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Chapter 1

Mac OS X Panther 101 (Prerequisites: None)

In This Chapter

- Defining Mac OS X Panther
- Finding help if you're a beginner
- Turning on your Mac
- Shutting down your Mac without getting chewed out by it
- Knowing what you should see when you turn on your Mac
- Taking a refresher course on using a mouse

Congratulate yourself on choosing Mac OS X, which stands for Macintosh Operating System X — that's the Roman numeral *ten*, not the letter *X (*pronounced *ten,* not *ex)*. You made a smart move because you scored more than just an operating system upgrade. Mac OS X version 10.3 Panther includes dozens of new or improved features to make using your Mac easier as well as dozens more that help you do more work in less time. Now you can use these new features to be more productive, have fewer headaches, reduce your cholesterol level, and fall in love with your Mac all over again.

In this chapter, I start at the very beginning and talk about Mac OS X in mostly abstract terms. You can turn your Mac on if you like, but most of this chapter has no hands-on material. What you will find, however, is a bunch of important stuff that you need to know in order to proceed. If you're a total beginner to the Mac experience, you should probably read every word in this chapter. Even if you're past the beginner stage, you may want to skim these sections anyway to refresh your memory.

Those of you who are upgrading from an earlier version of Mac OS to Mac OS X should read the Appendix right about now for installation information.

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Gnawing to the Core of OS X

Along with the code in its read-only memory (ROM), the operating system (that is, the *OS* in *Mac OS X*) is what makes a Mac a Mac. Without it, your Mac is a pile of silicon and circuits — no smarter than a toaster.

"So what does an operating system do?" you ask. Good question. The short answer is that an *operating system* controls the basic and most important operations of your computer. In the case of Mac OS X and your Mac, the operating system

- Manages memory.
- Controls how windows, icons, and menus work.
- Keeps track of files.
- Manages networking.
- Does housekeeping. (No kidding!)

Other forms of software, such as word processors and Web browsers, rely on the operating system to create and maintain the environment in which that software works its magic. When you create a memo, for example, the word processor provides the tools for you to type and format the information. In the background, the operating system is the muscle for the word processor, performing crucial functions like the following:

- Providing the mechanism for drawing and moving the window in which you write the memo
- Keeping track of a file when you save it
- Helping the word processor create drop-down menus and dialogs for you to interact with
- Communicating with other programs
- And much, much more (stuff that only geeks could care about)

So now that you have a little background in operating systems, take a gander at the next section before you do anything else with your Mac.

Don't let that UNIX stuff scare you. It's there if you want it, but if you don't want it or don't care, you'll rarely even know it's there. All you'll know is that your Mac just runs and runs and runs without crashing and crashing and crashing.

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The Mac advantage

Most of the world's PCs use Windows. You're among the lucky few to have a computer with an operating system that's intuitive, easy to use, and, dare I say, fun. If you don't believe me, try using Windows for a day or two. Go ahead. You probably won't suffer any permanent damage. In fact, you'll really begin to appreciate how good you have it. Feel free to hug your Mac. Or give it a peck on the CD-ROM drive slot — just try not to get your tongue caught.

As someone once told me, "Claiming that the Macintosh is inferior to Windows because most people use Windows is like saying that all other restaurants serve food that's inferior to McDonald's."

We may be a minority, but we have the best, most stable, most modern all-purpose operating system in the world. Here's why: UNIX — on which Mac OS X is based — is widely regarded as the best industrial-strength operating system. For now, just know that being based on UNIX means that a Mac running OS X will crash less often than an older Mac or a Windows machine, which means less downtime. But perhaps the biggest advantage OS X has is that when an application crashes, it doesn't crash your entire computer, and you don't have to restart to continue working.

A Safety Net for the Absolute Beginner (Or Any User)

In this section, I deal with the stuff that the manual that came with your Mac doesn't cover — or doesn't cover in nearly enough detail. If you're a first-time Macintosh user, please, *please* read this section of the book carefully — it could save your life. Okay, okay, perhaps I'm being overly dramatic. What I mean to say is that reading this section could save your *Mac.* Even if you're an experienced Mac user, you may want to read this section anyway. Chances are that you need a few reminders.

