covering Crosstalk
by Kent Bingham

This book is dedicated to **Cheri, Chelsea, Drew** and **Dax** for letting me bounce ideas off them and for patiently enduring my ranting and raving when I was frustrated with deadlines that didn't always go as smoothly as I hoped.

Introduction

For the past six years, I've been the (almost) exclusive cover artist for *CrossTalk, The Journal of Defense Software Engineering*. The process of brainstorming and designing new cover images each month is both challenging and a great way to keep creatively inspired. I'm constantly trying to reinvent myself and try new styles and approaches to keep my work fresh and new.

My association with *CrossTalk* began in the spring of 2000. I had been working for a number of years doing graphic design for Hill Air Force Base, as well as doing occasional freelance projects. As a freelancer I had gone through a period filled with problem clients and uninteresting jobs. I was burned out on doing any extra design work and hadn't been actively seeking new work for months.

One day, several customers showed up to work with me on a display design, and in the course of their conversation, they brought up the subject of *CrossTalk* magazine. I was somewhat familiar with the publication, as I knew a former staff member, and I had occasionally worked in the past with their then-regular cover artist. Up to that point, the covers I had seen had all been two-color pieces—black and a Pantone purple. They mentioned to me that they had not been happy with the quality of some of the recent *CrossTalk* covers and wondered if I would be interested in doing some freelance cover design. They also mentioned that they were in the process of changing to a full-color cover format. I was interested and thought it would be a great opportunity to get my work seen by a wider audience.

I contacted the editor and to my surprise, discovered that rather than just hiring artists directly, they were conducting a monthly cover competition. In my e-mail response I responded by saying, "Depending on my schedule, I will try to submit, but I have to say that I'm much less inclined to participate under this scenario. A monthly competition pays off for one person, but causes everyone else to have wasted a lot of time with no compensation. If you want a variety of artistic interpretations, wouldn't it make more sense to review portfolios and offer assignments based on the quality of their work? Most of the good freelancers I know are too busy working on paying projects to have a lot of time to invest in speculative efforts. I'm not saying I won't submit. I would like my work to appear in *CrossTalk*. Just pointing out that if you aren't happy with the quality of what you're getting, maybe you should re-examine the process."

Although I still think that I was making a valid point, in retrospect, it was not a very diplomatic way to start a business relationship. I had no clue that it would end up being such a long term association, so it didn't occur to me at the time that coming across as an arrogant, opinionated jerk was perhaps a bad idea. But I forged ahead and put together my first submission…and I won that month's competition…and the next…and the next.

At first I was a little surprised that in a competition scenario, even after creating the winning cover, the editorial staff would request changes. That seemed strange to me because I was stuck in a "winner take all" mentality. I learned quickly to adapt my thinking.

A few months later I got my first taste of losing the competition and experienced the frustration of spending time on a design with no financial compensation. But since I had already had proven that I could compete well and make some extra money, I kept submitting and continued, for a few more months, to win.

I realized that sooner or later, the competition set up would end up being a problem. If my work kept being selected every month, obviously the other artists would stop submitting work, or if I started doing a lot of work that I didn't get paid for, I wouldn't want to continue. After a frustrating scenario with the May 2001 cover, I made the decision that I could no longer continue to submit work under those terms. I was conflicted with this, because at the same time I felt like creatively I was just getting warmed up and wanted to continue to do covers for them. After several telephone conversations and e-mail exchanges, we finally negotiated a way for all parties to get what they wanted. I became the sole artist by agreeing to come up with at least three different concepts for each monthly theme. This allowed them to still have multiple ideas to choose from.

With the competition situation behind me, I changed my focus from "how can I win the competition?" to "how can I best portray the theme?" I did a lot of experimenting with how to submit cover proposals. At times I submitted very rough pencil sketches, and at

other times I found it easier to work on directly on the computer, creating full color designs. I provided narrative with each submission, explaining how the image portrayed the theme, or if it was a rough sketch, I would try to describe how I would be finishing the image.

I found that when I did rough pencil sketches, even though I had an exact vision in my head of what the finished product would be, the *CrossTalk* staff didn't always envision things the same way. I also found that when pencil sketches were competing with full color designs, they were at a disadvantage. Sometimes, to "even out" the competition, I would design something in full color and then draw a pencil sketch of it (essentially working backwards), so that I could present all concepts on even ground.

Each month the *CrossTalk* staff meets and discusses the theme for the upcoming issue. They brainstorm and put together a list of possible cover ideas, which are then forwarded to me. I sometimes work exactly from this list, and other times I come up with additional ideas based on the theme. With each theme, I initially begin researching the various ideas to see what photographic and graphic resources are available to me (stock photos that I can purchase, 3-D models, etc). Through this process I can make sure that I have the resources I need to put together a cover. The last thing I want to do is to present an idea and not be able to carry it out. At the end of my brainstorming sessions, I will often print out pages of thumbnails as reference material before I begin any sketches.

Some themes are very easy to work with and lend themselves to dozens of ideas. Others are more nebulous, like "Configuration Management" or "CMMI." There are times when I have to request additional information in order to better understand the theme I'm trying to represent.

Once I put together my ideas and submit them to the editor, they are presented at the next production meeting, and this is where things get interesting. Most of the time I don't attend these meetings (though I'm sure it would be eye-opening to be a "fly on the wall" and hear the analysis of each submission). Design-by-committee can be a difficult task, as interpreting art is very subjective. It's not easy to get a group consensus on what design to choose. I once heard a joke, which has become a favorite of mine: "You know what a camel is, don't you? *A horse designed by a committee.*"

Most artists typically have an ego, myself included, so having your work reviewed and critiqued month to month can sometimes be exasperating. There are times when I have to literally go back to the drawing board for a second round of sketches because none of my ideas are quite what they're looking for. Other times, they will buy off immediately on a concept. I can rarely predict the outcome of a cover submission, and more often than not, the decision is not what I expect it to be. I almost always make it a point to show everyone in my family the designs before I submit them, and we each make our prediction as to which one will be chosen. I think that the *CrossTalk* staff probably finds me just as unpredictable, and they may think I'm trying to push my personal favorite concept each month (sometimes I am, other times I don't have a favorite). At times I think they presume that I put the one I like best first, but I purposely try to mix it up so my presentation of the concepts is random and doesn't follow a pattern. Just when I think I'm beginning to understand their preferences, they throw me a curve. It keeps things interesting.

After many years of designing covers, I've learned the lesson that my most important job is to help the client get their theme across to the readers. Sometimes that means that I don't always get to do what would be the "coolest" design. Occasionally I've been pleasantly surprised when, after being frustrated with design rejections, I end up creating something that turns out to be much better than what I had initially hoped to do. That is always a pleasant surprise.

Though I can't say that I'm one hundred percent pleased with every cover I've done, there are many that I consider to be some of my best design work.

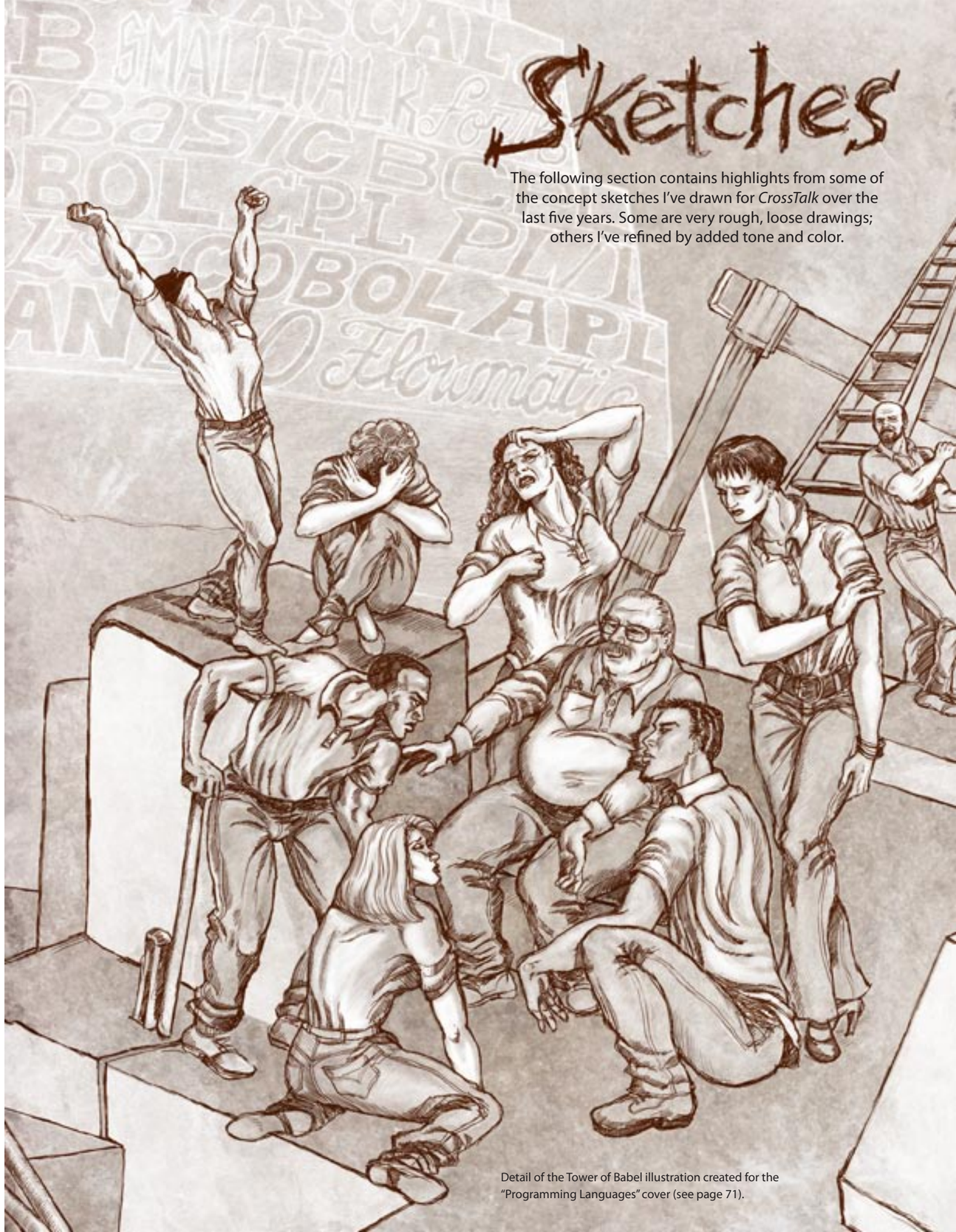
The rest of this book shows not only the finished, published covers, but also includes some behind-the-scenes sketches, rough drafts and covers that were never published. I've included stories and commentary on much of the work.

Enjoy!

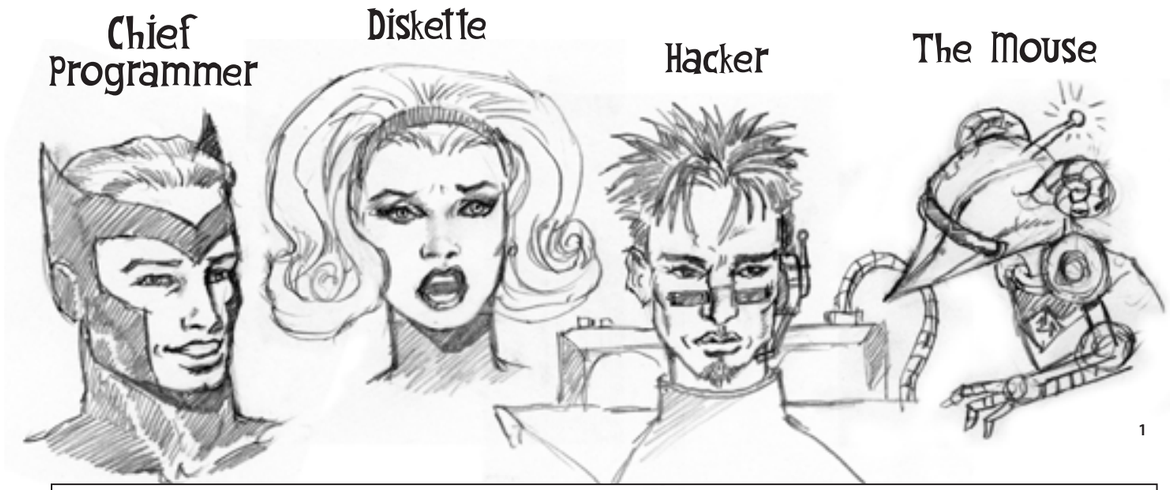
Kent Bingham

Sketches

The following section contains highlights from some of the concept sketches I've drawn for *CrossTalk* over the last five years. Some are very rough, loose drawings; others I've refined by added tone and color.



Detail of the Tower of Babel illustration created for the "Programming Languages" cover (see page 71).



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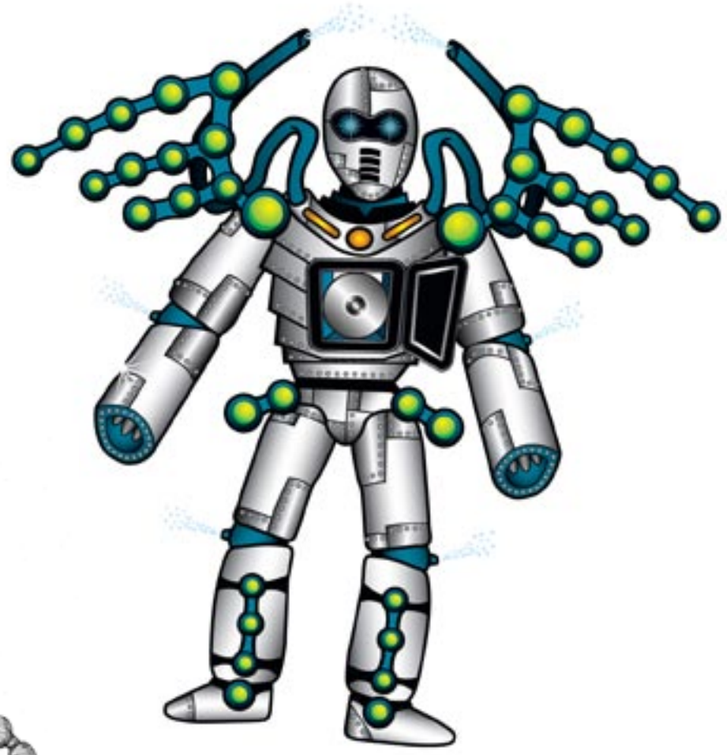
1-3. One of my favorite designs which never got published was a superhero team that I created, which I dubbed "The League of Software Engineers." I designed them to look like they stepped out of an old 1960s Marvel comic book, a homage to the classic Stan Lee/Jack Kirby *Fantastic Four.* Each costume included the double arrow symbol from the *CrossTalk* logo. My narrative to the proposed cover (3) said, "**Chief Engineer**, the muscle-bound hero with the cape is hoisting some heavy equipment, while his lady love, **Diskette** catches CDs as they exit the machine. The somewhat nerdy, and somewhat 'beatnik' **Hacker** sits at a terminal coding (while pining away for his true love, **Diskette**), and **the Mouse** flies through laboratory, making the right click when needed."

