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The Road Less Traveled

A few favorites for the Mac user on your gift list

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**Keyboard
Maestro is a
wonder.**

By Al Fasoldt

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These are a few of my favorite things in the world of modern Macs. Keep this list handy when you're doing last-minute holiday shopping.

Software:

PictureTheBatch. This oddly spelled image converter made me a fan as soon as I tried it out. It will convert entire folders full of images from one format to another automatically; you simply drag the folders to PictureTheBatch and drop them there. You have a choice of 11 image formats, including my current big-time favorite, lossless JPEG2000. I bought it over the Internet immediately. It's only \$19.95. Get it from www.q-technologies.biz/PictureTheBatch.

Allume Systems **Creative Essentials.** For \$149.99, Allume packages the excellent Corel image editor, Photo Paint 11, with Corel Draw 11 and Corel Trace 11. Also in the box are Bryce 5 for landscape creation and Toom Boom Studio Express, an animation editor. You also get two dozen excellent fonts. (Allume isn't new. It used to be called Aladdin Systems, the company behind Stuffit.) Find it at a store or order from www.allume.com/mac/creative.

Keyboard Maestro. Making macros -- little programs that press keys for you, insert text or do timed, repetitive tasks -- could not be easier. This is the champ. Get it from www.keyboardmaestro.com for only \$20. It will be the best \$20 you have ever spent on software.

Books:

"The Cult of Mac" by **Leander Kahney** (No Starch Press), \$39.95. Hardcover coffee-table book that you'll keep looking through even when your coffee table's too crowded for books. Mac history, Mac culture, Mac idiocy, Mac mania -- it's all here. The illustrations are priceless.

"Mac OS X: The Missing Manual," \$29.95; **"iPhoto 4: The Missing Manual,"** \$24.95, and **"Garage Band: The Missing Manual,"** \$19.95, all by **David Pogue** and published by O'Reilly. The Japanese routinely anoint their most revered writers and artists as national treasures, something David Pogue surely would qualify for in this country. He is unequalled among book authors for his clarity of prose and humorous bent. The three "Missing Manuals" here are outstanding. If you could choose only one, be sure to get the OS X Missing Manual.

Accessories:

Case Logic CD sleeves (CDP25), \$25 for 25 pages of sleeves. High-quality CD and DVD sleeves holding eight disks in each 3-ring binder sleeve, double sided with four on each side. I've tried many other methods of storing CDs and DVDs (I have hundreds of backup disks and image storage CDs) and nothing works as well and is as safe as Case Logic sleeves. At a buck a page (12 cents per disk), they're an affordable way to keep your CD-Rs and DVD-Rs organized and safe from damage. You'll need 3-ring binders, too, but don't pay more than you have to. Get the kind kids use for school.

Burning Blue Audio USB headphone amplifier, \$149 from www.burningblueaudio.com. I use this deck-of-cards size device constantly. I've been a super-fi headphone nut for decades, but it wasn't until I tried the Burning Blue amplifier that I heard really great audio from my computers. It turns my G4 into a gee-whiz sound machine. But beware: If you take the plunge and get this portable, USB-powered headphone powerhouse, you'll need better headphones than the ones you probably have now. (See the next item.)

NoiseBuster NB FX noise-canceling headphones, \$69 from www.goodcans.com. These new Noisebuster headphones not only look good -- I pegged the price at \$200 when I first saw them -- but they sound even better. They use a small, replaceable battery that powers a noise-canceling circuit. You can go back to Bach even in a noisy environment.
