

Re: help me understand how a Mac is virtually immune to viruses?

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*Source:* <http://sci.tech--archive.net/Archive/sci.astro.amateur/2006-01/msg01385.html>

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- *From:* [brian@xxxxxxx](mailto:brian@xxxxxxx) (Brian Tung)
  - *Date:* Sun, 15 Jan 2006 21:18:42 -0800 (PST)
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lal\_truckee wrote:

- > On the subject of virus/malware on Win and Mac/Linux, first, IMO it's a
- > combination; unix just basically has better designed security AND
- > there's a smaller target space which discourages potential attacks. If
- > Mac and/or Linux became equally common environments wrt Win boxes I
- > think attack attempts would be as common as on Windows; fewer would
- > succeed because of the intrinsic better security.

It depends. I think some of the preference for attacking Windows stems from the common view of Microsoft as the Evil Empire. It's hard to say how much of that is bound up in their success and market share; that is to say, if Unix and/or Mac became as successful as Microsoft, would they too be viewed as "The Man" and therefore be as attractive a target from a "karma" point of view? I don't know, but it does seem that one of the motivations for crackers is what they see as the insidious pervasiveness of Windows.

On the whole, of course, I agree. I think it is naive to think that because a few amateur astronomers cannot produce an example of a live Mac attack, OS X must be, like the Tick, nigh invulnerable—that it has vulnerabilities only of theoretical interest. Most certainly it has the same sort of issues that any OpenBSD system does. I suspect it does do somewhat better than Windows in some (possibly undefinable) objective sense. Such a comparison could only be performed by audit—not by some statistical measure such as attacks detected, or successful attacks, or something like that. The current disparity is surely suggestive, but nothing more.

- > Second, Microsoft just does incredibly stupid things leaving gapping
- > openings in their security. I suppose in each case management thought
- > "it was a good idea at the time" but MS has smart people – I bet those
- > poor smart people cringe every time a MS manager enters the programming
- > offices.

A lot of the vectors were developed at a time when security was viewed as an interesting sidepoint: something to be looked at, surely, but not a showstopper. People look at the recent metadata vulnerability and its long history as though it were particularly egregious, but I think that

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it is exactly those old vulnerabilities that are most likely to persist.  
It would be much less forgivable for a new feature to have that serious  
a problem.

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Brian Tung <brian@xxxxxxx>

The Astronomy Corner at <http://astro.isi.edu/>

Unofficial C5+ Home Page at <http://astro.isi.edu/c5plus/>

The PleiadAtlas Home Page at <http://astro.isi.edu/pleiadatlas/>

My Own Personal FAQ (SAA) at <http://astro.isi.edu/reference/faq.html>

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• *Follow-Ups:*

- ◆ *Re: help me understand how a Mac is virtually immune to viruses?*

◇ *From:* Starlord

• *References:*

- ◆ *help me understand how a Mac is virtually immune to viruses?*

◇ *From:* Beryl Gormley

- ◆ *Re: help me understand how a Mac is virtually immune to viruses?*

◇ *From:* Davoud

- ◆ *Re: help me understand how a Mac is virtually immune to viruses?*

◇ *From:* Chris L Peterson

- ◆ *Re: help me understand how a Mac is virtually immune to viruses?*

◇ *From:* lal\_truckee

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