1-4. In brainstorming ideas for the October 2001 theme, "Open and Common Software" my plan was to have a group of robots, each with an opening in the center showing a visible CD, showing that although different in design, they all ran on a common operating system. I enlisted my son Drew, who was thirteen at the time, to come up with some robot designs (**1-3**). I did my preliminary sketch (**4**) based on his initial illustrations, and then meticulously created models of the robots in a 3-D software program. See the finished design on page 55.



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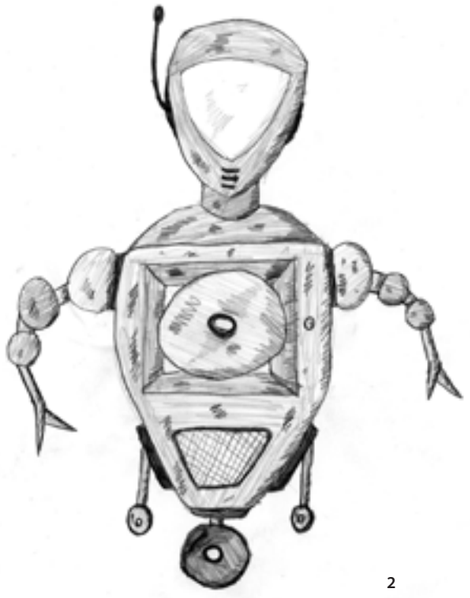

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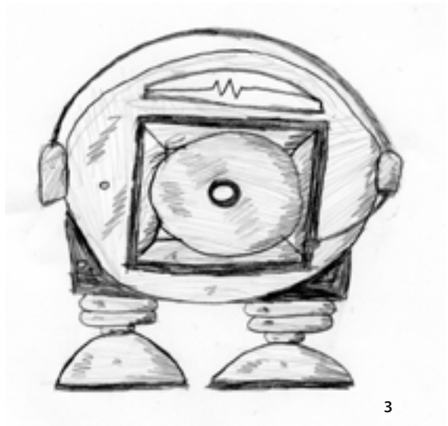

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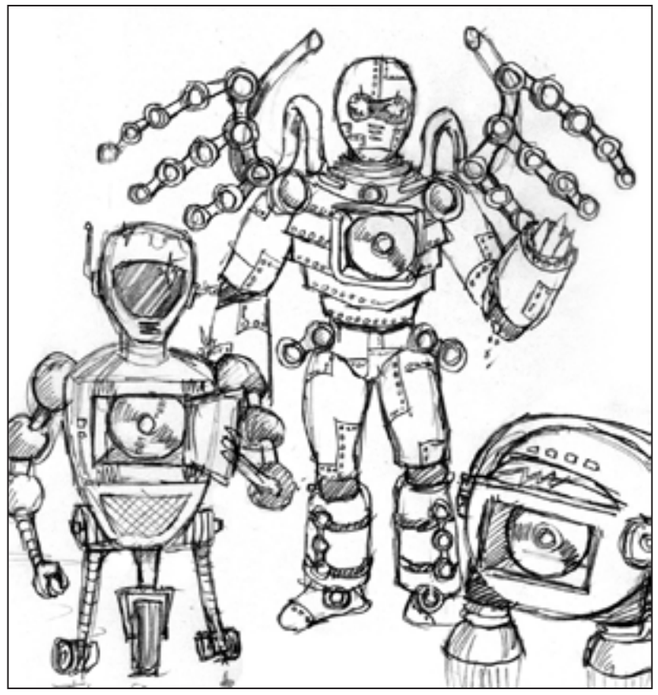

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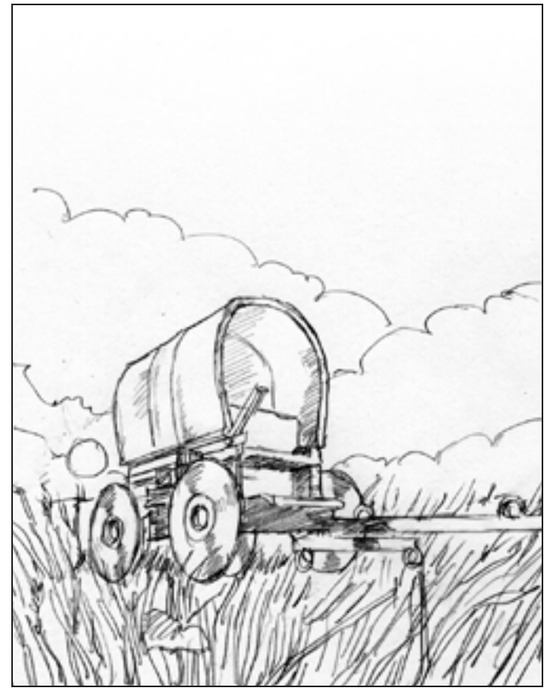

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5. My "Cyber-Frankenstein" sketch was to illustrate the concept of "Distributed Software Development." The analogy of the grave diggers digging up "parts" from graves to be assembled later was a gruesome, yet fun way to portray the idea. This would have appropriately been for an October issue, but was not selected.

6. The theme for this sketch was "Software Legacy Systems." I used a pioneer's covered wagon, but with CDs for wheels, to show that you can get a lot of mileage out of some software. The historical nature of the wagon also supported the "legacy" idea. You can see a preliminary color test of this on page 30.

7. A unused reworking of the classic "American Gothic" painting by Grant Wood was also used to portray Software Legacy Systems, implying the depression-era mentality where being thrifty and frugal was a virtue.

8. This sketch was the one selected for "Software Legacy Systems: Bridging the Past to the Future" (see page 57).

9. This idea used a variety of children's toys, crafted from wood. Each toy utilizes a CD as one of its components, to represent common software running many different systems. The light filled with binary code spilling from the box visually represents "open software systems" (see page 32).

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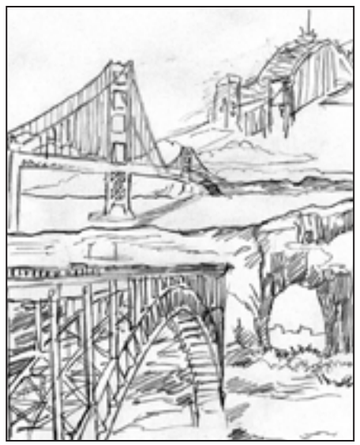

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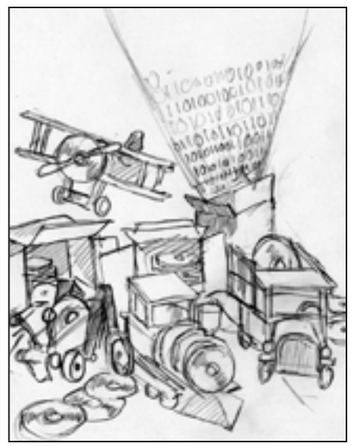

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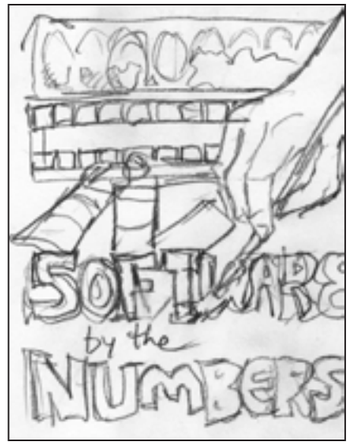

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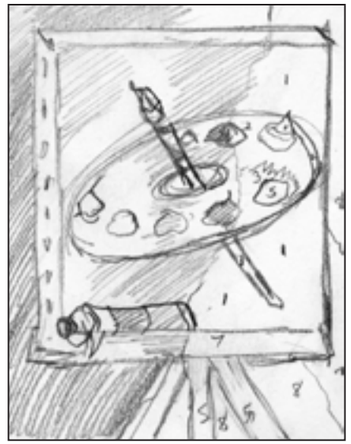

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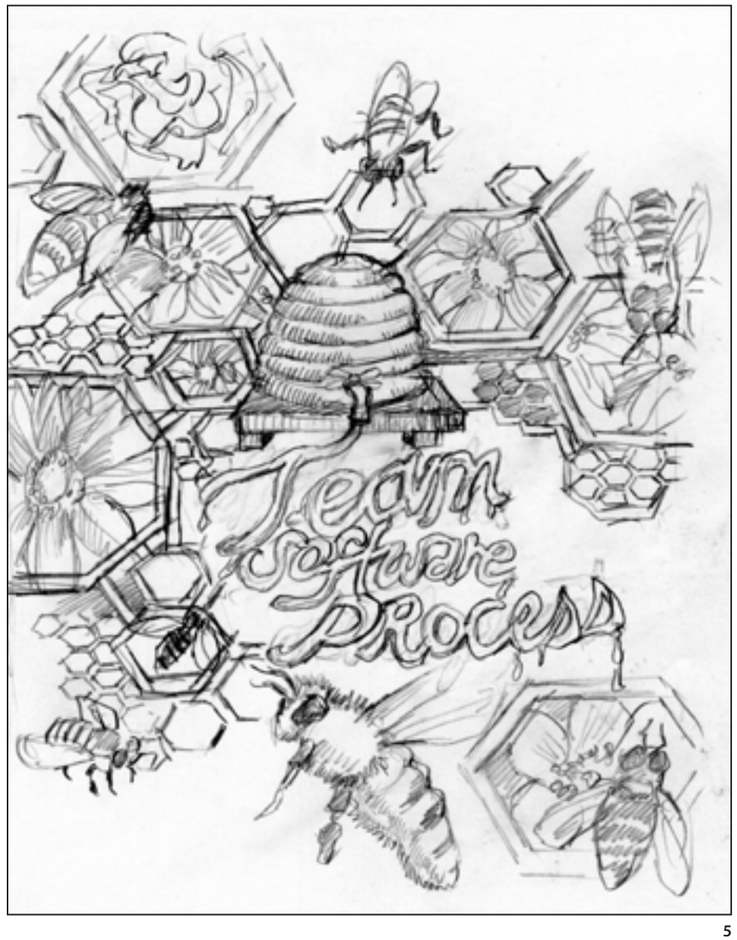

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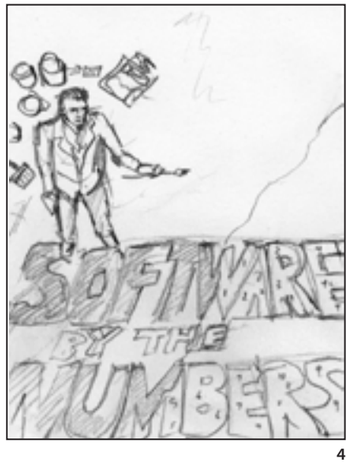

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1-4. I came up with a number of different variations on the theme "Software by the Numbers" (see page 60).

5. I liked the idea of having bees climbing over a digital honeycomb, with hexagonal-shaped computer screens displaying colorful flowers. This idea lent itself to several different themes, including "Distributed Software Development" and "Team Software Process." It was never selected, and so I never finished developing it.

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6. I later attempted to design another superhero team as a homage to DC Comics' *Justice League*. Each hero was designed to represent a branch of the Armed Forces (Air Force, Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard). As with the previous idea, it was never used. Still I enjoyed getting to design the characters and costumes.

7-8. For the theme "Software Design Methodologies" I thought it would be interesting to show software being created in a different way—being poured from hot metal in a foundry. I worked backwards and found a medium resolution photo to use as a reference. I was able to take a fairly lackluster photo and turn in into something more visually interesting (see page 51).

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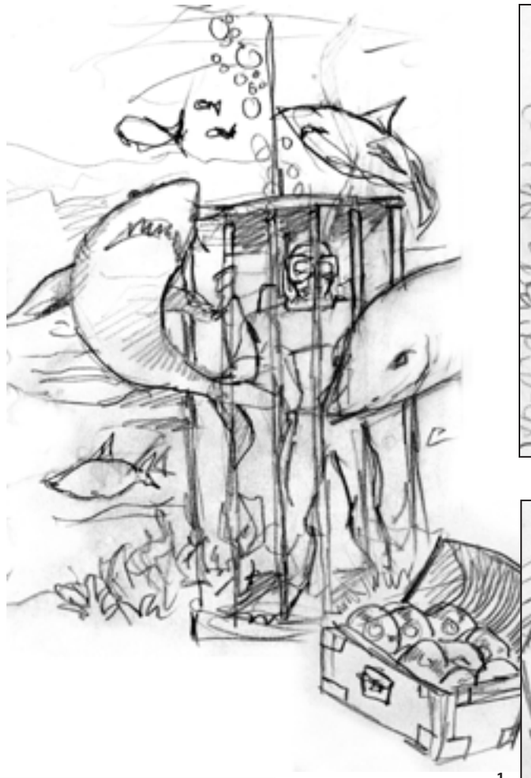
1. I originally did this sketch of a deep sea diver in a cage surrounded by sharks, with a treasure chest filled with CDs just out of reach for the theme "Risky Requirements," but it was initially passed over. A few months later I adapted it for the theme "Information Assurance" (see page 65).

