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Page(s) 40-43 in print issue

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Mad Reader Mod
Near Misses

On the rare occasions that someone tells us PC modding isn't popular, or that it's on the way out, we point to the growing number of modding Web sites and the flood of mod submissions we receive from around the world. Each month, we sift through pictures of some of the best (and, we suspect, a fair share of the worst) mods around. We decline to cover the modding disasters, of course, but we also pass on decent systems that lack the complexity or polish we expect.

Sadly, we also skip some truly great mods during our hunt for the Mad Reader Mod of the month. Many of the systems that catch our attention (and are worth yours) don't quite fit the Mad Reader Mod article for one reason or another. These intrepid modders poured creativity into the rigs. Some modded existing cases, while others built new cases from scratch. They cut, painted, filed, and sanded until the custom PCs reflected their modding skills.

We hate to leave such great mods behind, and so we haven't. For more than a year, we've collected an assortment of some of the best modified PCs you haven't yet seen. Now we're ready to unveil them in all their nothing-else-like-it glory. So lean back, kick up your heels, and enjoy this modding mélange.

■ Black Magic

Modders who sniff at LEDs and window cuts will love Michael Coar's latest workstation. He wanted a quiet rig that could handle Steinberg Cubase 4 music production software and his three displays, so he invested in new components and then built a watercooling system. The PC includes a Tyan Thunder K8WE motherboard, two AMD Opteron Dual Core 285 processors, and a watercooled 1kW PC Power And Cooling Turbo-Cool PSU. That's right, we said watercooled. Coar commissioned a custom waterblock and then installed it into the PSU. The rig's video cards, processors, and hard drives also benefit from the watercooling system.

■ BloodMoon

This small, LAN-party PC has plenty of attitude. Jeff "Dgephri" Kaiser designed the system in Google SketchUp and then built it in his garage workshop. Although BloodMoon is a small PC (it has a micro-ATX Asus P5LD2-VM rev. 2 motherboard), it houses a watercooling system, which lets Kaiser overclock the Intel Core 2 Duo E6700 to 3.45GHz. Kaiser also enlisted the help of Global Plastic

Services International (www.cleardomes.com), which created the Earth and Moon domes. "I used a satellite image of the Earth to print out a template for etching the continents onto the inside of the dome, and did the same for the Moon," says Dgephri.

■ The C

Believe it or not, The C's frame is cardboard. Architect Danny Rodriguez cut a long, rectangular piece from a cardboard box and then used a fiberglass resin coating to firm it up. "The cover is a polycarbonate sheet heated and warped to wrap around the case," Rodriguez tells us. We wouldn't be surprised to find this glowing piece of functional computer art at MoMA, but it sits for now in Rodriguez' living room filling the role of an HTPC.

■ Folding Rig

Greg "Fueler" Barry takes distributed computing seriously. In fact, he's dedicated as many as 14 computers to Stanford University's Folding@home project. The new Folding Rig, which replaces some of his previous folding PCs, is two computers in one. The box sports two Intel DG965SS micro-ATX motherboards, two Intel Core 2 Duo E6300s, 2GB of DDR2-800 memory, and two Western Digital Caviar WD800 hard drives. Barry wired both systems to a single PC Power and Cooling Turbo-Cool 510 PSU. He built the case from scratch from oak, aluminum tubing, and steel.

■ Icetubed

If you've never gotten chills from seeing a sweet mod, this one may do the trick. The icy Icetubed features custom-cut acrylic, hard drive waterblocks, and a removable motherboard tray. The PC isn't quite as small as it looks. The watercooling loop runs to an external cooling unit. Martin "thechoozen" and Stefan "trigger" Blass tell us that their custom external cooler keeps the FX-60 at -20 degrees. The brothers built a special motherboard enclosure to prevent any cooling loop sweat from reaching the rig's most important components.

◾ Mystique2

Brian "Boddaker" Carter's Mystique^2 is one of the coolest custom HTPCs we've seen. Carter combined two Cooler Master Mystique 631 mid tower cases to create this masterpiece. The PC owes almost all of its parts to these two cases. In fact, Carter bought only an aluminum bar and blue acrylic. We like the iPod docking station/media card reader, which slides out of the front panel. The rig, which runs Windows XP MCE, includes a WinPVR TV-tuner, and a Cats Eye HDTV tuner, as well as an AMD Athlon 64 FX-55 and an Asus A8N SLI motherboard.

◾ Optimus Prime PC

Why mess with a small, portable computer when you can build a nearly 7-foot Autobot? John Mangus unveiled his Optimus Prime PC to the public as the Transformers movie launched in mid 2007. Since then, the fully functional computer has also won first place at the modding competition at QuakeCon. Mangus built the system with an Intel Core 2 Duo e6850 processor, two BFG Nvidia GeForce 8800 GTS OC x2 video cards in SLI, and a 7-inch monitor at his waist. The modder welded the aluminum frame and handled its many coats of paint, as well as the wet sanding and buffing.

◾ Prometheus

This watercooled, overclocked PC divides its components into separate thermal groups, thanks to Daniel "Syrillian" Costin's vision. Forgoing traditional PC cases, the modder designed and built Prometheus from scratch. The PC Power And Cooling 750 Silencer PSU gets its own area, as do the rig's hard drives. The Intel Core 2 Duo E6400 (at 3.52GHz) and the Asus P5B-D WiFi motherboard share another room. Fan controllers let the modder adjust air cooling across the system. Costin positioned the motherboard horizontally so he could quickly reach components when changing hardware.

◾ Scan-A-Tron

What once was old is new again, with Allen "BigAl" Haid's Scan-A-Tron. The HP ScanJet 6100C scanner underwent a massive transformation on Haid's basement workbench. Haid swapped the scanner's innards with parts from an HP Pavilion ze4145 notebook to create a classy Web-surfing machine. The modder enlisted the help of Hyperkore (www.hyperkore.com), which etched the system's large window. The Scan-A-Tron now sits above Haid's workbench so he can download

drivers and surf modding forums while he works on his latest project.

Star Trek NX-PC

Russ "jediknight0" Caslis' latest mod shines the spotlight on Star Trek. "Star Trek has always been a love of mine (as well as Star Wars), but has received very little love from the modding community," says Caslis. "In the Star Trek world, the show Star Trek: Enterprise has also received very little love from the fans so it seemed appropriate to give both of these underappreciated areas a boost in the form of an appropriate mod." The rig boasts a speed-controlled watercooling system and warp engines that light up to indicate hard drive activity.

WMD

This attention-grabbing PC is the result of watching "James Bond" movies and episodes of "24," says well-known modder Peter "G-gnome" Dickison. "I also thought having a big, industrial-looking, stainless steel nuclear bomb sitting on my desk would look cool," says Dickison. The system includes an AMD Athlon 64 FX-55 CPU and a Shuttle SN95G5 motherboard, as well as two water-cooled power supplies. The key lock power switch and functional countdown timer (which has an audible alarm) completes the PC's bomb-like look.

by Joshua Gulick

Have a computer mod that will bring tears to our eyes? Email photos and a description to madreadermod@cpumag.com. We're looking for rigs that are recognizable as PCs; your Wookiee mod won't find a home here. If we include your system in our "Mad Reader Mod" section, we'll help you load up your modder's toolbox with $1,500 and a one-year subscription to *CPU.*

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