

### Available or Locate?

The Available? button in the Instant Message window does the same thing as the Locate a Member Online command under the Members menu. I prefer the button. Most of the time, if a member is online you're going to want to say hello, right? If you discover the member online via the Locate command and want to say hello, you have to call up the Instant Message dialog box anyway; but in the period of time it takes to produce that box, you might lose your opportunity.

OK, it's a small matter, and locating members online isn't like locating pike: they aren't liable to disappear in a matter of seconds. Nonetheless, it's one less command to learn, and every time you don't use the Available? button, you'll wish you did.

- ▲ Figure 12-14's window has been enlarged from the default. Like all of AOL's windows, the Instant Message window can be sized as you please. If you want to change the size of a window permanently, choose Remember Size from the Windows menu after you have sized the window to your satisfaction.
- ▲ You cannot receive or send Instant Messages while in a free area such as the Members' Online Guide. America Online closes any open Instant Message windows when you enter a free area.
- ▲ Determine where the intended recipient is before sending an Instant Message by clicking the Available? button in the Instant Message window. This feature tells you if the recipient is online, and if so, whether he or she can receive Instant Messages. It also tells you if a member is in a chat room, in which case you might want to go to that room rather than send an Instant Message.
- ▲ If the recipient is online but in a free area, in the process of downloading or in some other way unable to receive an Instant Message, AOL tells you—after it unsuccessfully tries to deliver the message.
- ▲ Instant Messages are accompanied by a “tinkerbell” sound and the Instant Message window becomes the frontmost window on your screen. The Preferences command under the Members menu allows you to change these options, but most people prefer the high degree of priority Instant Messages receive without changing their preferences.



- ▲ You can log Instant Messages (handy for “phone call”-style Instant Messages such as those I exchange with Pam) by choosing Logs from the File menu.
- ▲ If you don’t want to be disturbed by Instant Messages, you can turn them off at any time by sending an Instant Message to “\$im\_off” (without the quotation marks, with the dollar sign, and always in lowercase). Include a character or two as text for the message; otherwise AOL will respond with a “cannot send empty Instant Message” error. A single character will do. To turn Instant Messages back on, send an Instant Message to “\$im\_on.”



### Virtual Romance

Robin Williams writes wonderful little books for computer users. Her book *The Little Mac Book* (published by Peachpit Press) should be on every Mac user’s shelf. Robin is the penultimate romantic: she’s charmed by the Byronic, the poetic, the courtly. She writes:

“There was a letter in my mailbox. I didn’t recognize the name of the sender. The letter quoted MacBeth, ‘Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day, to the last syllable of recorded time....’ The writer complained of a gloomy evening in Atlanta, wet and dark and lonely. I realized this person had probably done a search for users who mentioned an interest in Shakespeare in their bios. So I sent a letter back, which included, ‘Hey, lighten up. MacBeth’s dysfunctional. I know a bank where the wild thyme blows, where oxlips and the nodding violet grows.’

“We exchanged several other short letters. He was a 24-year-old son of a minister. I was a 37-year-old single mother of three, pure heathen. It was easy to be friends because neither of us expected anything from the other.

“One late night I was hanging around in the lobby. I had only been connected to America Online for about a month, so I was still learning the etiquette and the conventions of online socializing. I heard a tinkling sound, as if someone threw fairy dust at me. On the screen was my first Instant Message, and it was from my friend. We sent a few messages back and forth, then he suggested we go to a private room. I had no idea what a private room was at that time, nor was I aware of what private rooms are generally used for. So I innocently tripped along with him to a room.

“I remember the feeling that night so clearly because it gave me a brief glimpse into the power of virtual reality. Meeting him in the lobby that night was as if I saw him across the





floor of a crowded room. He winked at me, nodded his head toward the hallway, and we snuck out and met in the corridor. We tiptoed down the hall and slipped into an empty room. It was very innocent; we chatted about our lives, history, philosophy, religion. I was so involved in this conversation that took place in the computer's nether world of digital bits and analog streams that when my neighbor walked into my room I jumped. I felt like she had intruded on a very personal moment, as if I had been caught in a dimly lit room, holding hands.

"Somehow, over the months, this unlikely relationship took an unexpected romantic turn. When I received a letter telling me how he had reached up with his left hand, reached into his fantasy, and pulled me down beside him, when he said, 'I would trade my loneliness for the warmth of her laughter; she would trade her nightgown for the cloak of a young man's affection,' when I found emotions raging in me that fought between my brain and my heart, I realized there were facets to human nature that this new medium of communication was going to expose in new and different ways. It was going to be an interesting summer."

### Center Stage & Rotunda

America Online offers two special chat rooms called *Center Stage* and *Rotunda*. This is the format AOL uses to present special guests or to offer "game shows" for members to play.