2. Also for the "Risky Requirements theme, I proposed doing the *CrossTalk* masthead as a theatre marquee, with a poster of Harry Houdini, inspired by this photo (**3**). Though submitted several times for various themes, this concept was never selected.

4-6. A selection of unused ideas for the theme, "Forging the Future of Defense Through Technology."



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7. This image was submitted for the theme, "Forging the Future of Defense Through Technology," which was the being used for a special issue of *CrossTalk* that was handed out at the 2002 Software Technology Conference in Salt Lake City. The "blacksmith" was supposed to look like a robot covered with circuitry, but the editorial staff still felt that the anvil and sword looked too archaic.

8-9. So I did a couple of revised sketches changing the anvil and sword to a high-tech assembly line with futuristic military helmets being welded by the "circuit man." Shortly after the concept was approved, I received a phone call where the client expressed concern that perhaps this concept wasn't going to be dynamic enough for this special conference edition. I had a vision in my head of how I wanted it to look, and I knew that what they were picturing from the loose sketch was not the same thing that I was seeing in my mind. I convinced them to let me "forge ahead" and the finished cover (page 62) still remains one of my favorites.

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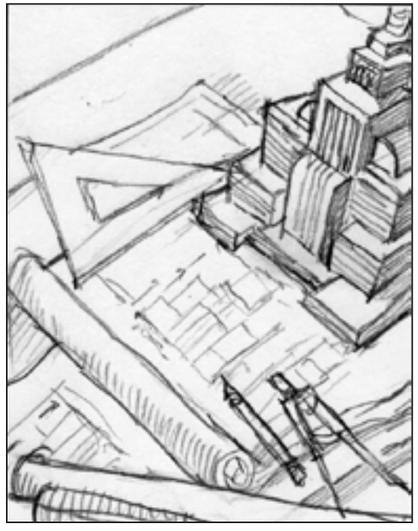

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1. Color test for "Software Estimation" cover (see page 64).

2. Pencil sketch for the "Software Estimation" cover. The massive proportions of the figure were inspired by illustration done by comic book artist Bill Sienkiewicz in the Marvel Comics Daredevil graphic novel titled *Love and War*. I began with a very loose pencil sketch, scanned it in at high resolution and continued to refine the drawing digitally in *Corel Painter*, then added texture for the clothing and background in *Adobe Photoshop*. See the finished cover on page 64.

3. The theme "Team Software Process" was illustrated by a pit crew working on a race car. This concept was approved, but the final cover was not (see page 115). This was one of those times where the client and I disagreed about the image. In my mind I had completed the concept they had approved as I had explained to them through my notes, sketch, and preliminary renderings. The bottom line was that they didn't like the image. Unfortunately, it happened at a bad time, because right when I found out that I would need to scrap this cover and start from scratch, I was leaving town for a summer vacation and was unavailable, so they had someone else work up a new cover from a very lackluster (in my opinion) stock photo. I was miserable and cranky the entire vacation because of the unresolved conflict. Thankfully, we smoothed things over after the vacation and a year or two later, I resurrected the image for another non-*CrossTalk* project.

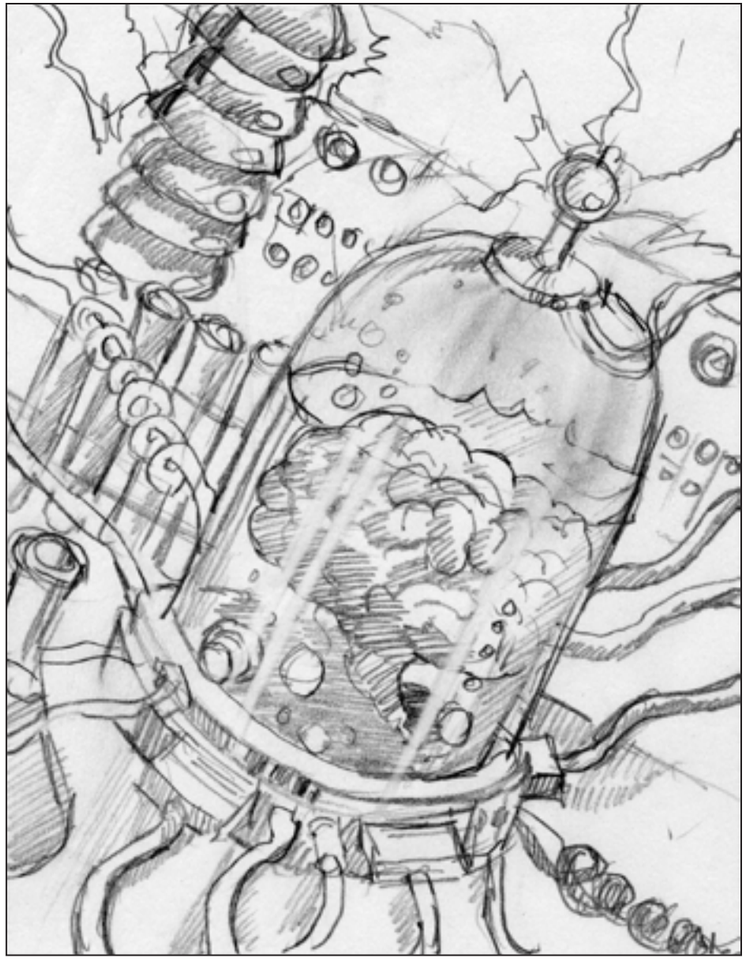
4. I used blueprints and a model of an art deco building to come up with this idea for "Software Acquisition: A Blueprint for Buying and Building Successfully." (See page 66.)

5. This concept illustration took "brainstorming" to a whole new level. My intent here was to do a classical mad scientist's laboratory, but infused with a bit of modern technology. The theme was "Information Sharing" (see page 80).

6. I proposed doing a game board cover on several occasions. This particular idea wasn't used, but I later did a similar cover for "Software Acquisition" (see page 86).

7. Unused "Software Estimation" idea.

8. An unused Egyptian motif. I did a another similar cover, fully rendered (page 114) which was also not used.



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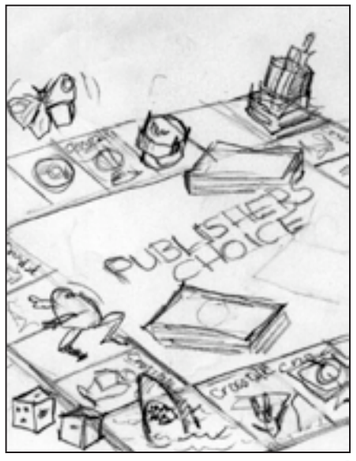

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1. These are very rough illustrations that I used to plan a photo shoot for the March 2003 Sherlock Holmes-themed cover (see page 72).

2. This concept wasn't selected for the "Quality in Software" theme but was later used to portray "Defect Management" (see page 79).

3-4. Two unused Thanksgiving-related images submitted for the "Publisher's Choice" theme.

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5. This unused oriental-styled design was submitted for the theme, "Year of the Engineer and the Scientist".

6. Another unused oriental design, this time incorporating mythical Chinese dragons, also submitted for the "Year of the Engineer and the Scientist" theme.

7. I still liked the idea of using a yin/yang theme, so I later submitted this sketch for the theme, "Consultants: Can't Live With Them, Can't Live Without Them (see page 84). I printed up fortunes, photographed the fortune cookies and added some interesting textures to both the yin/yang symbol and the background to give it a very oriental flavor.

8. This was the first of several unused submissions for a cover about programming languages.

9. Another "Programming Languages" idea, creating a face from pieces of many different photos.

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1. For the February 2003 "Programming Languages" theme, another idea I had was to do a "Tower of Babel" image based on the Gustave Doré biblical illustration (**3**), replacing the ancient inhabitants of Babel with modern-day software engineers. I originally planned to have each figure "speaking" in a different programming language by showing word balloons filled with actual computer code. The editorial staff liked the concept, but without the unnecessary clutter of the word balloons. The finished cover was one of my all-time favorites (see page 71).

2. I drew the figures in *Corel Painter*, at more than double the required resolution, so that I could more easily do detail work. Once the line art was complete, I painted it digitally on a separate layer. This was one of the original color tests. I ended up using more neutral colors on the final cover.

3. The Gustave Doré biblical illustration that was inspiration for the February 2003 cover.

4. An early unused pencil sketch (some of the figures were inked) for the Programming Languages cover. When I found this image years after drawing it, I realized that the central kneeling figure is supposed to me (or at least an idealized version of me, as I was generous in my depiction of the muscles of my arms).

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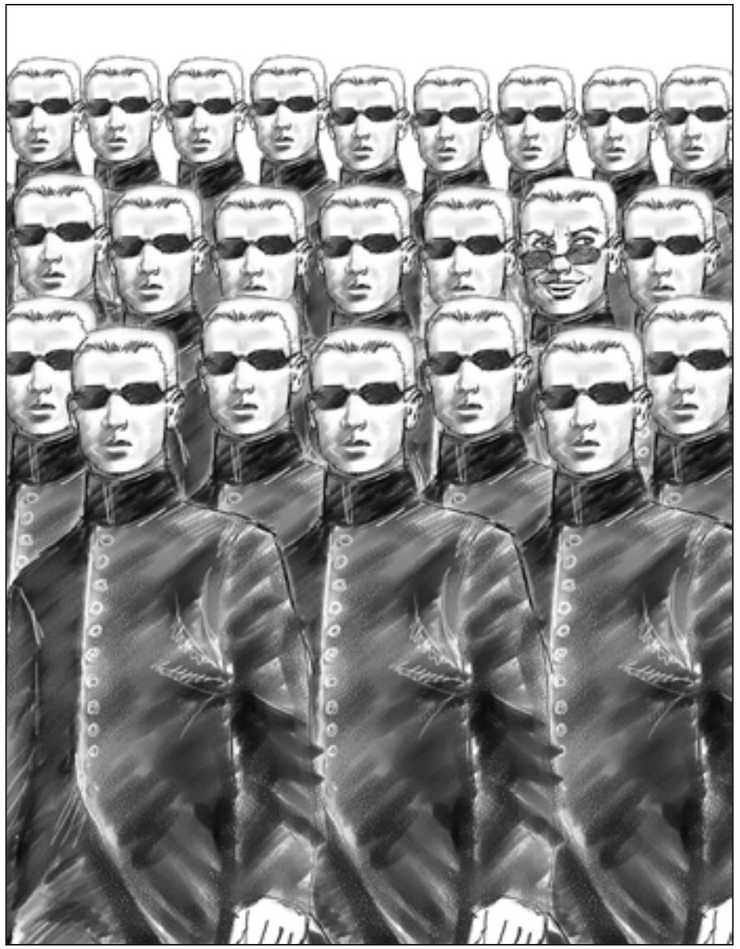

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5. A unused *Matrix*-inspired image for a "Defect Management" theme.

6. For the theme, "Real Time Software" I sketched runners instantly responding to the firing of a gun at the beginning of a race (unused).

7-8. Two variations on chess boards for a "Strategies and Technologies" theme. The final cover was more of a traditional photograph with some dynamic coloring (see pages 74 and 75).

9. The Ugly Duckling as a metaphor for "Defect Management (unused).

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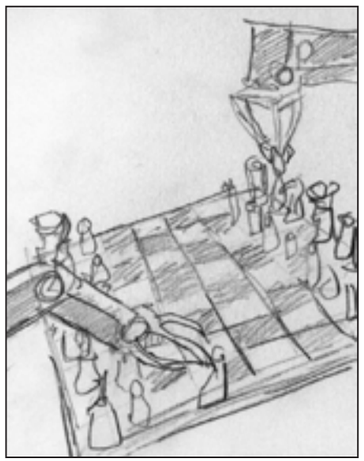

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1. A rough sketch of a proposed collage for the theme, "Commercial and Military Applications Meet" (see final cover on page 76).

2. Another unused proposal for the theme, "Commercial and Military Applications Meet."

3. A sketch depicting a robotic-looking spider weaving a web to interconnect computer systems representing "Network-centric Architecture" (see page 78).

4. This unused sketch showing a maestro leading a "virtual orchestra" was submitted for several themes, but was never used. I also did some test renders in *Poser* (see page 31).

5. For the theme "Information from Senior Leadership I drew an old-fashioned desk, with five envelopes sealed in wax, each bearing the symbol of a branch of the armed forces.

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6. An old-fashioned telephone operator for an "Information Sharing" theme.

7. A take off on the *Tortoise and the Hare* to show "Enabling the Warfighter."

8. A proposed "Defect Management" sketch.

9. This sketch depicting "Real Time Software" by showing an online virtual pizza parlor that delivers pizza hot off the screen. See page 81 for the final image.

