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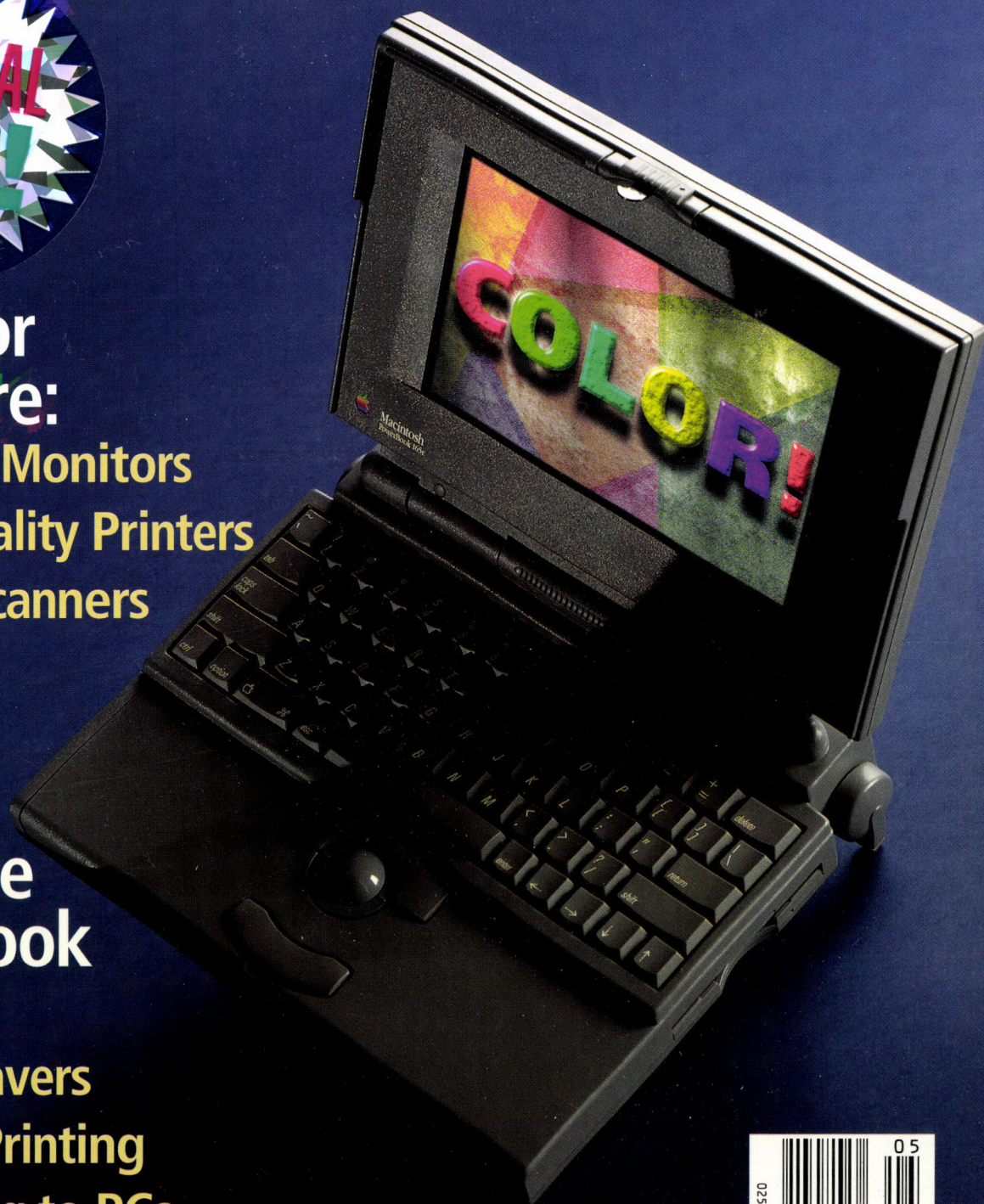
Armchair Headhunting

Grab a copy of *The Wall Street Journal* or *People*, and you too can join in on the fun of armchair headhunting, as we pick John Sculley's successor.

There's a new game sweeping Silicon Valley: armchair headhunting. For those who'd like to join in on the fun, the rules are easy. First, the shareholders in a big company get fed up with quarter after quarter of mediocre results. Next, the board of directors gets pressured to give the CEO the heave-ho. Then the press gets together to pick a replacement candidate for the hot seat, and the bets are placed. Finally, the sage advice of the punditocracy is ignored, an unknown replacement is selected, and the next round of play starts up.

The hottest game today centers around IBM and its outgoing CEO, John Akers. But advanced players of armchair headhunting are already betting on the subsequent round of play: Who replaces the person who replaces John Akers?

With John Sculley high on everybody's short list of candidates for Akers' spot, the real question is: Who would replace Sculley at Apple?

Chances are that whenever Sculley decides to go, his replacement will come from inside. But for you long-shot players, here's the current list of outside candidates for the top spot at Apple, along with their biggest pluses and minuses and the odds on their getting the nod.

Lee Iacocca

Long-shot Iacocca could deliver a shot in the arm with an "If you can find a better computer, buy it!" testimonial ad campaign, featuring him rolling up his shirtsleeves to personally test how each new Mac fares in a rigorous crash test.

Biggest plus: His hard-hitting style would reinvigorate Apple sales and marketing.

Biggest minus: Apple execs will balk if Lee decrees that the official corporate wheels will now be the K-Car.