Turning the dang thing on

Okay. This is the big moment — turning on your Mac! Gaze at it longingly first and say something cheesy, such as "You're the most awesome computer I've ever known." If that doesn't turn your Mac on (it probably won't), keep reading.

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If you actually thought that flattery would turn on your Mac, you should probably read *Self-Psychotherapy For Dummies* before you continue with this book. (And if you think that book exists, maybe you should check out *Gullibility For Dummies.*)

If you don't know how to turn your Mac on, don't feel bad — just look in the manual that came with your Mac. Apple, in its infinite wisdom, has manufactured Macs with power switches and buttons on every conceivable surface: on the front, side, and back of the computer itself, and even on the keyboard or monitor. Some Macs (including most older PowerBooks) even hide the power button behind a little plastic door. Because of the vast number of different configurations, I can't tell you where the switch is without devoting a whole chapter just to that topic. (Can you say booooo-ring?)

What you should see on startup

When you finally do turn on your Macintosh, you set in motion a sophisticated and complex series of events that culminates in the loading of Mac OS X and the appearance of the Mac OS X Desktop. After a small bit of whirring, buzzing, and flashing (meaning that the operating system is loading), OS X first tests all your hardware — slots, ports, disks, random access memory (RAM) — and so on. If everything passes, you hear a pleasing musical chord and see the tasteful gray Apple logo in the middle of your screen and a small spinning pinwheel cursor somewhere on the screen. Both are shown in Figure 1-1.

- **Everything is fine and dandy:** Next, you see the soothing blue Mac OS logo, the words *Mac OS X,* and a status indicator with messages that tell you that the Mac is going through its normal startup motions. Makes you feel kind of warm and fuzzy, doesn't it? If all this fanfare shows up on your screen, Mac OS X is loading properly. In the unlikely event that you don't see the gray Apple logo, the soothing messages, and the familiar Desktop, see Chapter 18 where I show you how to troubleshoot your system.

  Then, you may or may not see the Mac OS X login screen, where you enter your name and password. If you do (you'll only see it if your Mac is set up for multiple users; don't worry, I tell you all about this in Chapter 16), press the Enter or Return key and away you go.

  If you don't want to have to type your name and password every time you start or restart your Mac (or even if you do), check out Chapter 16 for the scoop on how to turn the login screen on or off.

  Either way, the Desktop soon materializes before your eyes. If you haven't customized, configured, or tinkered with your Desktop, it should look something like Figure 1-2. Now is a good time to take a moment for positive thoughts about the person who convinced you that you wanted a Mac. That person was right!

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Figure 1-1: No more smiley Mac or multi-colored beach ball cursor at startup. These are their Panther replacements.

- **Sad Mac:** If any of your hardware fails when it's tested, you could see a black or gray screen that may or may not display the dreaded sad Mac icon (shown in the left margin) and/or hear a far less pleasing musical chord (in the key of F-minor, I believe), known by Mac aficionados as the *Chimes of Doom*.