10. Another unused *Tortoise and the Hare* sketch, also submitted for the "Real Time Software" theme.

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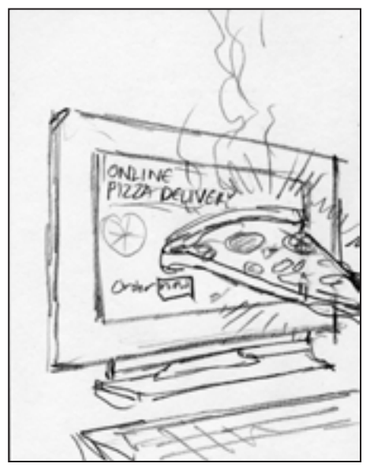

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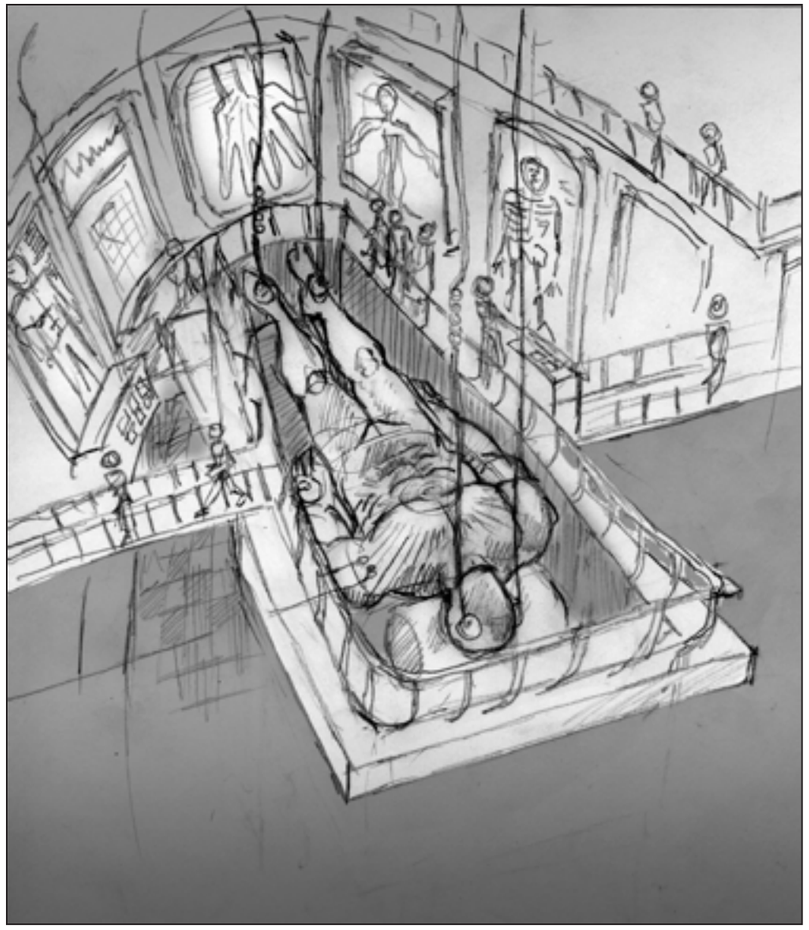

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1. For an "Assessments and Certifications" theme, I came up with the idea of a huge android being examined by a group of scientists.

2-4. Three different submissions for the "Software Toolbox theme. The second image (**3**) was selected. This was a challenge as I had to create the entire toolbox from scratch in a 3-D modeling program. The completed image is on page 94.

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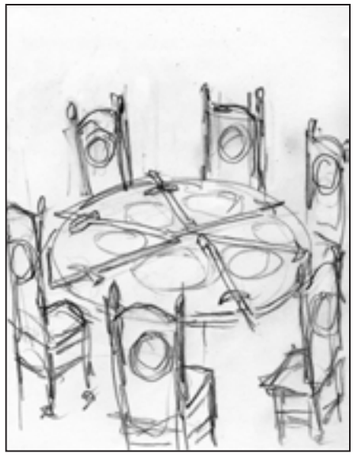

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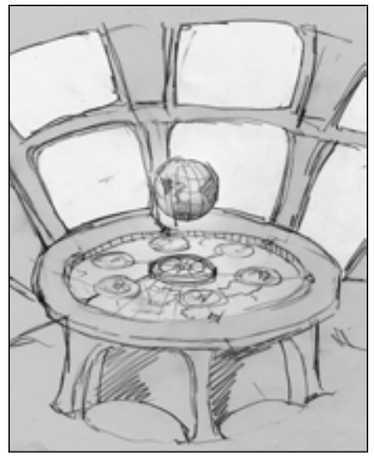

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5-7. These sketches depict both an ancient and a modern-day version of the "Knights of the Round Table", as well as a high-tech, science fiction-inspired version of a war room proposed for an "Information from Senior Leadership" theme. The final cover (page 83) was a cross between the two concepts.

8-9. Two unused ideas using angels and devils for the theme, "Consultants, Can't Live With Them, Can't Live Without Them." I eventually did a finished cover using a different take on the good/evil, angel/devil concept (see page 102).

8

9

1. This unused idea was a rare instance where I actually proposed something that could be classified as "cute". The theme was "Open Source Software," and each of the puppies had tags with names such as "Linux, MySQL, Apache, etc."

2. Here I used Lego blocks for a "Reuse" theme. The final cover (page 95) changed considerably from the original sketch, as I added military vehicles and a runway. I was fascinated to discover that there is a huge worldwide community that build things with "digital Legos." I had problems converting some of the models to formats compatible with my software, but I was able to find a complete stranger from one of the online Lego forums who was more than willing to help.

3. An unused fortune teller idea for "Cost Estimation."

4. Another proposed idea for "Open Source Software." The point I was making here is that sometimes there really is such a thing as a free lunch.

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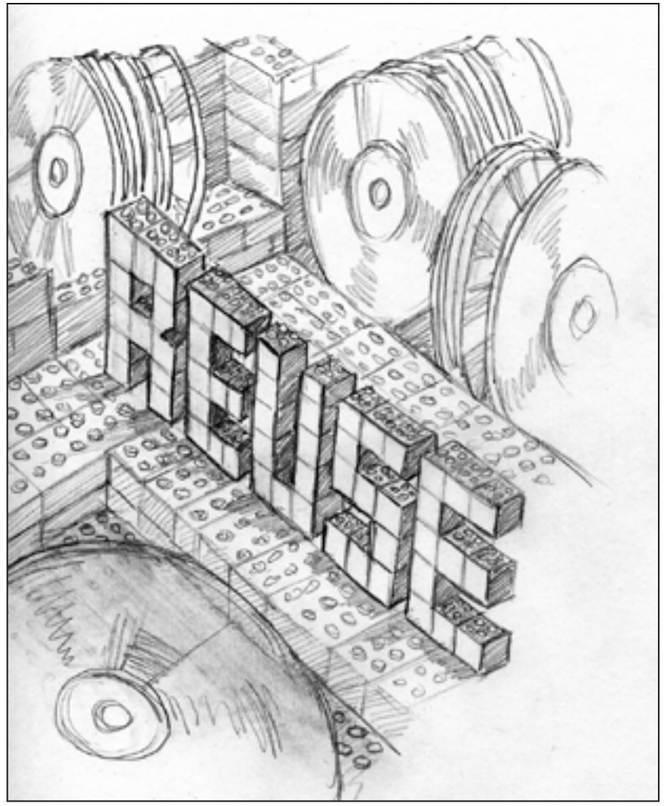

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5. For "Safety/Security" theme, I wanted to do an image inspired by the classic James Bond poster, with beautiful women, spies, and a variety of security metaphors—retina scans, passwords, keys, etc.

6. "A New Twist on Today's Technology" is portrayed here with the creation of the not-soon-to-be-seen-in-stores "iPretzel."

7. This was the idea that was selected for the "Open Source Software" theme, showing a well with an endless supply of water (see page 96).

8. An unused knight-in-armor concept for "Software Safety and Security."

9. Another proposal for "Cost Estimation."

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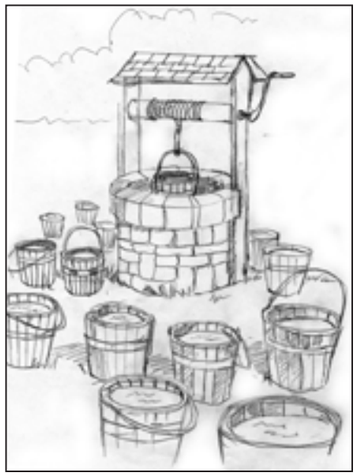

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1. A proposed collage for the "Safety/Security" theme, using a variety of "biometrics" imagery.

2. Another sketch showing a huge iron gate, also to portray the "Safety/Security" theme (see page 105).

3-4. Concept sketches of the god Hermes, running with a cell phone, for a "Communication" theme. I combined the two images into one and gave him a haircut for the finished cover (see page 108).

5. Practice sketches for what I call the "bobblehead cover" (see page 89).

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digital concepts

I don't always begin a design with a sketch. It's often easier to brainstorm and develop concepts directly in graphic design software. The following section highlights both fully developed ideas (complete except for the addition of the masthead) and some preliminary tests and digital "doodles."

This unused image was proposed for the "Systems: Fielding Capabilities" theme. The reworking of the background to match the rainbow colors seen when light is reflected off a CD, changes the image of silhouetted high-tech soldiers, to give it the feel of a rock concert.

1. This is a good example of the kind of "digital doodling," I often do in *Adobe Photoshop*. I take several interesting images and start to play around with them. I often "invert" the colors of the image, as part of the experimenting process, then alter the way the different layers blend until I find something that works well. I originally did this image just for fun one afternoon, and it later ended up being the inspiration for a *CrossTalk* cover (see page 54).

2-4. These are three samples I created in *Bryce* to illustrate the theme, "Software Around the World." Had I finished the concept, I would have varied the faces to represent people of many different nationalities (**2**) or made each flag from a different country, not just Britain (**3-4**).

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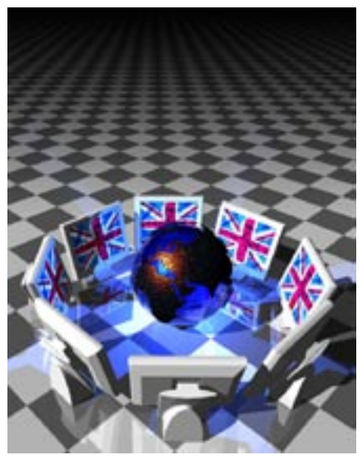

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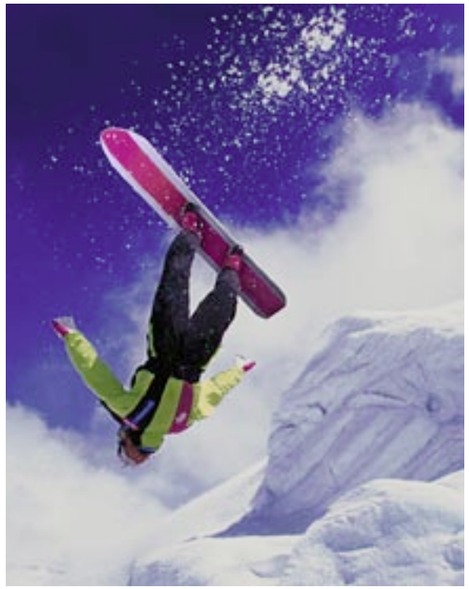

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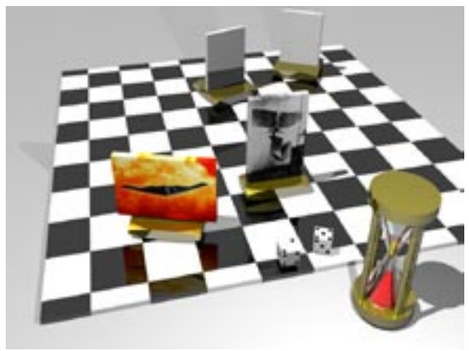

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5. This is the original photo I used to create the April 2002, "Risky Requirements" cover. Because I was informed that the colors of the ski outfit were out of style, I had to do some "color trend research" at a local sports clothing outlet. The revised color palette can be seen on page 61.

6. This was an initial brainstorm for the theme, "The People Variable," which I created by stacking layers of binary code to reveal several faces. I refined this concept into the image show on page 117, but it was never used.

7. Over the course I several years, I proposed several "game board" ideas for various themes. This was one of the earliest game-related ideas, which wasn't selected for use. I later did a game board for a "Software Acquisition" theme (see page 86).

8. This unused oriental image highlighting a bonsai tree was designed to represent "Configuration Management." My commentary for this metaphor explained that the gardener/artist creating the look of the bonsai tree would have to identify how he wanted it to look over its life cycle, systematically pruning and controlling its growth to maintain the integrity of his artistic vision throughout the tree's life.

8

1. Especially early on in my freelance career with *CrossTalk*, I found myself always trying to incorporate CDs into my ideas, because they are the most obvious way to visually represent software. I used CDs repeatedly in my imagery until both the editorial staff and I got sick of them.

2. Here I did a test render of a pioneer wagon as a color test to submit along with a pencil sketch (see page 9).

3. A test render of a bucket and pulley for an "Open Source Software" theme (see sketch on page 25 and the final cover on page 96). Though built and rendered in a 3-D program, *Carrara Studio*, the technique I used here combined several different 3-D renderings together, giving it the feel of a painted sketch.

4. The dreaded CD makes another appearance as the moon in this unused concept for the theme "Agile Software Development, with a cow (on loan from Mother Goose) jumping over it.

5. This view of a futuristic cityscape, connected by virtual pathways coming from a central location was presented for the theme "Network-centric Architecture.

6. A unused 3-D test for a "Reuse" theme.

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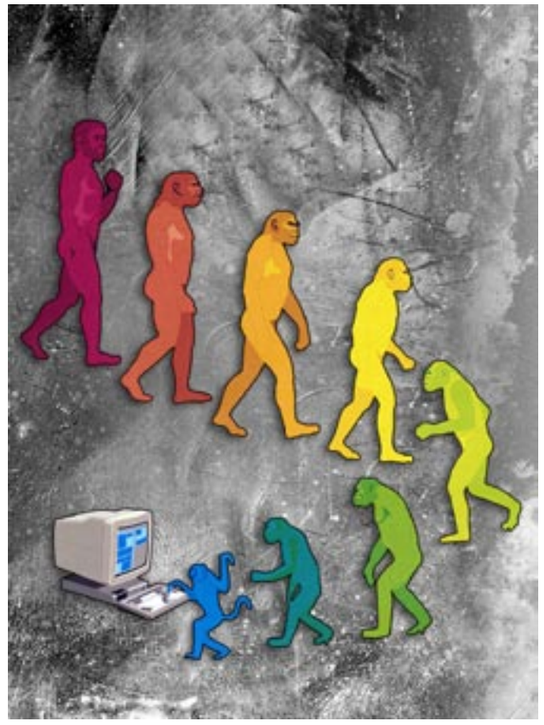

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7. This take off on Da Vinci's "Vitruvian Man" was for an "Enabling the Warfighter theme." The center hole of the CD conveniently covered the figure's pelvis, yet perhaps still drew too much attention to it.

8. I did this study in texture to submit along with the oriental-style "Year of the Scientist" sketch shown on page 17.

9. A 3-D orchestra conductor created in *Poser* (see sketch on page 20). I liked the conductor-appropriate hairstyle.

10. "Back to Basics" is represented here with a reverse evolutionary progression, culminating with a monkey happily typing away at a computer keyboard.