Odds: 20-to-1.

Akio Morita

As the head of Sony, one of Apple's biggest suppliers, Morita is already intimately familiar with the Mac product line.

Biggest plus: Sony's vise grip on the consumer-electronics distribution channels would help move Performas and Newtons into the market.

Biggest minus: Insistence on making QuickTime compatible with Beta.

Odds: 20-to-1.

Steve Jobs

Is the time ripe for the return of the native? Jobs built Apple from rags to riches, and it was Jobs' gut instincts and his commitment to such projects as the first Mac and the LaserWriter that saved Apple from the brink of oblivion more than once. Many credit his charismatic zeal as the primary reason a generation of computer users were willing to gamble on the unproved, underpowered, overpriced Mac platform.

But in his NeXT turn at bat, that zeal turned to stubbornness, as Jobs' refusal to accept the reality that NeXT's real strength was software left NeXT awash in a sea of red ink amid a tide of outgoing employees.

That finally changed earlier this year, when NeXT announced that it would no longer sell hardware and would focus on its operating system and application-development environment. The question is, Was that move merely Jobs' finally coming to grips with market realities or was he intentionally decapitating the company as a prelude to a new détente with Apple?

Biggest plus: Jobs' newfound expertise in the workstation- and IBM-dominated enterprise realms would be a boon as Apple poises to launch its forthcoming line of PowerPC-based machines.

Biggest minus: Remember the Apple III? Didn't think so.

Odds: 30-to-1.

George Bush

He's available and has no preconceptions about which computers are best — or even about what they do — that might bog him down.

Biggest plus: Read my lips — no new PDS/expansion-slot form factors.

Biggest minus: Thinks System 4.2 is "pretty high-tech."

Odds: 50-to-1.

Siskel and Ebert

The duo that gave new meaning to the phrase "opposable thumbs" would jointly share the chief executive's office. Siskel (the tall, skinny one) is a notorious PC guy and would focus on the serious IBM joint-venture projects, such as PowerPC, Taligent, and Kaleida. Ebert (the less tall, less skinny one) is the Mac guy and would focus on the cute, cuddly machines, such as the Color Classic and the Newton.

Biggest plus: Apple would benefit from the vigorous dialogue between the two, with neither one of them willing to let the other's utterly ludicrous viewpoint go unchallenged.
Biggest minus: We'd be stuck with Gene Shalit's movie reviews.
Odds: 100-to-1.

Roger Heinen

The former guru of the Mac OS recently defected to Microsoft to head up database operations. Some speculate that the whole affair was a ruse to give him access (no pun intended) to the secrets of the inner circle at Microsoft before returning to Cupertino.
Biggest plus: Still has his key to the executive washroom.
Odds: 150-to-1.

John C. Dvorak

MacUser's own anti-editor would bring a much-needed dose of reality to Cupertino.
Biggest minus: Would insist on writing the back page of all Apple manuals.
Odds: 150-to-1.

Rush Limbaugh

The infamous right-wing talk-show host may hold the distinction of being the only radio/TV personality who has discussed PowerBooks and "environmentalist wackos" on the air in the same breath.
Biggest plus: He commands the unswerving devotion of millions of dedicated followers.
Biggest minus: Apple productivity would plummet when he removed Jolt from the programmers' vending machines and replaced it with Snapple.
Odds: 200-to-1.

Barney, the Dinosaur

Big Blue gets trounced by Big Purple? The latest idol of the preschool set would have a field day restoring Apple's lead in education.
Biggest minus: Well, he's a fictional character.
Biggest plus: He's a fictional character.
Odds: 500-to-1.

Al Gore

Already showing signs of frustration at playing second banana, the vice-president would bring valuable Washington connections to the job.
Biggest plus: Technological literacy.

Biggest minus: Tipper would demand warning labels on any software that featured hidden and potentially mind-warping "Easter egg" messages in its About box.
Odds: 500-to-1.

Zoë Baird

Although her nomination as U.S. Attorney General stumbled over the nanny thing, she entered the spotlight as an intelligent and competent administrator and litigator.
Biggest plus: By personally overseeing Apple's legal efforts, she could dramatically turn the jurisprudential tides in Apple's favor in numerous strategically important arenas.
Biggest minus: Potential scandal about whether she ever actually paid her shareware fees.
Odds: 500-to-1.

Bill Gates

The man who has everything — except a computer company — may just go for the chance to prove he's got what it takes to sell hardware.
Biggest plus: Rebates! Rebates! Rebates!
Biggest minus: Nifty plans for system extensions include the C: prompt, AUTOEXEC.BAT files, and whatever idea he last overheard an indiscreet third-party vendor talking about.
Odds: 1,000-to-1.

Sinatra

As Apple's Chairman of the Board, ol' Blue Eyes would use that patented melodic mix of boyish charm and veiled threat to preempt any possible defections among Mac users considering a switch to Windows.
Biggest plus: New corporate slogan: "The power to be your best, Jack!"
Biggest minus: Aging Rat Pack performs at annual shareholders' meetings.
Odds: A long shot, but would you really want to bet against him?

John Akers

As the outgoing head of IBM, the anything-but-green Akers knows exactly where the enemy's greatest weaknesses are.
Biggest minus: Where do you think the enemy's greatest weaknesses came from?

Whenever he goes, and whoever gets the job, Sculley will be leaving some big shoes to fill. So you'd better not leave Michael Jordan off your list.