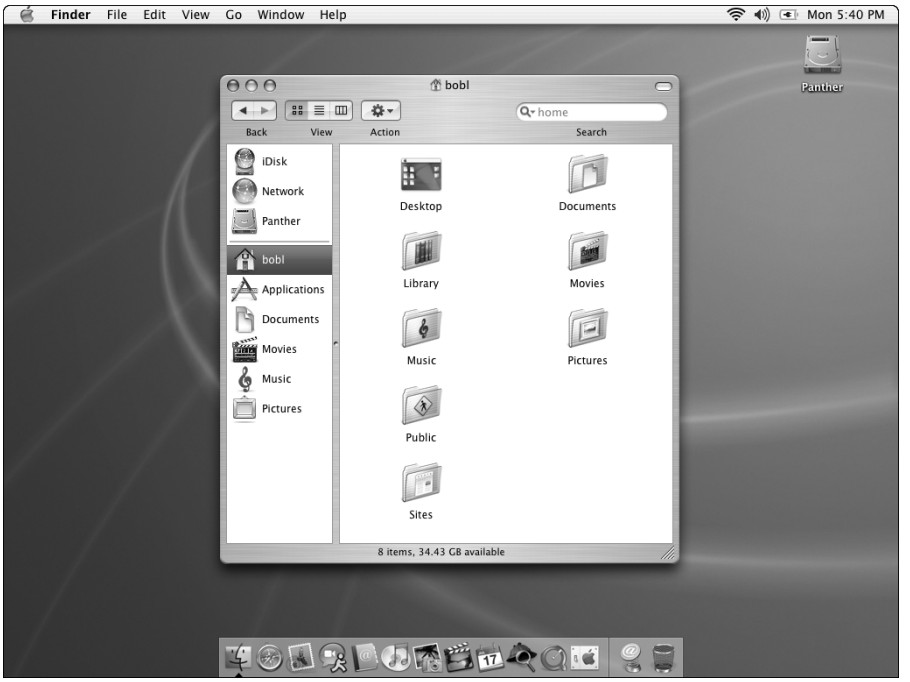

Figure 1-2: The Mac OS X Desktop after a brand, spanking new installation of OS X.

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Some older Macs played the sound of a horrible car wreck instead of the chimes, complete with crying tires and busting glass. It was exceptionally unnerving, which may be why Apple doesn't use it anymore.

The fact that something went wrong is no reflection on your prowess as a Macintosh user. Something inside your Mac is broken, and it probably needs to go in for repairs (usually to an Apple dealer). If any of that's already happened to you, check out Chapter 18 to try to get your Mac well again.

If your computer is under warranty, dial 1-800-SOS-APPL, and a customer service person can tell you what to do. Before you do anything, though, skip ahead to Chapter 18. It's entirely possible that one of the suggestions there can get you back on track without you having to spend even a moment on hold.

- **Prohibitory sign (formerly known as the flashing question mark disk):** Although it's unlikely that you'll ever see the sad Mac, most users eventually encounter the prohibitory sign shown in the left margin (which replaced the flashing question-mark-on-a-disk icon and flashing folder icon back in OS X 10.2 Jaguar). This icon means that your Mac can't find a startup disk, hard drive, network server, or CD-ROM containing a valid Macintosh operating system. See Chapter 18 to try to ease your Mac's ills.

How do you know which version of the Mac OS your computer has? Simple. Just choose About This Mac from the menu (that's the menu with the symbol in the upper-left corner of the Finder menu bar). The About This Mac window pops up in the middle of your screen, as shown in Figure 1-3. The version that you're running appears just below *Mac OS X* in the center of the window. Click the More Info button to launch Apple System Profiler, which has much more information, including processor speed, bus speed, number of processors, caches, installed memory, networking, storage devices, and much more. Discover more about this program in Chapter 13.

Shutting down properly

Turning off the power without shutting your Mac down properly is one of the worst things you can do to your poor Mac. Shutting down your Mac improperly can really screw up your hard drive, scramble the contents of your most important files, or both.

If a thunderstorm is rumbling nearby or if you're unfortunate enough to have rolling blackouts where you live, you may *really* want to shut your Mac down. (See the next section where I briefly discuss lightning and your Mac.)

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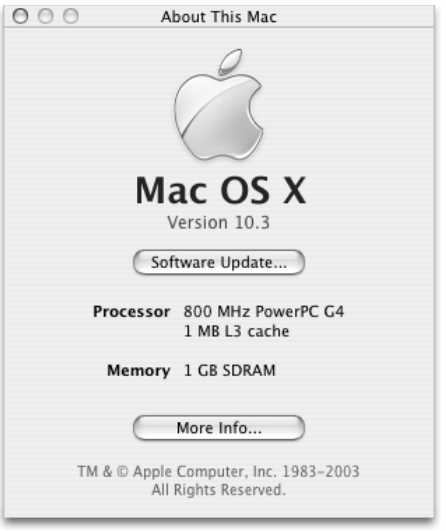

Figure 1-3: See which version of Mac OS X you're running.

To turn off your Mac, always use the Shut Down command on the menu (which I discuss in Chapter 6), or you can press the Power key once and then click the Shut Down button. On Apple Pro keyboards, which don't have a Power key, press Ctrl+Eject instead and then click the Shut Down button that appears (or press the Return key, which does the same thing).

The legend of the boot

Boot this. *Boot* that. "I *booted* my Mac and. . . ." or "Did it *boot*?" and so on. Talking about computers for long without hearing the *boot* word is nearly impossible.

