

**What a knockout!** We're not sure which is hotter, Denzel Washington's adored physique or his new movie "The Hurricane," the story of boxer Rubin Carter. ... page 8

**Lost in space!** Despite a big budget and the directorial assistance of Francis Ford Coppola, sci-fi flick "Supernova" sinks into the black hole of bad movies. ... page 8

**The father, the son and ... three daughters?** The gospel trio Trin-i-tee 5:7, taking its name from a Biblical passage, flaunts both traditional faith and contemporary style on *Spiritual Love*. ... page 7

# DIVERSIONS

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## cyber sprawl

With the union of America Online and Time Warner, the Net continues its entertainment invasion and looks to link to TV.



## Merger to Add New Dimensions to Household Entertainment

By DANIELE EUBANKS  
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Perched on the edge of your couch, remote in hand, you gaze intently at the illuminated screen. It's Thursday night, and you're hanging out with "Friends." Will Rachel run away with a circus performer or stick around serving coffee and waiting on Ross? You pick. That's right, there's a box to click for each scenario. Rachel's destiny lies in your hands.

Like those "Choose-Your-Own-Adventure" books we used to read as kids, interactive TV is in the works, and is expected to radically change the way we are entertained.

One huge move toward advancing Internet technology is the recent merger between America Online and Time Warner Cable.

Blending the speed and massive carrying capacity of TV cables with the memory and ability to individualize communication of personal computers will greatly expand resources and potential. Benefits include faster transmission of information; clearer, more detailed images; and enough space to engage in two-way correspondence, leading to an interactive future.

Cable TV transfers information through a broadband connection, which is about 50 times faster than the analog telephone connection most people use to access the Internet, said UNC communications studies Professor Happ Kindem. The cable wires also provide more space for car-

rying information.

"Broadband multiplies exponentially the amount of information that can be streamed at one time," Kindem said.

Broadband cable connections have the space to carry the two-way exchange needed for interactivity. Traditional phone connections, much like narrow Italian streets, just aren't big enough for communication traffic to flow in two directions. Broadband is more like a superhighway, giving everyone plenty of room to move around.

Currently, Time Warner offers a broadband Internet connection called Road Runner. This high-speed modem has an immediate Internet connection (no waiting or busy signals), is live indefinitely, and doesn't tie up a phone line.

But the union between Time Warner and AOL will lead to much more, Kindem said.

"The largest Internet provider using primarily phone line connections is merging with one of the largest entertainment providers," Kindem said. "I have no doubt about the alliance leading to interactive TV."

AOL is calling the earliest version of interactive home entertainment AOL TV and claims it could be up and running in the next year.

Within the next five years, providers might be able to offer an even more advanced interactive system, said Xinshu Zhao, director of the UNC Center for Research in Journalism and Mass Communications.

Zhao explained the benefits of integrated tech-

nology. "Imagine the Web is a TV station - you can talk back, you can copy material. Imagine I'm listening to a radio station (on the Web) - I can pause it," he said. "In the future the computer and the TV will become one thing."

AOL's deal with Veon Inc., a San Francisco-based company that makes software to make online video streams interactive is a move that could ignite the technological boom.

With Veon's software, viewers can launch another video, an animation, a picture or music file when watching a video online, Veon CEO Joanna Shields said in the San Jose Mercury News last week.

Another explosive step is AOL's deal with TiVo Inc. This company has developed technology capable of recording television as it is broadcast. AOL hopes to make it possible for viewers to pause, rewind and replay shows as they watch.

But it might be awhile before interactive entertainment reaches the Triangle area. Brad Phillips, the vice president of government and public affairs at Time Warner's Raleigh division, said the local cable company did not expect any major changes in service immediately.

"The merger itself is not something that will occur overnight," he said. "It's something that will take a year or more to complete. It's way too soon to comment on benefits for the customer."

While major innovations in Internet technology might take years to reach Chapel Hill, entertainment consumers will see some immediate

benefits from the merger.

AOL members will have access to Time Warner entertainment resources that cannot be reached from other sites. Members will be able to play exclusive music clips from artists on Time Warner's label, or link to Time Warner magazines such as *In Style*, according to a press release on Time Warner's Web page.

