

# Sallying Forth on a New Adventure

by Art Smith

As the newly elected chair of the MUMPS Development Committee (MDC), I have the honor of writing a regular column in this journal. My predecessor, Ed de Moel, titled his column "Windmills"—a reference to his native Holland. Whenever I saw that title, however, it made me think of Don Quixote, the mad knight of Cervantes who saw ogres in windmills, but who also saw beauty in ugliness and nobility in the commonplace. In the end, the beauty and nobility won out.

I see parallels in this with M and the work of the MDC. Some people seem to feel, perhaps rightly, that the MDC spends much of its time tilting at windmills; tending to insignificant details and minor advancements and ignoring the important vistas ahead of us. Pursuing these ogres, though, is part of the vision of beauty and nobility we hold for M. Our quest is to find (or, if necessary, to make) beauty where others see only ugliness and to uncover nobility in what others see as commonplace. We can only hope that, like Don Quixote, our vision wins out in the end. I hope to use this column to show the path of our questing from the viewpoint of the vision we hold. Perhaps it will enable you to see wisdom in our madness.

At our last meeting, March 16-19, the MDC embarked on a bold new quest. A new subcommittee was formed to develop specifications for a new language, tentatively named Omega. This effort has gained support not only from the "user" repre-

sentatives in the MDC, but also from the M vendors and from authorities on object orientation outside of the M community. This language will complement M, drawing from the best that M and other languages have to offer and inter-operating fully with M. The language will introduce many new concepts as well. The subcommittee has already adopted a standing document outlining some of the goals and visions of the new language, and a portion of that document, "Taking M Beyond the Year 2000," can be found elsewhere in this issue (see page 43).

One of the principal design goals for the language is a commitment to object orientation. Just as everything is a string in M, so everything is an object in Omega. The incredibly powerful and flexible data structure of the M array is preserved, as is the seamless ability to handle both temporary and persistent data (i.e., locals and globals). Like M, Omega will be multiprocessing, though we hope to introduce multithreading into the language as well. Modern block structuring and control flow will also be part of the language, though the details of these have yet to be defined.

Does this mean that development on M will stop? No! While we are all excited about the possibilities that Omega represents, we know that M is not dead and must not be allowed to wither from inattention. The MDC remains committed to ongoing development in M, as well as development of the new language.



Art Smith

Are you interested in working on the development of a new programming language? The MDC is always looking for new volunteers. We meet for four days twice a year at different cities in the U.S. and abroad, though task group and working group activities may go on between meetings as well. All of our members are volunteers—the cost of their participation is borne by the individuals themselves or by the institutions they represent. In addition to the hotel, meal and travel costs, there is a \$100/year membership fee and a \$100/meeting fee for attending. In return for this, you receive four inch-thick mailings (one before and after each meeting) and get to spend four long days in meeting rooms poring over the details of our language(s), seeking beauty and nobility in what others call ugly and commonplace. Mad? Perhaps, but very rewarding to those who share this particular madness.

For more information on the MDC or any of its activities, please feel free to send me e-mail at [Emergent@sockets.net](mailto:Emergent@sockets.net), or write me care of the MTA Office at 1738 Elton Rd., Suite 205, Silver Spring, MD 20903. Please also feel encouraged to send me any questions you would like answered, or topics you would like addressed in this column.

**M**  
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