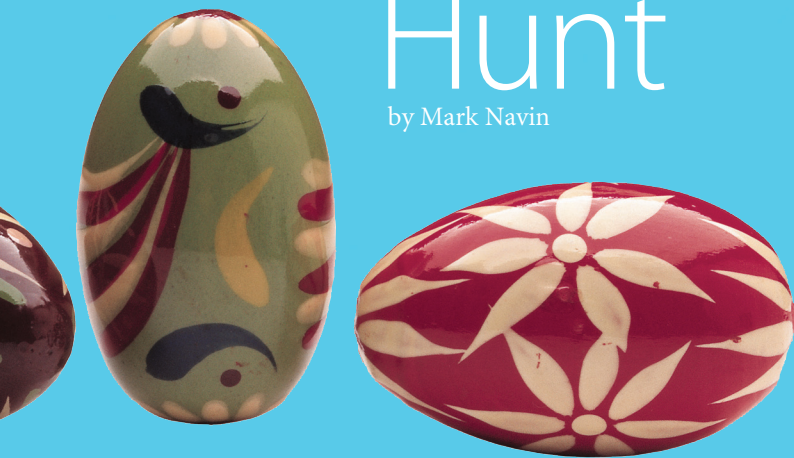


The Thrill of the Hunt

by Mark Navin



In most cultures, eggs are associated with new life, regeneration and spring. In particular, in many Western countries during the Christian celebration of Easter, eggs play an important role. Whether it's painting ordinary eggs or eating the chocolate variety left by the Easter Bunny, it's difficult to see the religious connection to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. For those of you interested in exploring the subject of how eggs became tied to a religious festival, these Web sites are worth checking out: www.aphrodite-chocolates.co.uk/easter-eggs-history.htm; www.night.net/easter/egghist.html-ssi; www.holidays.net/easter/eggs.htm; www.theholidayspot.com/easter/history/icons/easter_egg.htm.

One tradition that continues in many parts of the world today is the Easter egg hunt when children search for hidden painted (or more likely chocolate) eggs on Easter Sunday. (This is certainly a useful way to keep the kids occupied over the long holiday.)

Just as children enjoy scouring for prizes, the idea has been refined and developed over a number of electronic media. In the virtual world, Easter eggs are the hidden extras found in computer programs, operating systems, video games, compact discs, DVDs and movies. They could be unlisted images, music, interview segments, quizzes, games, a list of names, almost anything that the product developer decided to add for a bit of extra amusement. All these additional goodies are "buried" somewhere and can be accessed through a set of undocumented commands, keystrokes or clicks.

There have been some famous eggs over the years like the flight simulator game hidden within a version of the Microsoft business spreadsheet application Excel 97 (www.eeggs.com/items/29841.html). At one time, typing the word "beer" or "volcano" into the text of the screensaver for Windows would produce the name of American beers or the names of current active volcanoes. Even MS Messenger has some eggs waiting to be found (www.eeggs.com/tree/4808.html). The first known Easter egg to feature in a video game was in the Atari game "Adventure." If a player used a particular item in a certain place, the game designer's name would appear (www.digitpress.com/eastereggs/).

A more recent example is in the Word application of Microsoft Office 2000. To see a list of the people who worked on the User Assistance feature of Microsoft Word 2000, first open the program then press F1 or click on Office Assistant. Under "What would you like to do?" type "Cast" (no quotation marks) and click Search. Click on Microsoft Office 2000 User Assistance Staff then on the graphic in the Microsoft Word Help screen.

An unintended but interesting side effect of the recent litigation against Microsoft on undocumented features within an operating system is that Microsoft is legally restricted from including such things. This has meant the death of the Easter egg within the operating system. The zero finds within Microsoft's latest operating system for users—Windows XP—is testament to that. The new Apple operating system has no such constraints (www.eeggs.com/tree/1141.html).

As mentioned earlier, Easter eggs exist not only in the realm of the computer. They reside in music CDs and DVDs as well. If you're old enough to remember the Beatles, you might recall the story about Paul McCartney being dead. The evidence allegedly lay in one Beatles song, which when played backwards emitted the words "Paul is dead" (www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/3674/pid.html). There are now a host of examples of eggs in CDs, including extra songs, sounds or readings at the end of the regular set of tracks.

With the advent of the DVD and the ability to load more information onto recorded media, Easter eggs have become popular and much more mainstream. Unfortunately, not all DVDs have the same freebies. It depends on the version and where it was bought. Just because a Web site highlights an egg for a particular movie, for example, doesn't make it the case for all versions. Looking for eggs on a DVD, however, can require a bit more work. For example, navigating the menu page is usually done using the up and down arrows, so try the left and right arrows, this may move the highlight to another place on the screen and activate a hidden item. For some eggs from Middle Earth, try these Lord of the Rings links: www.eeggs.com/tree/6786.html.

The definition of the Easter egg gets a bit more blurred when you enter the realm of movies and even books. There has been a long tradition of directors and writers hiding references to people or previous works, or even keeping in mistakes and bloopers. These, too, have become the passion of egg hunters who now swap them online like treasured pieces of code. While they require far less manual work to access (maybe pausing the video), they still invoke the same enjoyment when unearthed. □

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