

# PAPER

## GEEK WEEK

Robert Cringely documents  
the triumph of the Web. By Vikki Tobak



Robert Cringely  
uncovers the Internet

**T**he revolution will not be televised, it will be computerized—or at least that's what cyberpundit Robert X. Cringely believes. Today, it's possible to practically live through your keyboard, whether it's sending e-mail, ordering groceries or checking out nudie pics of Leo DiCaprio. But what do we really know about the origins and the future of the Net? Cringely offers some answers.

No newcomer to the subject, Cringely was employee number 12 at Apple Computer in the late 70's. He then earned his stripes as a columnist for the influential *Infoworld* magazine, where, for eight years, he witnessed the evolution of a technology that would change the world. In 1993, he wrote the techie tell-all *Accidental Empires: How the Boys of Silicon Valley Make Their Millions, Battle Foreign Competition and Still Can't Get a Date* (HarperBusiness).

Cringely's new PBS documentary, *Nerds 2.0.1: A Brief History of the Internet*, has the answers to everything you ever wanted to know about the World Wide Web but were afraid to ask. In the

three-hour special (a follow-up to *Triumph of the Nerds*, his highly touted 1997 tribute to the rise of the PC), Cringely digs deep and dishes some surprising details regarding the meteoric rise of the Internet and the "entrepreneers" who've made their fortunes from our mouse-clicks.

For example, did you know that the Internet began as a Pentagon project in the late 60's intended to facilitate communication between military bases during the height of the Cold War? "I think people will come away with several ideas from my documentary," says Cringely. "One is that the Internet is a 30-year-old 'overnight sensation,' when in fact it was a long time coming. The general public has the idea that the Net came to be three years ago."

Cringely documents the Net's civilian roots among hippies. San Francisco's WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link) was the original online virtual community, a place where, starting in 1986, Deadheads could talk shop and trade bootlegs. Back then, Cringely explains, "We saw hippies who wanted to share a culture, and what we have today are similar communities of interest."

This meticulous look at the Internet couldn't have come at a better time. After all, it has only taken four years for cyberspace to lure the fingertips of 50 million Americans, while it took 13 years for television to reach the same number of people. Says Cringely, "The Internet suddenly makes it possible to extract from a global community and eliminate the concept of time and distance from the equation."

*Nerds 2.0.1: A Brief History of the Internet*, PBS, Nov. 25, 8 p.m. The weekly Internet column "I, Cringely" can be found at [www.pbs.org/cringely](http://www.pbs.org/cringely) ★