

CYBERNEWS

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Warning: America Online Viruses *Beware of Strangers Bearing Gifts*

Cyberspace has become an exciting frontier for computer users all over the world. For many, America Online is the Internet provider of choice. However, a new threat has presented itself to unsuspecting users of AOL, and it comes complete with it's own marketing campaign.

By now, most computer users know what a computer virus is and the damage it can do. Every March, the horror stories of the now infamous "Michaelangelo" virus are shown throughout the media. Virus scanners and "shields" are commonplace in most office computers systems, and home computer users are also gaining savvy in this area. But, virus scanning can only go so far - they only search for things which don't belong on your computer. What if a virus was so well disguised and so cleverly marketed that it actually invited you to deliberately download and install it on your computer?

It is called AOLGOLD, or sometimes AOL Version 3.0 virus, and it is being emailed to unsuspecting America Online members as the "newest update for America Online". A file is attached to the email, named AOLGOLD.ZIP. Simply reading an e-mail message or even downloading the included file will not do damage to your machine. You must execute (or run) the downloaded file to release the virus and have it cause damage. If you attempt to "install" AOLGOLD, the virus will deliberately delete vital Windows and DOS directories in your computer. The latest version of AOLGOLD (AOL ver 3.0) is also rumored to contain a sub-program, which finds your America Online password and forwards it to the hacker who mailed you the virus. All of this has been done by you (during the "install"), so your virus scanner never detects it until it is too late.

Although the latest version of Norton Anti-Virus does have a rescue program for the AOL GOLD virus, there is no way for a virus scanner to stop the theft of your password, if in fact this virus has this capability. If you have recently tried to "update" your version of America Online and are now experiencing difficulties with your computer, call Bryant Enterprises immediately. Your data may be



"AOL Gold" or "AOL 3.0" may be viruses inviting themselves into your computer

recovered with the undelete program in Windows (or DOS), but this must be done swiftly. Do not turn your computer off!

While the threat of a virus may cause concern to new America Online users, it should be kept in mind that this program can only be sent to you by email and you must download and run it yourself. America Online has gained a superb reputation for maintaining large, virus-free software libraries. With a little know-how, you can still "surf the net" safely through America Online.

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