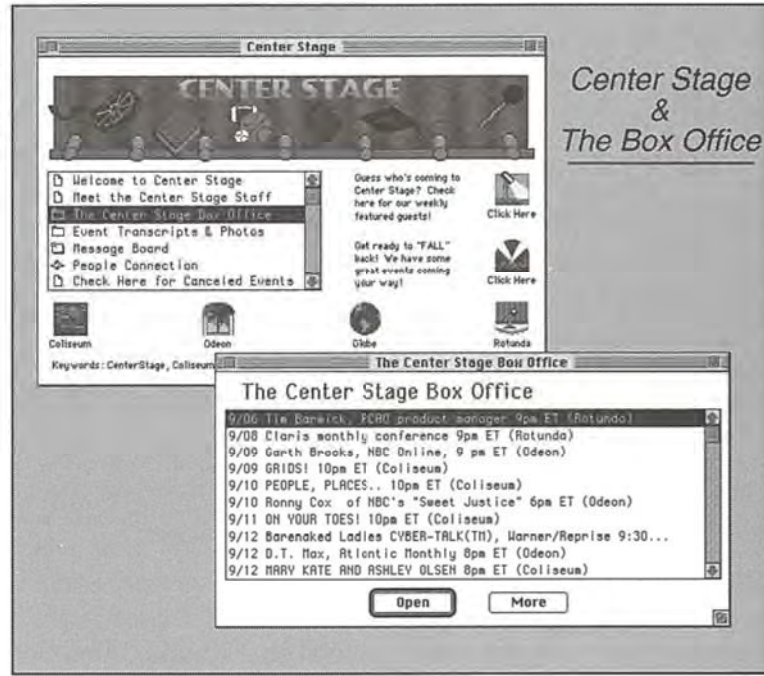
Typically, members attending a Rotunda or Center Stage event sit in "rows" of seats in the audience. Each row has a limited number of seats. This is how AOL accommodates a large audience of members without exceeding its own 23-member room capacity. Your chat window contains the text of everything that's happening on stage, along with comments from other members in your row (but not from members in other rows). You can change rows if you like, as long as there's an empty seat in that row, and you can turn off the comments of members in your row if they're distracting.

Provision is usually made to submit questions or comments to the people onstage. The event's host receives your message and (optionally) delivers it to the guest for a response.

Center Stage and Rotunda schedules are posted each day and are available by using the keyword: Center Stage or the keyword Rotunda (see Figure 12-15). There are many other "large-room" events sponsored by individual forums as well. To see their schedules, use the keyword TITF (Tonight in the Forums).



Figure 12-15: The Box Office lists all upcoming Center Stage events. Double-click any one for details.



Rules for the Center Stage game shows are available by opening the Game Show Rules folder pictured in Figure 12-15. Read them before you take part in a game. Game shows are often profitable: winning contestants are awarded free connect time.

The person in charge of Center Stage—AOL’s “theater district”—is Amy Arnold. Another team player who has come up through the ranks, Amy recruits the guests who have filled her four auditoria to capacity recently—something that rarely happened before she took over.

As I mentioned a moment ago, the Center Stage feature is often used to present special guests to members. One of those recently featured was Guy Kawasaki. Kawasaki is the former Director of Software Product Management at Apple Computer, and as such was one of the key players in the success of the Macintosh personal computer.

Guy left Apple in 1987 to start his own software company. An author, he’s written *The Macintosh Way*, *Selling the Dream*, *Database 101*, and *The Computer Curmudgeon*. Formerly he was a columnist for *MacUser* magazine. Portions of his Center Stage transcript appear below.

**Marge Hawk:** Hi Guy! Welcome to Center Stage!

**Mac Way:** Hi all!



- Marge Hawk:** Do you plan on writing a biography?
- Mac Way:** Who would care about my biography?
- Mac Way:** I am just a Diligent Oriental who did okay in Silicon Valley.
- Mac Way:** Not like I am Bill Gates or Steve Jobs.
- Question:** What would be one thing you would like to change in the computer industry?
- Mac Way:** Good question. Let me think... Several things come to mind 1) Level of compensation for Apple execs. Nah, too obvious. 2) Software piracy. Nah, too greedy. 3) Assumption that you have to have lots of money to start a company. This is it. I want everybody out there to have the courage and masochism to start new companies and not listen to the prevailing cr\*\* that it takes lots of (vc) money.
- Question:** Guy, do you recommend living in the Silicon Valley area to young people trying to get into the computer industry?
- Mac Way:** It is not really necessary. I think the place to start in the business is in field sales. That way you can learn about rejection and what customers want. If you work in the Valley, in the headquarters of companies, you tend to lose touch with customers because you live in the "Tower."
- Question:** I am an avid PC user and I have recently read your book. Can you give me one good reason why I should buy an Apple?
- Mac Way:** Sure. You can never have too fast a car, too many silk blouses, or too easy a computer to use. How many apps do you really use? I bet a Macintosh owner can use more.
- Question:** Guy, Do you think Apple has sold out Mac evangelism and religion in favor of market share, "strategic" alliances and business footholds?
- Mac Way:** Another good question. I don't think Apple "sold out." I think it just "leased" it for a while. When they need good, ole evangelism for the next computer, they'll get back the feelings. Toward the end of the Apple II, there wasn't much "evangelism" for it either.
- Question:** Do you think there will ever be an end to the Windows/Macintosh "debate?"
- Mac Way:** Never. What else do the press and analysts have to write about? You can say you heard it here first. The world can be divided into two groups: 1) those who can do, and 2) those who can't. Those who can't and can write, become

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