1-4. The January 2002 *CrossTalk* cover had featured a photograph of a single "Top 5" award. For the July 2003 issue, the plan was to have another professional photograph taken of all five trophies together, so I created a 3-D mock-up and experimented with various camera angles and lighting. The final image photo (patterned after image **3**) appears on page 77.

5. A 3-D color rendition of an assortment of toys for an "Open Source Software" concept. (See the sketch on page 9.)

6. Stacks of CDs (yet again) show stored modular software components to illustrate the theme, "Reuse."

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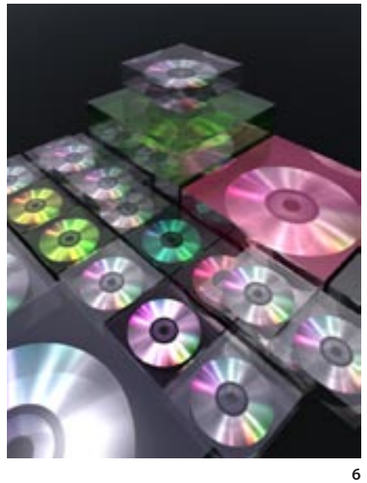

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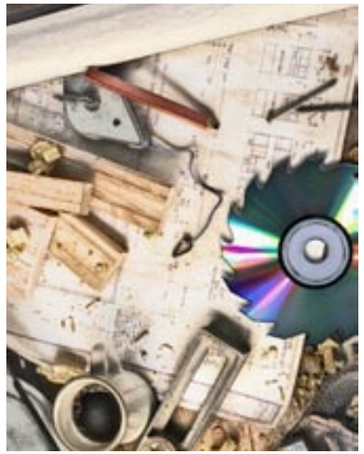

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7. A rowing team represents the theme, "Team Software Process."

8. This unused idea related "Software Process Improvement" to home improvement. This is one instance where I believe the ever-present CD works well, doubling as a saw blade.

9. A simple, colorful presentation of the "Risk Management" theme.

10. This is the original photograph I used to create the December 2003 "Management Basics" cover. If you compare it to the final cover on page 82, you'll notice that I've digitally transformed five of the poor unsuspecting boys in this all-male class from an old 1950s photograph into girls. This "gender bender" cover always gets a lot of laughs whenever I show the before and after images. The surprising thing is how easily some of their faces translate to the opposite gender.

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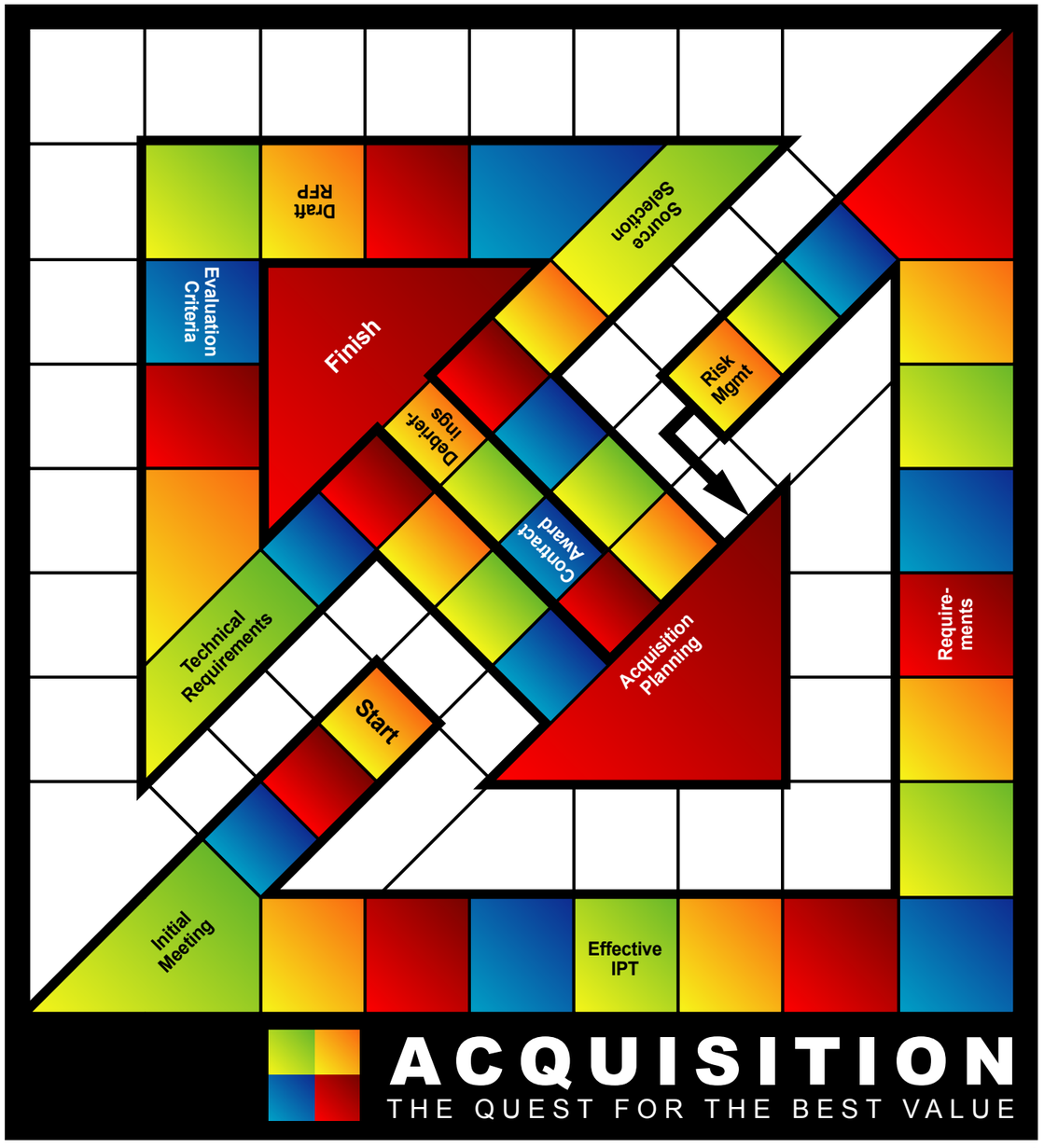

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1. This game board was designed for a "Software Acquisition" cover. In order to design the cover, I needed to create enough of a game to maintain the illusion of something that could actually be played. The game board (**1**) was designed using the double arrow symbol from the *CrossTalk* logo. I also had to design several cards (**2-3**), game pieces and play money (**3**). The money was especially fun to design. See the finished cover on page 86.

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1. My son Dax posing for the January 2001 "Modeling and Simulation" cover (see page 47).

2. The original photograph of "Lago Argentina" (Argentina Lake) taken by my brother, Kevin. I used this image to create the "Sword in the Stone" image for the April 2001 cover (see page 50).

3. This image was submitted for two different themes, "Capabilities: Building, Protecting, Deploying," and "Systems: Fielding Capabilities" and was selected for neither.

4. This image, submitted for a "Team Software Process" theme, was created from an ordinary locker room photo, but reworked in *Studio Artist* to give it a painterly look.

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5-6. My friends, Brice and Heidi, hamming it up for our "Sherlock Holmes" photo shoot (see pages 72 and 115). We shot the photographs in a studio on the morning after Christmas, and they were incredibly gracious to volunteer as models. They kept thanking me for letting them do it, and in reality, I was the one who was indebted to them for making one of my most successful covers.

7. This is one of the many photos taken for the November 2002, "Publisher's Choice" issue. The trees in the final cover had to be recolored digitally to create a vibrant autumn scene (see page 68).

1

1. My kids were starving, and they waited very impatiently while I finished photographing various shots of this pizza (their dinner) for the November 2003 "Real-Time Software Virtual Pizza Parlor" cover (see page 81).

2. The original photo used to create the July 2001 "Testing and CM: Necessary Evils to a Software Success" theme. (See page 52).

3. Two of my children, Chelsea and Drew, pose for some quick photographic mock-ups for an "Assessments and Certifications" theme, including a fake "American Idol" take off, with Chelsea doing double duty as both Paula Abdul as the contestant, and Drew handling the roles of both Simon and a very white Randy Jackson.

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PUBLISHED COVERS

Artist's Annotations on the Published Covers

Not all covers are mentioned in this commentary. Sometimes, amazingly, I just don't have anything to say…

September 2000, page 44

For my first published *CrossTalk* cover, I created a surreal landscape in 3-D Landscape/modeling software *Bryce* and collaged in the other elements. Originally I had used a different "shopper" taken from some stock photography, but he was replaced with an Air Force Colonel who agreed to pose for the shot.

October 2000, page 45

At first I thought the stone eagles guarding the cage in this image would evoke a patriotic feel, but instead they came across to me as almost Nazi-ish. The glowing red skull in the cage is the obvious metaphor for a network predator. One detail that isn't readily apparent, but was a nice touch, was the addition of little red cockroaches crawling across the keyboard. When this issue was published, the words "Lock Out Network Predators" were added by a former staff member, but in shades of yellow/gold, which made no sense to me, as the image had no gold in it. Being somewhat of a control freak, I made sure from this point on to do the complete design myself and not leave the addition of copy to anyone else.

November 2000, page 46

For this "Jason and the Argonauts" cover, my favorite creation was the computerized version of the mythical Hydra with "mouse" heads. The warm, muted color palette blended well with the stylized Greek figures. Originally the computer monitors atop the pillars contained the faces of the gods Zeus and Hera, but they were eliminated to put the focus on Jason and to help de-clutter the image.

January 2001, page 47

My son Dax, who was nine at the time, posed for this "flight simulator" photo. I shot the photo in our front hallway. Dax drew the "control panel" on a sheet of paper and I digitally added it to the cardboard box.

March 2001, page 49

My take-off on The Three Pigs was apparently controversial, as several comments that were made by people who saw the cover came back to me: "the pigs look like buffalo," and "the floor is too clean—if the artist had ever been around pigs he would realize that the floor should be covered with crap..." I guess I just didn't have as much experience with crap as they did…

April 2001, page 50

I created this "Sword in the Stone" image partially from a photograph my brother took of a glacier in southern Argentina (see page 36). Inverting the colors of the photograph and playing with the saturation in *Adobe Photoshop* created a great image of a glowing rock. This apparently also offended the animal rights activists/pig protectors, as I heard complaints that it looked like the "skull of a pig." Also the sword looked "too Catholic" because it forms a cross (which I believe most swords do…)

June 2001, page 51

This issue marked the first month that *CrossTalk* discontinued their monthly cover art competition. I began to submit multiple ideas for each theme. This is one of my favorite covers, because I was able to create such a rich image from a photo that had less-than-great resolution. I created multiple filtered versions of the image in black and white, both in *Photoshop* and a great tool called *Studio Artist* and layered them together to get the "painterly" effect. The fiery glow was painted on by hand using my favorite *Photoshop* tool, the gradient map. The great texture at the top was taken from the image of an old Civil War daguerreotype photo.

July 2001, page 52

I love this photo. Years ago a co-worker had dug it out of her family archives and brought it in to work to share. She explained that the man at the bottom right was her father as a young adult, hanging out with his buddies. At the time I liked the photo so much, I copied it and made it into a cover for my day planner. The image lent itself to a "mobster" treatment, showing "the boys" doing a little "testing" on some classic automobiles.

September 2001, page 54

This cover shows a pterodactyl morphing into a B-2 bomber, and includes a great picture of an early aviator, as well as text from a letter written by one of the Wright brothers.

October 2001, page 55

My son Drew helped with this cover by coming up with the original designs for the three robots. My challenge was to take those designs and create 3-D models of each. This was a "learn as you go" project, as I was learning new software, and getting very frustrated in the process, but I was happy with the final result.

November 2001, page 56

As a child I remember playing for hours with a blue plastic "Soma" cube. I recreated that digitally, in *Bryce*. Each square of the models contained two cubes—a slightly smaller wooden cube inside of a larger shiny plastic cube.

December 2001, page 57

Digital montages have always been one of my specialities, and I always enjoy the challenge of how to take multiple images and make them look like they blend together naturally.

January 2002, page 58

This cover was the first one where I paid to go to a photo studio to have something professionally photographed. I had asked in advance if I needed to bring a flag, but they told me they had one available. What they didn't tell me was that it had some nasty yellowish water stains on the white stripes. Luckily *Photoshop* allowed me to digitally bleach the stains on the flag, restoring it to its original beauty.

February 2002, page 59

This was a tough concept to portray. I originally had each one of the main butterfly's four wings a different color/pattern, but the argument was made that genetically that would not be possible, so rather than defy nature, I changed it to a symmetrical pattern.

March 2002, page 60

This "paint-by-number" image was simple, but effective. I had to create 3-D models of the paint blobs, but was happy to find already-available models of the paint tubes and art tools. The numbers on the unfinished part of the "painting" were totally random. I didn't stop to see if they would actually make sense if painted.

April 2002, page 61

In the original photo I worked from, the skier was clothed in black, neon pink and lime green. It was pointed out that those colors were out of date, so after making a trip to a sporting goods store with a note pad and pencil to see the latest trends in ski-wear, I reworked the colors to electric orange and gray.

May 2002, page 62, 63

This special conference cover involved working with several complex 3-D applications and required lots of testing and sample rendering. The final image took over 12 hours to render overnight on my computer. The companion piece for the "fake cover" given out at the conference was equally challenging as I had to render dozens of different expressions and poses of the robot/circuit man. I migrated the positioning of the circuitry pattern so it was different on each face.

June 2002, page 64

This was my first true "illustration" project for *CrossTalk*. I started with a scan of a rough pencil sketch and refined and painted it digitally, adding fabric and wallpaper texture to complete the image.

July 2002, page 65

This was another very complicated 3-D piece. In order to do the shark I ended up tracking down someone online who had created a posable 3-D model that was willing to let me use it. I also had to scrounge the internet to find diving suits to clothe the figures with, the cage, treasure chest, seashells, etc. Rendering the underwater scene was very time-intensive, but the extra work was worth the trouble.

