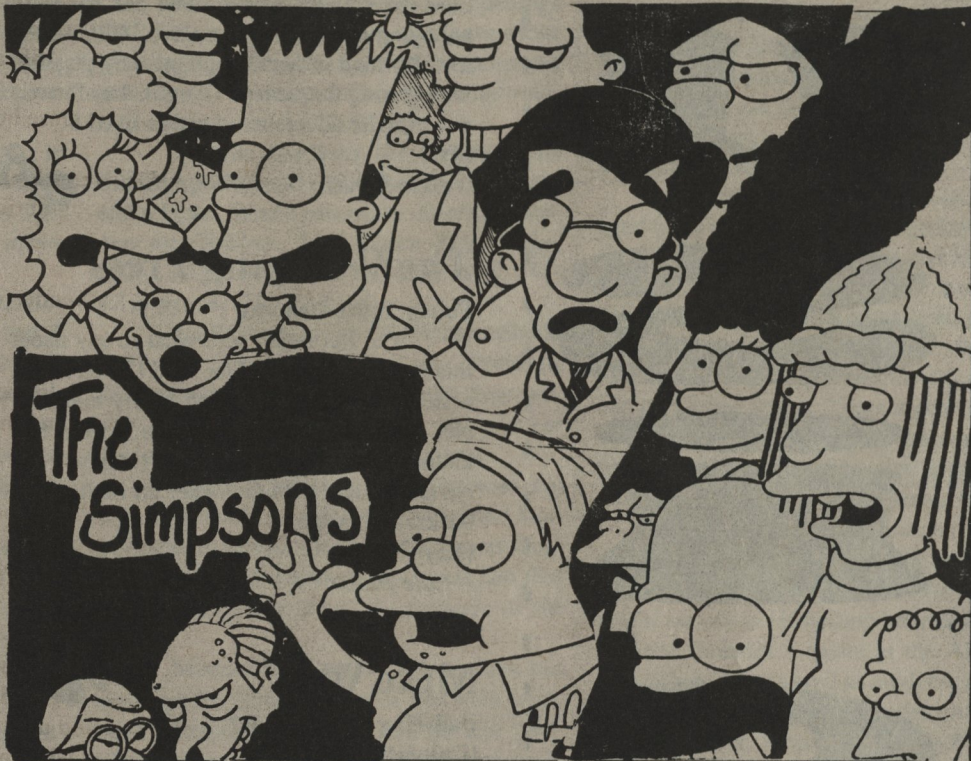
him and the match blows out. I just get such a kick out of it.

Meanwhile, *After Dark* also offers what is virtually Disney's opposite number with the *Simpsons* screen saver, based on the popular animated series. Funny stuff includes

well done. A word of caution: the *Simpsons* are satirical characters aimed at adults, so you might not want kids scoping some of this stuff for hours on end.

Last but by no means least on our list is the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* screen saver. This boasts some impressive computer models of the Enterprise crew, though some of them are put to hideously boring use (like Counsellor Troi's advice program-- the one setting that depends entirely on conversation and they don't even throw in a voice clip). Again, there's some mighty fine computer tunes (like the digital rendition of the *Star Trek: TNG* theme). High points include Lieutenant Commander Data's dance lessons (expertly animated and a real hoot) and Lieutenant Worf's weapons exercises, wherein he slices and blasts your desktop to pieces while his cute little son Alexander plays weapons-caddie. In terms of technical merit, one of the most impressive settings is the "Encounters" module, which relives scenes from past *Star Trek: TNG* episodes (it's very disjointed, but features a killer rendering of the Enterprise bridge and its crew, plus some primo voice clips). One quibble is that it would have been fun to include more characters (like O'Brien, Barclay, Ro and Tasha Yar) in the profiles section, or even in the animated segments. Regardless, this is an enjoyable program. I wonder when we can expect a *Star Trek: Deep Space 9* screen saver? (Or better yet, a *Star Trek: Voyager* screen saver!)

Oh, and lest I forget, there is always the basic *After Dark* program itself. Many of its settings are rather boring, but in some cases that's relaxing in a meditative, hypnotic way-- and some of the modules (like *Bad Dog*, *Rat Race*, *Daredevil Dan* and the bizarre interactive game show *You Bet Your Head*) are pretty funny.



Mickey Mouse cartoons wherein he wandered into a haunted house and ran afoul of a bunch of skeletons. This screen saver, done in the same black & white animation style, has a neat twist: Mickey walks around your blacked-out screen (you can see his eyes), occasionally lighting a match. When he does light a match, it illuminates the portion of your desktop he's standing in front of... until a skeleton or some other creature frightens the beejabbers out of

the wrath of Mister Burns (sinister nuclear power plant manager), and the ultra-violent "Itchy and Scratchy" cartoons (a dubiously guilty pleasure best taken in small doses). With settings including virtually all the series characters, this program is fun for any *Simpsons* fan. There's some choice musical cuts (especially the theme song), though Lisa's saxophone solo just doesn't ring true in terms of sound quality. Voice clips are abundant and



Graphic/ Christopher Heath Robinson/ SFU Peak

ugh... LAUGH I SAY!!

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