And those who refuse to buy into the America Online dream can expect to find more pesky AOL disks in Time Warner products.

Even with its slew of benefits, the \$350 billion merger leaves many with reservations. Zhao said he feared that the powerhouse might limit TV writers' freedom of speech because they would have to consider the interests of a greater number of shareholders. Kindem worries the information and entertainment superpower will become an overwhelming force in the industry.

"The downside is that so much more information and entertainment programming is becoming increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer Internet providers," he said. "The larger the provider, the more conservative it tends to be about advancing technologically and providing better service to consumers."

But Kindem predicts the AOL/Time Warner

### How to Get Connected

■ **Analog Telephone Modem** - Uses your regular phone line and gives you around a 54K connection. Slow standard way to the Net.

■ **ISDN Telephone Modem** - Still uses your regular phone line, but is a little faster, around 64K.

■ **ADSL Telephone Modem** - The Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line uses a phone line, but is 30 to 100 times faster than an analog modem. BellSouth has a \$300 start-up fee and \$50 monthly rate.

■ **Road Runner** - Broadband cable connection using a high-speed cable modem. It's 50 times faster than analog with a huge capacity for information. Time Warner offers the service for a \$100 startup and \$40 monthly fee.



conglomerate will have competitors, and smaller companies will be struggling to become major players. "Consumers can benefit from services emerging from increased competition," he said.

"It is all about money and power, but it's also about new opportunities - a continual explosion of audiovisual technology that will transform the future of entertainment."

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## BIZBUZZ ENTERTAINMENT NEWS

### The 'Other Group' of Oscars

The Independent Spirit Awards, the Oscars for independent films, released the nominees for 1999's best movies. Among the nominees for best film are Alexander Payne's "Election," David Lynch's "The Straight Story" and Steve

Soderberg's "The Limey." A fan might ask, "Where's 'The Blair Witch Project' and 'Being John Malkovich'?"

Due to the ceremony's rules, first-time features and first-time directors cannot be nominated for best film of the year. However, both movies received nominations for best first-time feature and best first-time director.

### They Can't Take Away My Dignity

According to a Hawaiian newspaper, security guards at the Keahole-Kona International Airport found 15.2 grams of marijuana in Whitney Houston's bag Jan. 11.

Following a routine inspection, guards seized the bag and tried to detain Houston until police arrived, but she left for San Francisco anyway.

Police arrived a full 45 minutes after Houston's plane left for San Francisco. If convicted, Houston faces 30 days in jail and a \$1,000 dollar fine. Houston has not commented on the incident.

### What Would Buddha Do?

Just in case Jesus' example didn't offer enough spiritual guidance, a new book lends the perspective of another religious leader - Buddha.

"What Would Buddha Do?: 101

Answers to Life's Daily Dilemmas" provides advice that is "helpful, insightful and surprisingly hip." As an added bonus, the book comes complete with a trendy "W.W.B.D." bracelet.

### Puff Daddy Indicted

A Manhattan grand jury charged Sean "Puffy" Combs with criminal possession of a weapon in the second and third degree and for having two loaded hand guns in his possession. If convicted, he could face 15 years in prison.

Combs was arrested after a shooting at a Times Square club but proclaims he is "100 percent innocent." Perhaps he

believed he had the right to carry loaded weapons in order to threaten people when they heckle him for his absolute lack of talent.

Police charged Combs' protege, rapper Jamal "Shyne" Barrow, with attempted second-degree murder, assault and reckless endangerment in the shooting that left people injured.

### Still More "Simpsons" Merchandise?

In honor of "The Simpsons" 10th anniversary, Fox will celebrate by doing what they do best: selling a ton of gratuitous "Simpsons" merchandise.

On the new "Simpsons" Web site,

[www.thesimpsons.com](http://www.thesimpsons.com), consumers can buy paraphernalia from its online store.

Fox will inundate stores with a new line of interactive talking action figures and a Springfield diorama, two new comics, two more Simpsons' video games and a rerelease of the CD "So Simpsons" that features over 50 tracks of songs, themes and underscore music.

When faced with this shameless merchandising a consumer might say, "Simpsons Pez dispensers are about the only thing they aren't selling." Oh yeah, Fox is selling those as well.

— Compiled by Matt Mansfield