August 2002, page 66

I like how the art deco building in this cover twists and bends as though it's literally popping out of the blueprint. It had a certainly "jello mold" quality, that when combined with blurred duplicates of the building, gave some motion to what would have otherwise been a static image.

October 2002, page 67

I must have been on a 3-D binge at this point in my career. I created and posed the frogs in *Poser*, and then added the texture in my 3-D landscape program, *Bryce*, which was the ideal tool for rendering the muddy water, moss-covered rocks, etc. I really enjoyed the almost-operatic interaction between the two frogs in the background.

November 2002, page 68

I don't really consider myself to be a photographer, but for this cover, I decided to tackle the photography myself, with the *CrossTalk* staff as my models. We had a blast playing in the leaves and scattering papers all over the ground. The photo was taken in late summer when the leaves were all very green, so I had to digitally rework the image (once again with my favorite tool, the gradient map) to create a fall scene. A *CrossTalk* reader actually contacted me, curious to find out wear the photo was taken, convinced that we had traveled to Vermont to take in those rich hues. She was a bit disappointed to find out it was all a digital illusion.

December 2002, page 69

My favorite part of this collage is how the image of a young Thomas Edison appears in the light bulb. I also liked how the color from the bulb "illuminates" the surrounding images. In addition to the final yellow and magenta-hued cover, I also created unused green and blue-tinted versions.

January 2003, page 70

What I liked about this cover was the interaction of the wooden floor and bars and the mirrors. It's always fascinating to me how well 3-D programs can create realistic environments. I wasn't happy with the ballet image on the cover of the book. I looked far and wide for a good stock photo that showed a ballet instructor and her student interacting, and that was unfortunately the best one I could find. The models I used for the shoes were anatomically incorrect, as they had a "wall" that would have prevented anyone's toes from entering them. I had to digitally hollow them out, so they wouldn't end up distracting from the image.

February 2003, page 71

A homage to a classical biblical illustration by Gustave Doré (see page 18). Although this was one of the most time-consuming covers, it was one of the most rewarding because it gave me a chance to stretch my illustration skills more than I usually do with straight graphic design projects.

March 2003, page 72

My neighbors and friends, Brice and Heidi, were great sports to agree to be my models for this Sherlock Holmes-inspired cover. They met me at a costume shop one afternoon

and tried on various costumes until we found some that worked. It was Christmas time and many of the men's coats that would have worked well for Sherlock Holmes were already rented for local productions of "A Christmas Carol." Although it was against their policy to loan out costumes, I talked the owner of a local playhouse into letting me borrow a fur-lined jacket. Since I had been in several musicals there a few years earlier, he knew me well enough to trust me with the coat for a few hours.

June 2003, page 76

I always enjoy doing complex collages. It's like putting together a puzzle where any particular piece may fit in more than one place. It's challenging getting the images and colors to balance and combine into a cohesive whole.

July 2003, page 77

I took five trophies with me to a local photo studio and I was a bit nervous hauling them around, since they were worth hundreds of dollars each and had fragile glass parts. While we were setting things up, a prima donna bride-to-be came in and acted very annoyed that they were trying to work on my project simultaneously and weren't devoting the entire studio to her.

September 2003, page 79

One interesting fact about this cover is that to get the details correct, the editors had a programmer provide me with some authentic defective code, so that any software programmer examining the cover would understand it.

October 2003, page 80

This cover is another one of my favorites. The whole "mad scientist with a living brain in a jar" motif was great fun to create. It was also very time consuming to build and test render each section. Objects made of either liquid or glass are typically very slow to render, and this had both of those elements. I was happy that they let me get away with the green ooze dripping from the logo. It added the perfect finishing touch to this issue, which appropriately came out in the month of October.

November 2003, page 81

For this cover I had to create a website interface for the "Real-Time Pizza Company" where you could virtually order pizza online and have it delivered through your monitor. I found a great photo of a very cheesy statue of a classic stereotypical Italian chef, which added some personality to the design. My family had to wait for me to photograph the pizza before they could eat their dinner.

December 2003, page 82

This retro 1950s-era photo was originally of an all-boy class. All of the "girls" were created by digitally altering the boys to bring out their feminine sides (see page 33).

January 2004, page 83

I created this futuristic war-room scene using several 3-D software programs. My favorite element was the sleek design of the chairs, which included transparent supports and a chrome base.

February 2004, page 84

Texture is what makes this design work. The fiber of the paper in the background, the polished wood and the rough red-hued metal all work well together. I also enjoyed adding an oriental brush stroke version of the word "*CrossTalk*" behind the masthead. I did some photography work on this image, shooting pictures of the cookies after printing and cutting out the individual fortunes.

April 2004, page 86

This cover required extra work to create an entire game (or at least enough elements to give the illusion that a complete game existed). Designing the fake currency was especially fun. I was also pleased with both the extreme perspective of the image and the color palette I used for the game and masthead. (See pages 34 and 35.)

May 2004, page 87

This simple patriotic montage of an eagle's head, flag, and the Declaration of Independence was a big hit at the 2004 Software Technology Conference. I have created so many patriotic themes in my years of designing for the Air Force, that I've become jaded to their impact.

June 2004, page 89

I call this the "Bobble-head" cover. I tried a more cartoony style of illustration, starting with pencil sketches, which I painted in *Corel Painter* and then layered over a homemade confetti paper texture. I intentionally created the figures to be ethnically diverse.

August 2004, page 91

I don't like this cover. There were other available orchestra-related images that were much better photos, but they lacked the right perspective (from the conductor's point of view) to best portray the theme. One thing that particularly annoyed me with this stock photo was the nasty hair covering the conductor's neck and sticking out from his collar. I had to digitally "shave" him to make him more presentable.

September 2004, page 92

Instead of working in my usual "blended collage" style for this cover, I kept hard edges and black borders and worked at balancing out color and form to complete this image.

November 2004, page 94

Often when I do three-dimensional design, I'm able to either buy or find 3-D models available to download off the internet. In this case, I had to completely create the toolbox from scratch. I came up with the idea of a toolbox which opens into a laptop, and as I researched the internet for toolbox photo references, I was surprised to find that several people had actually built a computer (but not a laptop) within a classic red toolbox housing.

December 2004, page 95

I was worried that I would need to digitally create the Lego models of the aircraft on this cover brick by brick, but found a huge worldwide internet community of helpful digital Lego enthusiasts who had models ready to use as a starting point for this design.

January 2005, page 96

This was another project where I created 3-D models from scratch for each component. I did several different type of renderings of this image in order to create a more illustrative feel to the finished cover.

February 2005, page 97

I researched many historical posters to find inspiration for this circus-themed cover. The flat, non-embossed logo and the inset border added to the feel of an old-time poster.

June 2005, page 101

This "Reality Computing" logo was designed to have the feel of a reality-TV logo, almost a cross between "American Idol" and "Survivor." I especially liked the way the trees in the upper left corner blended into the underwater image beneath, with the fish swimming to the flow of the image.

July 2005, page 102

Reworking the male tango dancer in this image into a devil was possible, once again due to my favorite *Photoshop* tool, the gradient mask. The glow added behind the female dancer's head helped give her an "angelic" glow.

August 2005, page 103

Once again the gradient mask tool allowed me to rework the colors of the parachutes, transforming what would have been a very bland photo into something colorful.

September 2005, page 104

This blending of a a United States flag over a close up of the Statue of Liberty's face almost creates the illusion that she's wearing war paint.

October 2005, page 105

Along with the initial sketch I did for this idea (see page 26), I sent a quick sample photo to show the kind of gate I was proposing to use in the cover. I wasn't intending to offer up that specific image as the actual cover, but it was what caught the eye of the editorial staff. After some color adjustment and the addition of a chain and padlock, the image came together.

December 2005, page 107

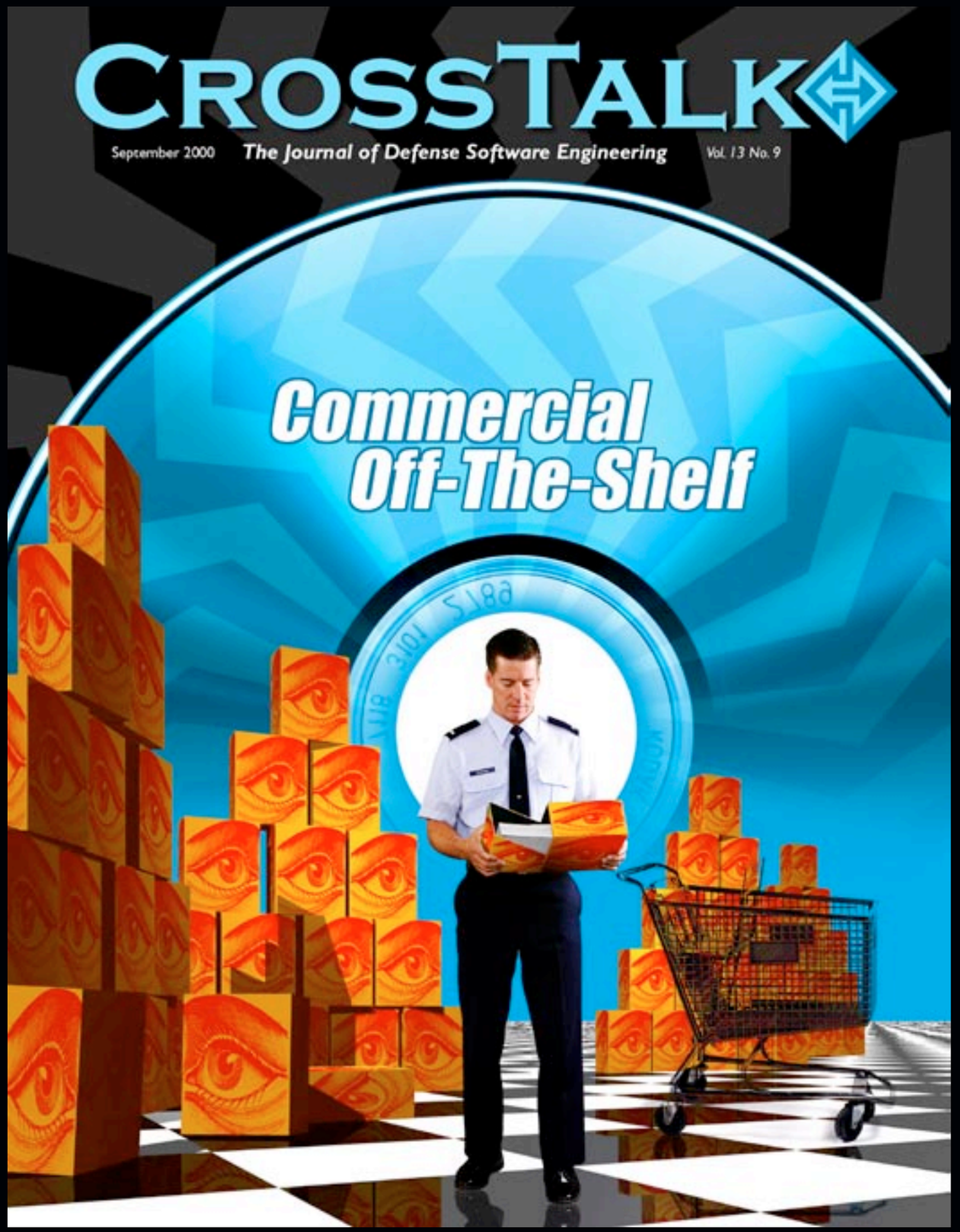
This space collage was composed of a number of different images, including some fireworks imagery which helped create the "Big Bang" look.

January 2006, page 108

I used several different illustrations to put together this cover, because I liked the body on one sketch and the head from another. I was initially frustrated trying to color the image in *Painter*, so using Prismacolor pencils, I hand-colored a lightly printed copy of it, then scanned it and merged it with the pencil drawing and textured background.