But why *boot*? Why not *shoe* or *shirt* or even *shazam*?

Back in the very olden days — maybe the 1960s or a little earlier — starting up a computer required you to toggle little manual switches on the front panel, which began an internal process that loaded the operating system. The process became known as *bootstrapping* because if you toggled the right switches, the computer would "pull itself up by its bootstraps." This phrase didn't take long to transmogrify into *booting* and finally to *boot.*

Over the years, *booting* has come to mean turning on almost any computer or even a peripheral device, such as a printer. Some people also use it to refer to launching an application: "I booted Excel."

So the next time one of your gearhead friends says the *b*-word, ask whether he knows where the term comes from. Then dazzle him with the depth and breadth of your (not quite useful) knowledge!

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Eternally yours . . . *now*

Mac OS X is designed so that you never have to shut it down. You can configure it to sleep after a specified period of inactivity. (See Chapter 15 for more info on the Energy Saver features of OS X.) If you do so, your Mac will consume very little electricity when it's sleeping and will be ready to use just a few seconds after you awaken it (by pressing any key or clicking the mouse). On the other hand, if you're not going to be using it for a few days, you may want to shut it down anyway.

Note: If you leave your Mac on constantly and you're gone when a lightning storm or rolling blackout hits, your Mac may get wasted. So be sure that you have adequate protection if you decide to leave your Mac on and unattended for long periods. See the section "A few things you should definitely NOT do with your Mac" elsewhere in this chapter for more info on lightning and your Mac. If I plan to be away from mine for more than a day, I usually shut it down, just in case. But because OS X is designed to run 24/7, I don't shut it down at night unless it's dark and stormy.

Of course, most of us have broken this rule several times without anything horrible happening. Don't be lulled into a false sense of security, however. Break the rules one time too many or under the wrong circumstances, and your most important file *will* be toast. The only times when you should turn off your Mac without shutting down properly is if your screen is frozen or if you crash and you've already tried everything else. (See Chapter 18 for what those "everything elses" are.) This doesn't happen often — and less often under OS X than ever before — but when it does, turning your Mac off and then back on may be the only solution. Sometimes even that doesn't work, and you may have to unplug the computer from the power outlet to get it to reboot.

A few things you should definitely NOT do with your Mac

In this section, I deal with the bad stuff that can happen to your computer if you do the wrong things with it. If something bad has already happened to you — I know . . . I'm beginning to sound like a broken record — see Chapter 18.

- **Don't unplug your Mac when it's turned on.** Very bad things can happen, such as having your operating system break. See the preceding section where I discuss shutting your system down properly.
- **Don't use your Mac when lightning is near.** Here's a simple life equation for you: Mac + lightning = dead Mac. 'Nuff said. Oh, and don't place much faith in inexpensive surge protectors. A good jolt of lightning will fry the surge protector right along with your computer as well as

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possibly frying your modem, printer, and anything else plugged into it. Some surge protectors can withstand most lightning strikes, but these warriors aren't the cheapies that you buy at your local computer emporium. Unplugging your Mac from the wall during electrical storms is safer and less expensive. (Don't forget to unplug your external modem, network hubs, printers, or other hardware that plugs into the wall as well — lightning can fry them, too.)

- **Don't jostle, bump, shake, kick, throw, dribble, or punt your Mac, especially while it's running.** Your Mac contains a hard drive that spins at 5,400+ revolutions per minute (rpm). A jolt to a hard drive while it's reading or writing a file can cause the head to crash into the disk, which can render many or all the files on it unrecoverable. Ouch!
- **Don't forget to back up your data!** I beg you: Please read Chapter 17 now before something horrible happens to your valuable data! If the stuff on your hard drive means anything to you, you must back it up. Not maybe. You must. Even if your most important file is your last saved game of Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2, you still need to realize how important it is to back up your files.

  In Chapter 17, I discuss how to back up your files, and I *strongly* recommend that you read Chapter 17 sooner rather than later — preferably before you do any significant work on your Mac. Dr. Macintosh sez: "There are only two kinds of Mac users: those who have never lost data and those who will." Which kind will you be?
- **Don't kiss your monitor while wearing stuff on your lips.** For obvious reasons! Use a soft cloth and/or the Klear Screen polish and wipes Apple recommends if you need to clean your display.

