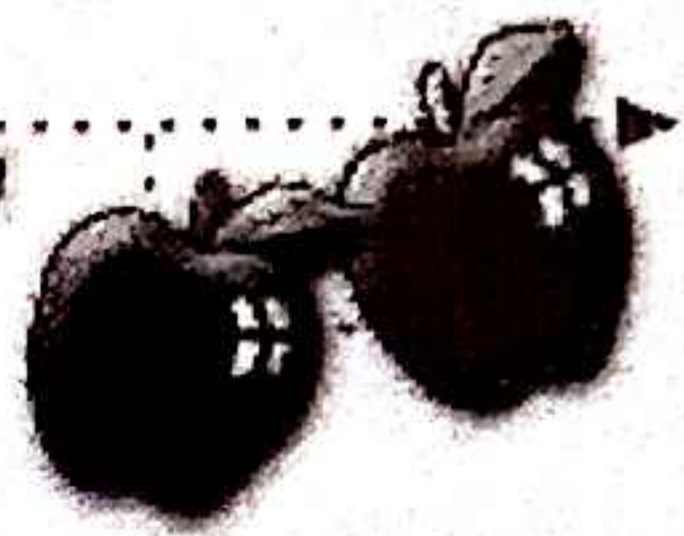


# TUTORIAL TUESDAY



## Have a Cuppa Java

by Scott Holstad

The Internet is overflowing with Java. You can't escape. Everywhere you go, you hear all of those little buzz words ("espresso" this and "cafe" that and "brewed" the other). Hhhmmm, gets a little sickening after awhile. So, whatup??? How come a product which has been out for just slightly over a year virtually rules the online world? What's it mean for us?

### "What is Java?"

Java(TM) is an object-oriented programming language developed by Sun Microsystems. It's designed to enable a Web browser to execute "applets" (mini-applications). Perhaps you've heard complaints that HTML makes Web pages too static -- no user interaction is possible beyond the obvious use of hyperlinks to get to new pages. Java is designed to remedy that. With Java applets, designers can enhance layouts and employ animated graphics, and users can enjoy games and a certain level of interactivity.

### "Fair enough, but where did it come from, and why is it called Java?"

The original project, named Oak, was initiated around 1990. It went through several transitions (originally envisioned as being the enabling technology behind a personal digital assistant -- netspeak=PDA -- like Apple's Newton), but was put on the back-burner. By '94, however, the Web was taking off and the smart people at Sun recognized that they possessed something in Java which had great promise for use on the Internet. Patrick Naughton put together a browser prototype called HotJava(TM), and the rest is history.

Java was named during a lengthy Sun brainstorming session. DNA and Silk were the other two name finalists. While there is some debate as to who originated the term, rumors abound that an engineer named Chris Warth came up with it, inspired by the coffee they were consuming during the session. The former Java product manager, Kim Polese, is, however, widely credited with both pushing for approval of the name and its subsequent success.

### "As scintillating as that is, what's the importance of Java? What's it actually do?"

Java is an important development for several reasons. It allows user input, extended graphics capabilities, and a smaller server load. (The server is the computer where the files that make up a Web page are actually stored.) This last point is especially important. CGI scripts (another method allowing limited interactivity; for example, an online order form) are server-side programs; Java applets are client-side. Actual programs are thus downloaded directly to your computer (the client), where they're then executed. Rather than having tons of users clogging up a Web server with CGI requests, each user can execute a program on a personal system, freeing the server for more pressing needs.



## "If Java is a language, can I speak it?"

Sure, Java is a programming language, and it's available to anyone, but people who are unfamiliar with programming languages may find it difficult to ingest. Those familiar with the C/C++ programming language should find it easy going. You may wish to check out some [tutorials](#), read a magazine like [JavaWorld](#), or even buy a book. While you can download the [JDK](#) (Java(TM) Developers Kit) from Sun, there are other applications out there with a friendlier face, such as [Symantec Cafe](#).

## "How can I experiment with Java?"

Well, if you're interested in developing applets, you have a few choices: Sparc, Solaris, Mac, NT, and Win95. If you're interested in viewing Java-enhanced sites, you need a Java-enabled browser. In addition to Sun's [HotJava](#) browser, Netscape Navigator(TM) 2.0 (and up) and Microsoft's Internet Explorer 2.0 (and up) are the current choices.

## "Where can I find some groovy Java examples?"

Well, you can go pet [The Interactive Cat](#), blow up the [Tower of London](#), or enjoy [Jerry's Java Page](#). You can become a [Celebrity Painter](#), and play [JavaCraps](#) or [StarBase](#).

## "Only, it sounds great, but is there anything bad to say about Java?"

Now that you mention it... when you download a Java applet, you are downloading executable material to your computer. Theoretically, this could include a virus. While there haven't been any reports of this happening, the possibility exists.

More importantly, in my estimation Java is the closest thing to vaporware ever to hit the Net! (Vaporware: cyberspeak for a vastly overhyped computer product/technology.) While the potential is vast, so far the hype is infinitely more considerable than the actual advances Java brings. So you spice up a Web page with a couple of meaningless moving graphics... big deal! Maybe I don't want to waste my time downloading it? The vast majority of Java examples you'll currently see seem to exist **only** to show off; they add virtually nothing of substance to the Web site. Until developers can move forward as the technology progresses, Java's hype will continue to outpace reality.

That said, it is a step forward, and companies (ahem, Sun) are betting billions. So, what do you think? Take a minute to [lemme know](#) how you feel and where you see Java taking us.



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