February 2006, page 109

This unusual abstract 3-D computer-generated image turned out to have just the right elements for the theme, "A New Twist on Today's Technology."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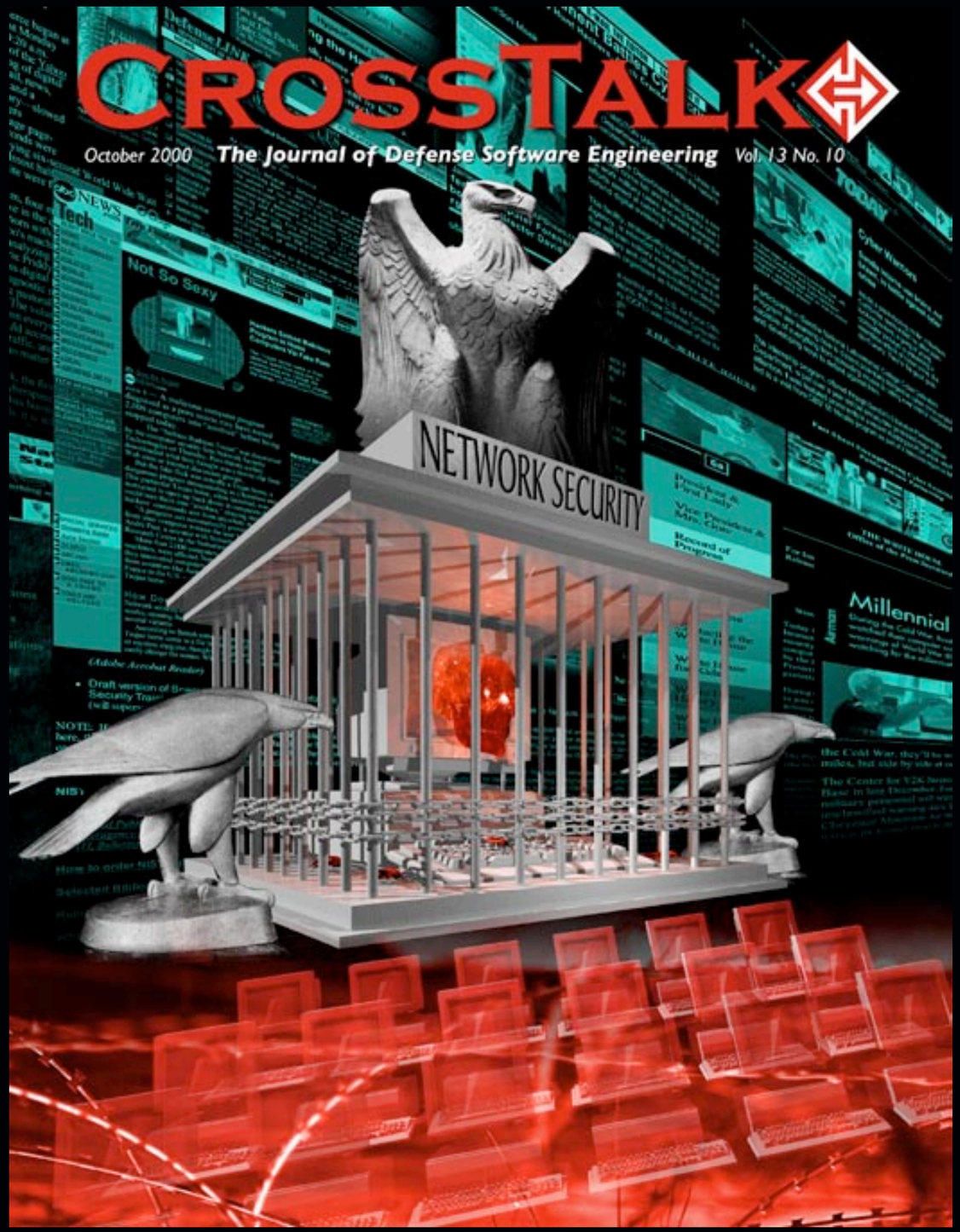
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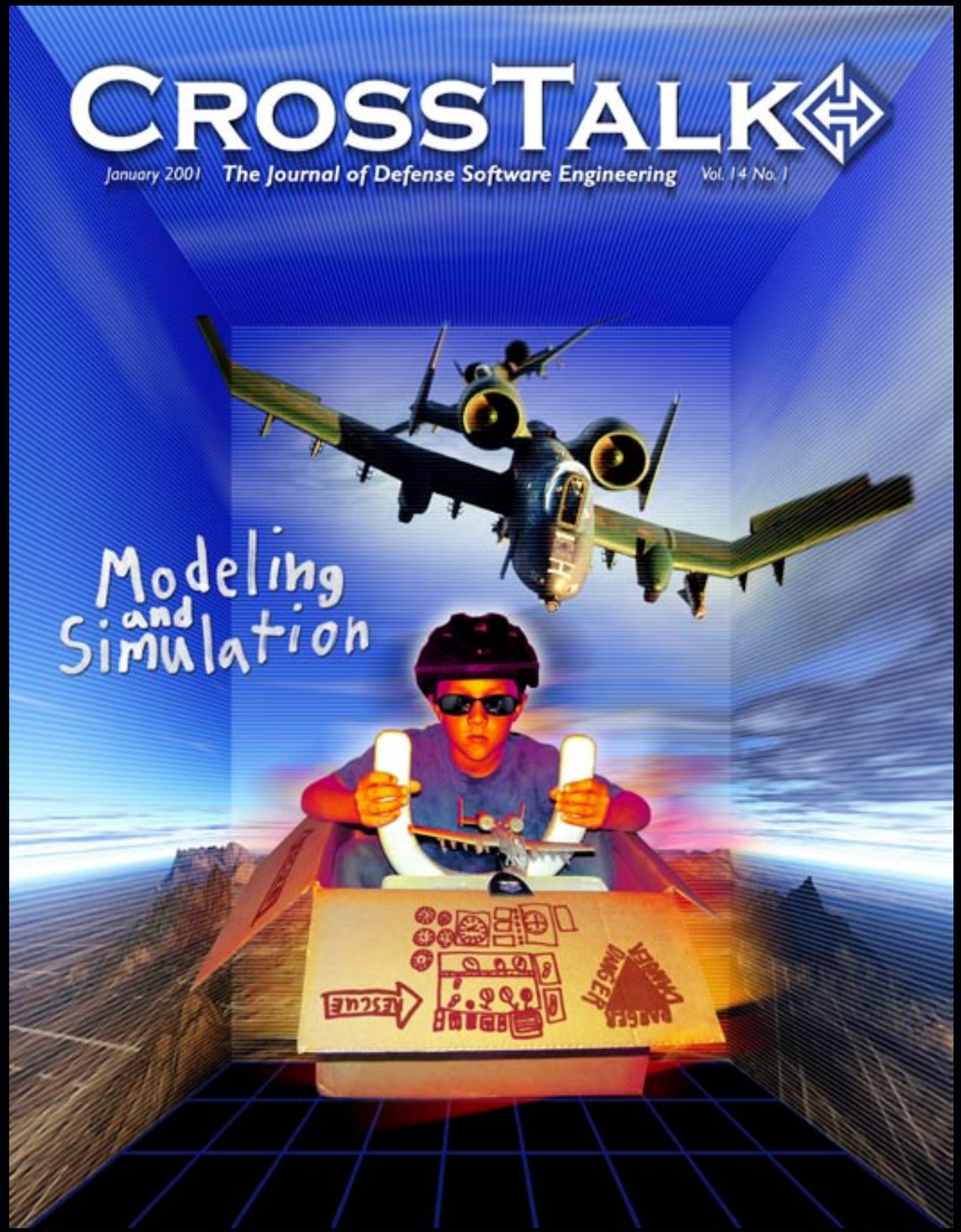
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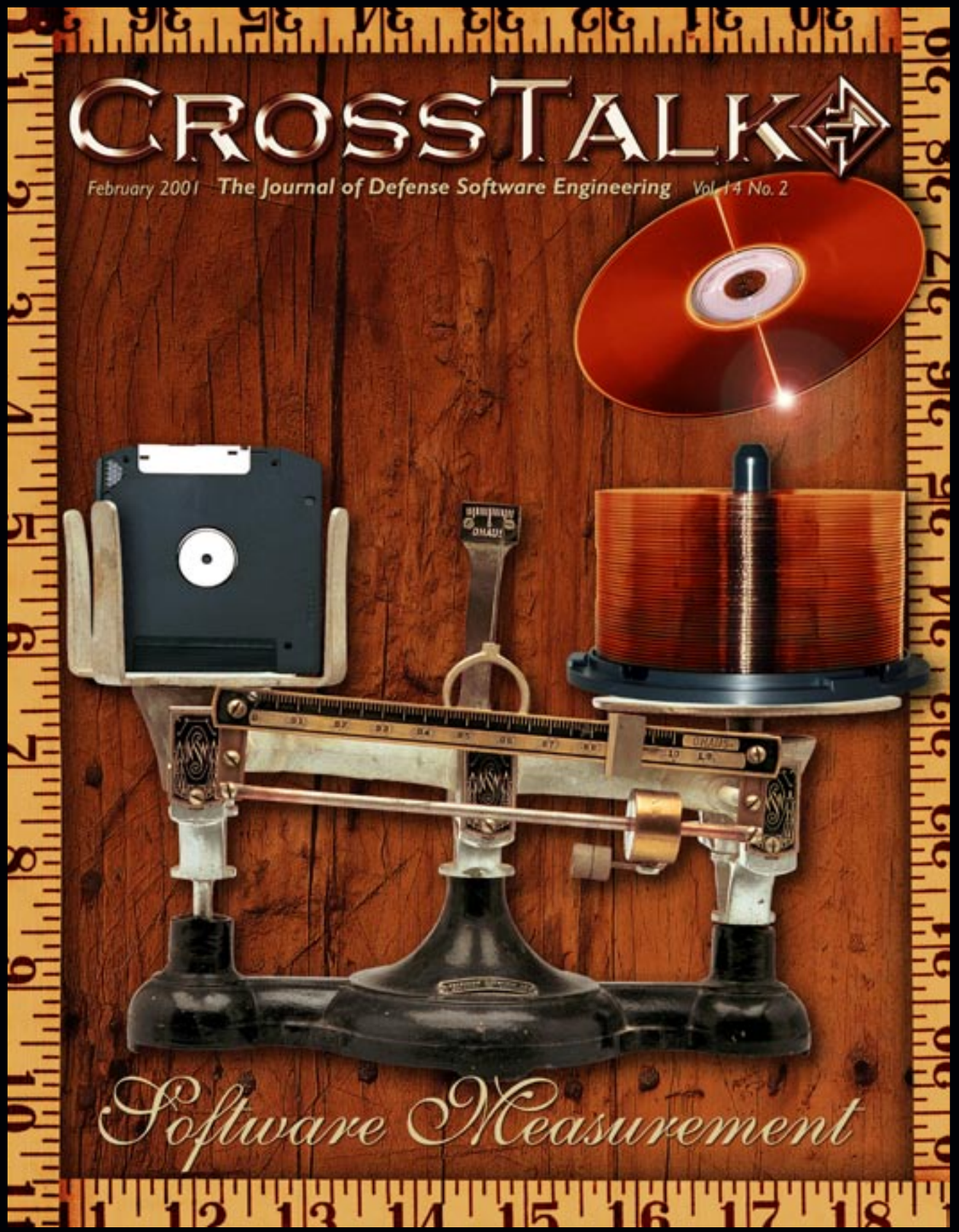