Point-and-click boot camp

Are you new to the Mac? Just learning how to move the mouse around? Now is a good time to go over some fundamental stuff that you need to know for just about everything you'll be doing on the Mac. Spend a few minutes reading this section, and soon you'll be clicking, double-clicking, pressing, and pointing all over the place. If you think you've got the whole mousing thing pretty much figured out, feel free to skip this section. I'll catch you on the other side.

Still with me? Good. Now for some basic terminology.

- **Point:** Before you can click or press anything, you have to *point* to it. Place your hand on your mouse and move it so that the cursor arrow is over the object that you want — like on top of an icon or a button. Then click the mouse to select the object or double-click it to run it (if it's an application or an icon that starts up an application). You point and then you click — *point-and-click,* in computer lingo.

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- **Click:** (Also called *single-click*.) Use your index finger to push the mouse button all the way down and then let go so that it produces a satisfying clicking sound. (If you have one of the new optical Apple Pro mice, you push down the whole thing to click.) Use a single-click to highlight an icon, press a button, or activate a check box or window.
- **Double-click:** *Click twice* in rapid succession. With a little practice, you can perfect this technique in no time. Use a double-click to open a folder or to launch a file or application.
- **Control-click:** Hold down the Control key while single-clicking. Control-clicking is the same as right-clicking on a Windows system and displays a menu (called a *contextual menu*) where you Control-clicked. In fact, if you are blessed with a two- (or more) button mouse (I personally use the four-button Kensington Turbo Mouse Pro Wireless and recommend it highly), you can right-click and avoid having to hold down the Control key.
- **Drag:** *Dragging* something usually accompanies clicking it first. With the mouse button held down, move the mouse on your desk or mouse pad so that the cursor — and whatever you select — moves across the screen. The combination of pressing the mouse and dragging it is usually referred to as *click-and-drag*.
- **Press:** A *press* is half a click. Instead of letting go of the mouse button to finish the click, keep holding it down. In most cases, your next step is to drag the mouse somewhere — down a menu to choose a command or across the screen to move an object, for example.
- **Choosing an item from a menu:** To get to Mac OS menu commands, you must first open a menu and then pick the option that you want. Point at the name of the menu that you want with your mouse cursor, press your mouse button down, and then drag your mouse downward until you select the command that you want. When the command is highlighted, finish selecting by letting go of the mouse button.

If you're a long-time Mac user, you probably hold down the mouse button the whole time between clicking the name of the menu and selecting the command that you want. You can still do it that way, but you can also click once on the menu name to open it, release the mouse button, and then drag down to the item that you want to select *and then click again*. In other words, OS X menus stay open for a few seconds after you click them, even if you're not holding down the mouse button. Go ahead and give it a try . . . I'll wait.

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A pop quiz on mousing

For those of you who need to hone your mousing skills, here's a little quiz:

1. How do you select an icon?

A. Stare at it intently for five seconds.

B. Point to it with your finger, slap the side of your monitor, and say "That one, stupid!"

C. Move the mouse pointer on top of the icon and click once.

2. When do you need to double-click?

A. Whenever you find yourself saying, "There's no place like home."

B. When you're using both hands to control the mouse.

C. When you want to open a file or folder.

3. How do you select multiple items or blocks of text?

A. Get several people to stare intently at the items that you want to select.

B. Attach multiple mice to your Mac.

C. Slide the mouse on your desk, moving the onscreen pointer to the location where you want to begin selecting. Press and hold down the mouse button. Drag the pointer across the items or text that you want to select. Then let go of the mouse button.

4. How do you move a selected item?

A. Call U-Haul.

B. Pick up and tilt your monitor until the item slides to the proper location.

C. Point to the item and hold (press) down the mouse button. With the mouse button still held down, drag the pointer to the new location and let go of the mouse button.

If you haven't figured it out by now, the correct answer to each of these questions is C. If any other answer sounded remotely plausible, sit down with your Mac and just play with it for a while. If you have kids at your disposal, watch them play with your Mac. They'll show you how to use it in no time.

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