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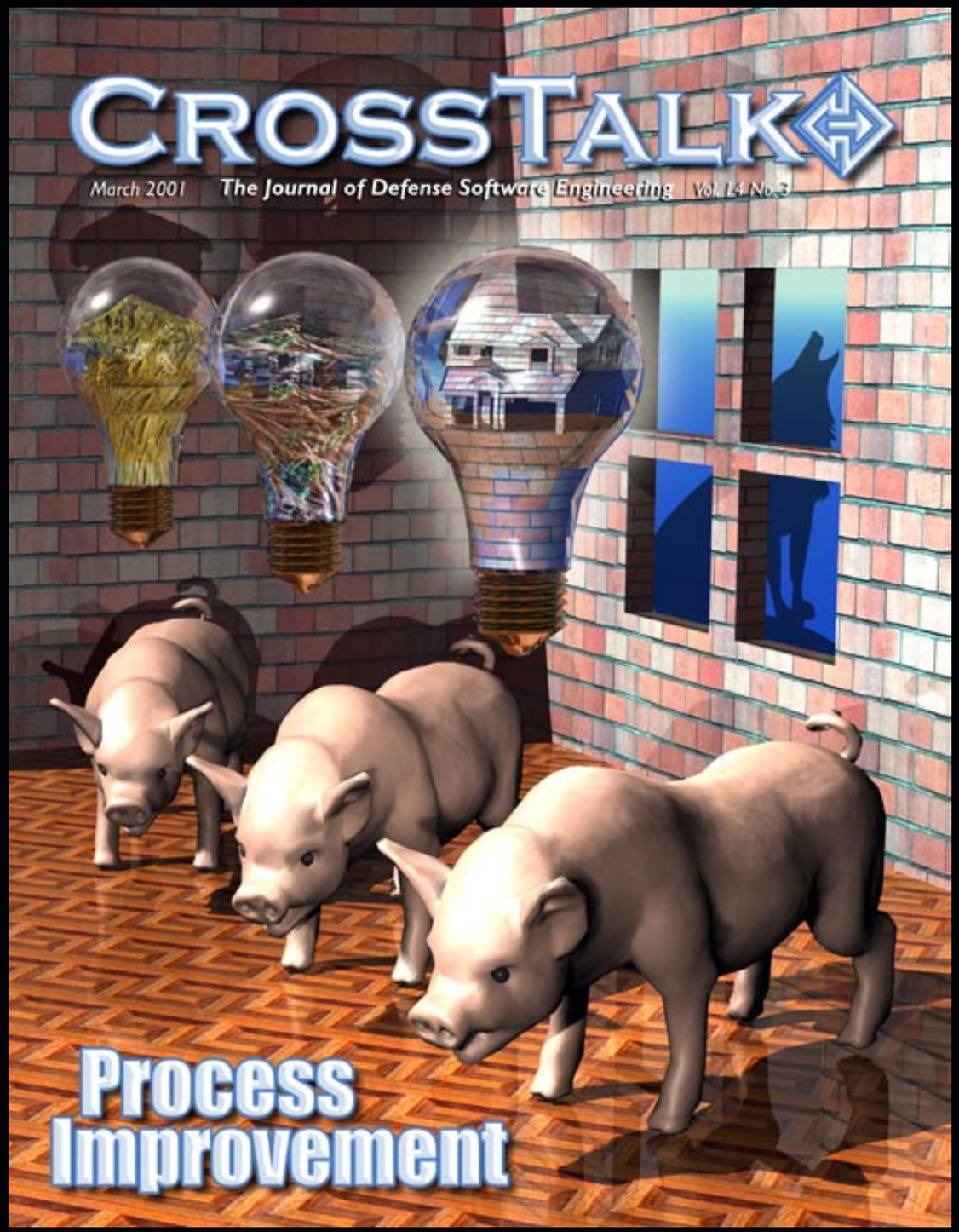
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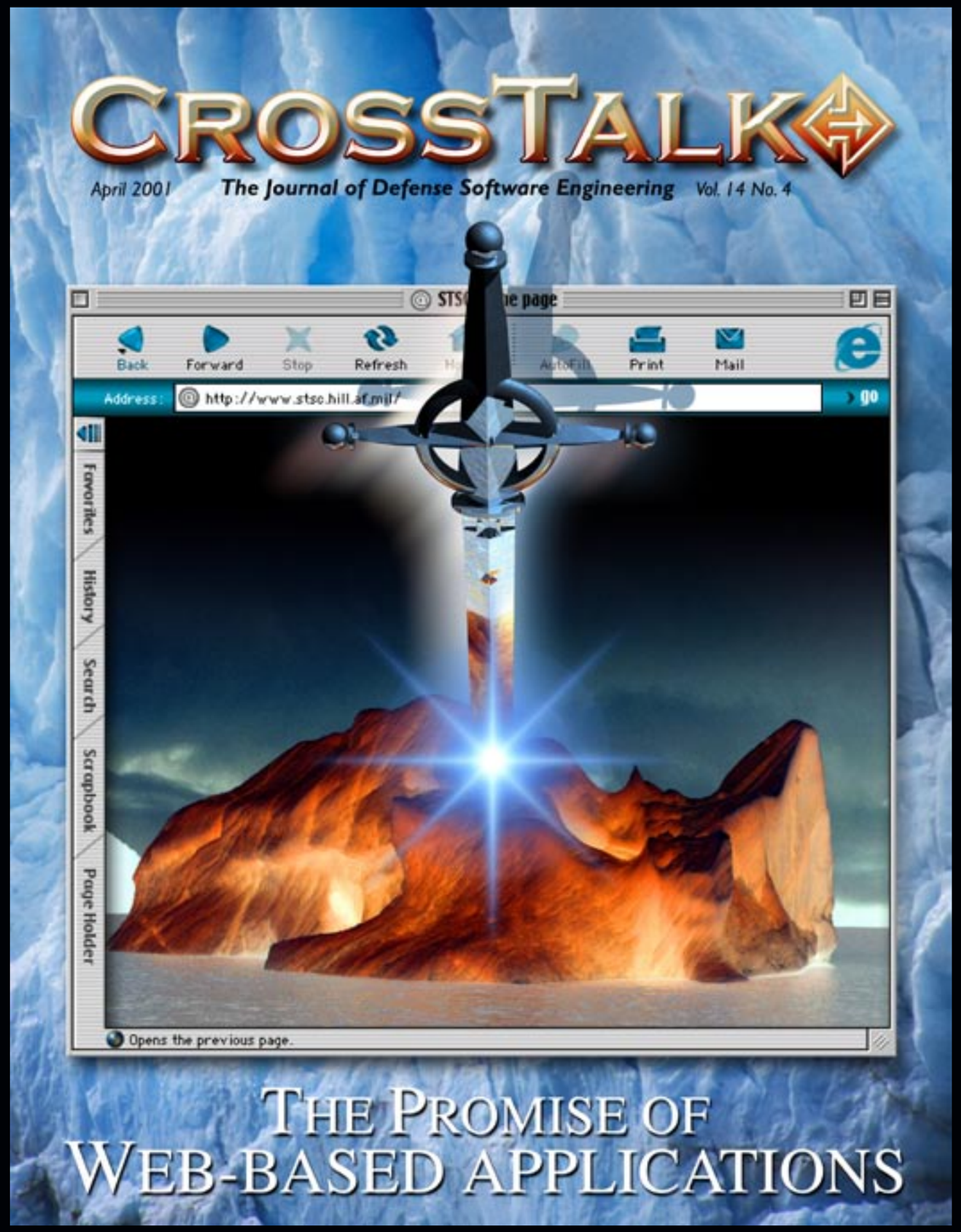
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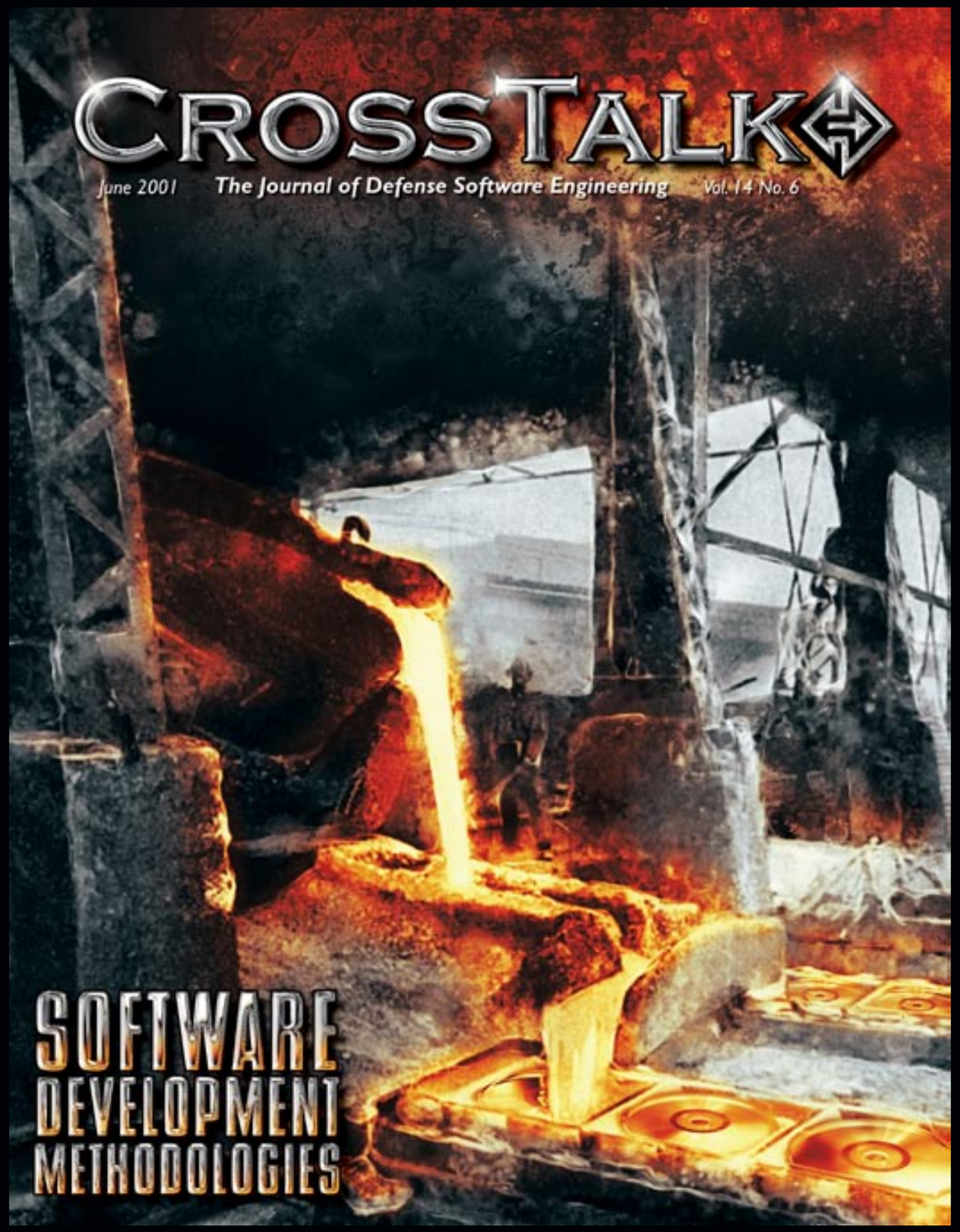
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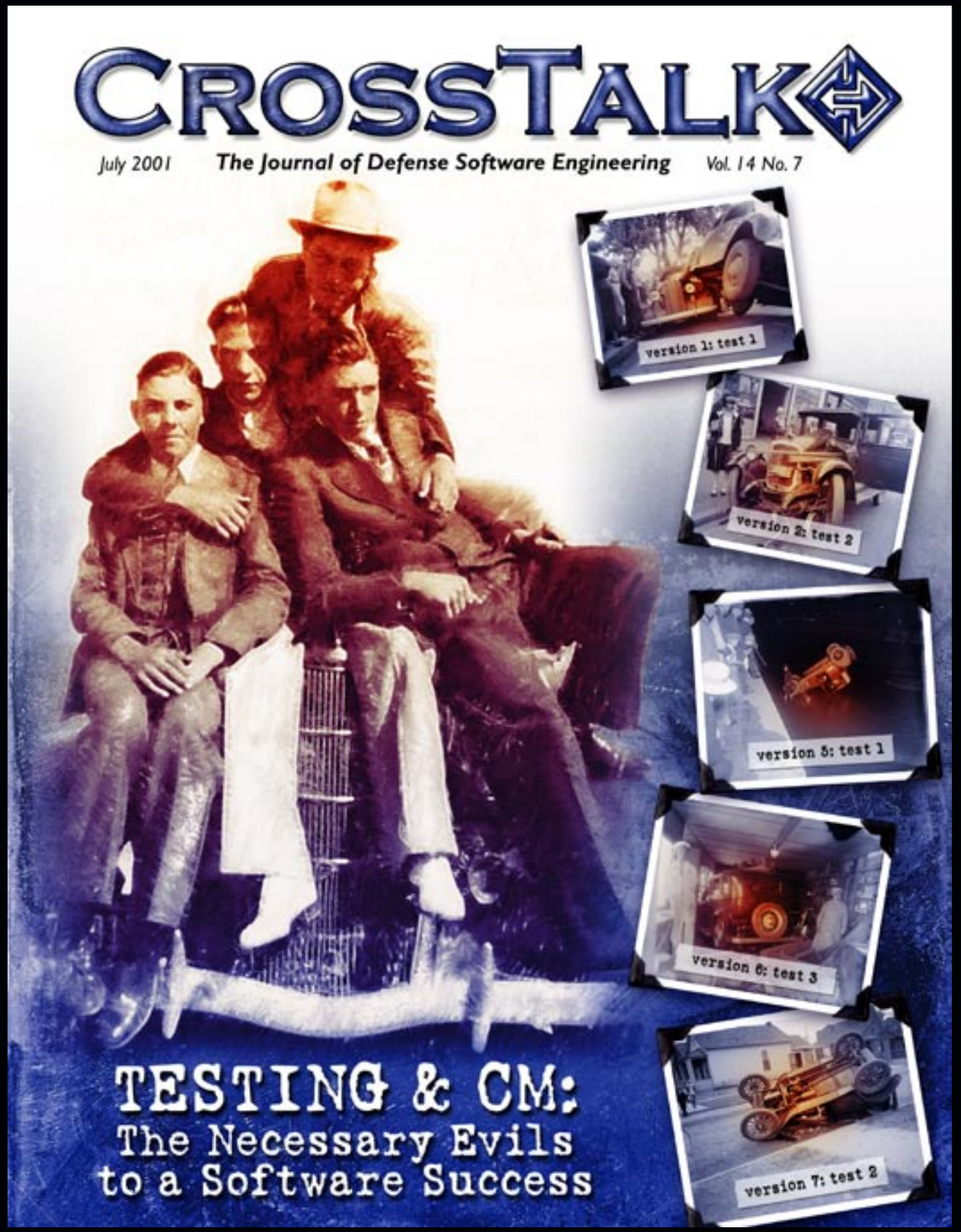
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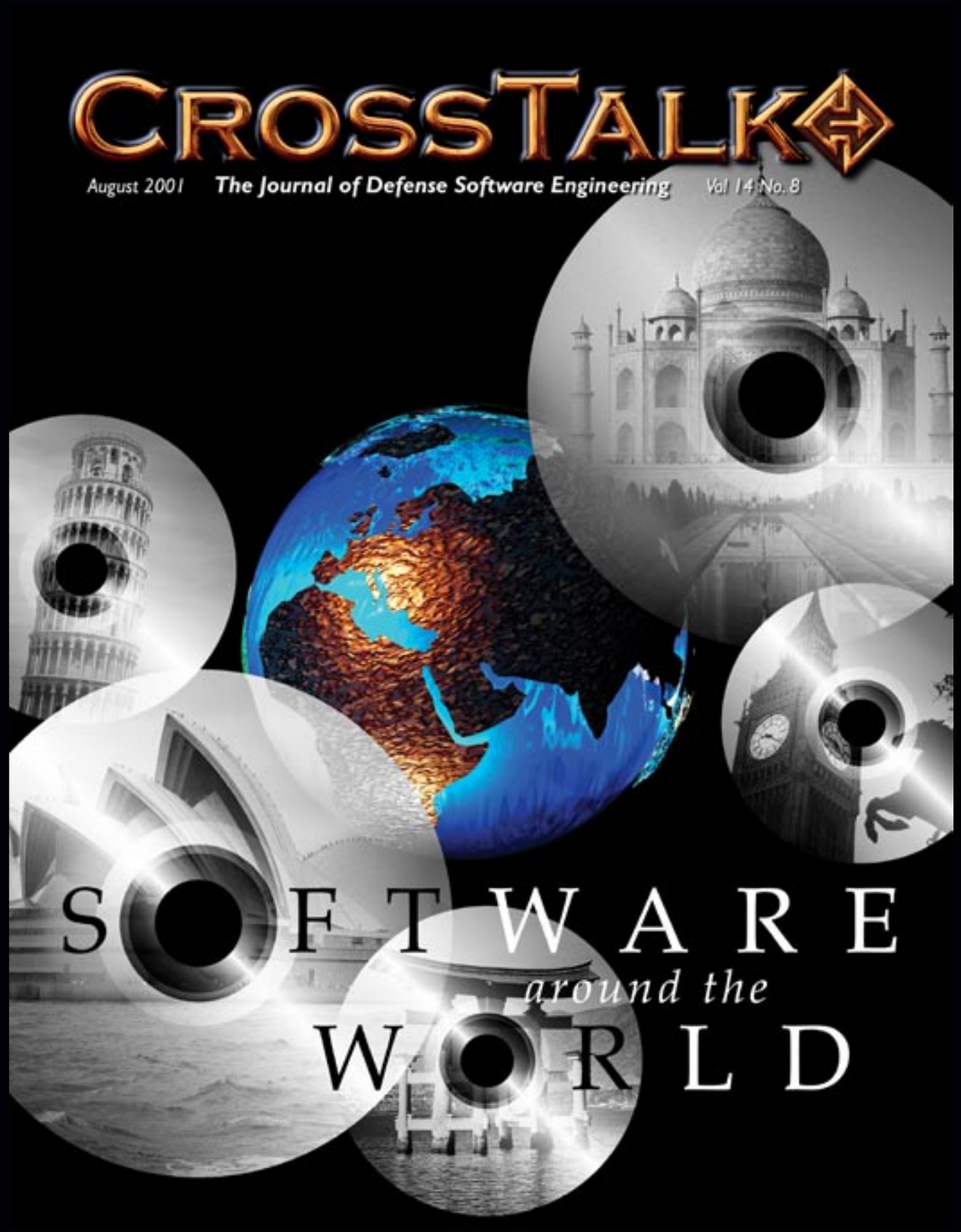
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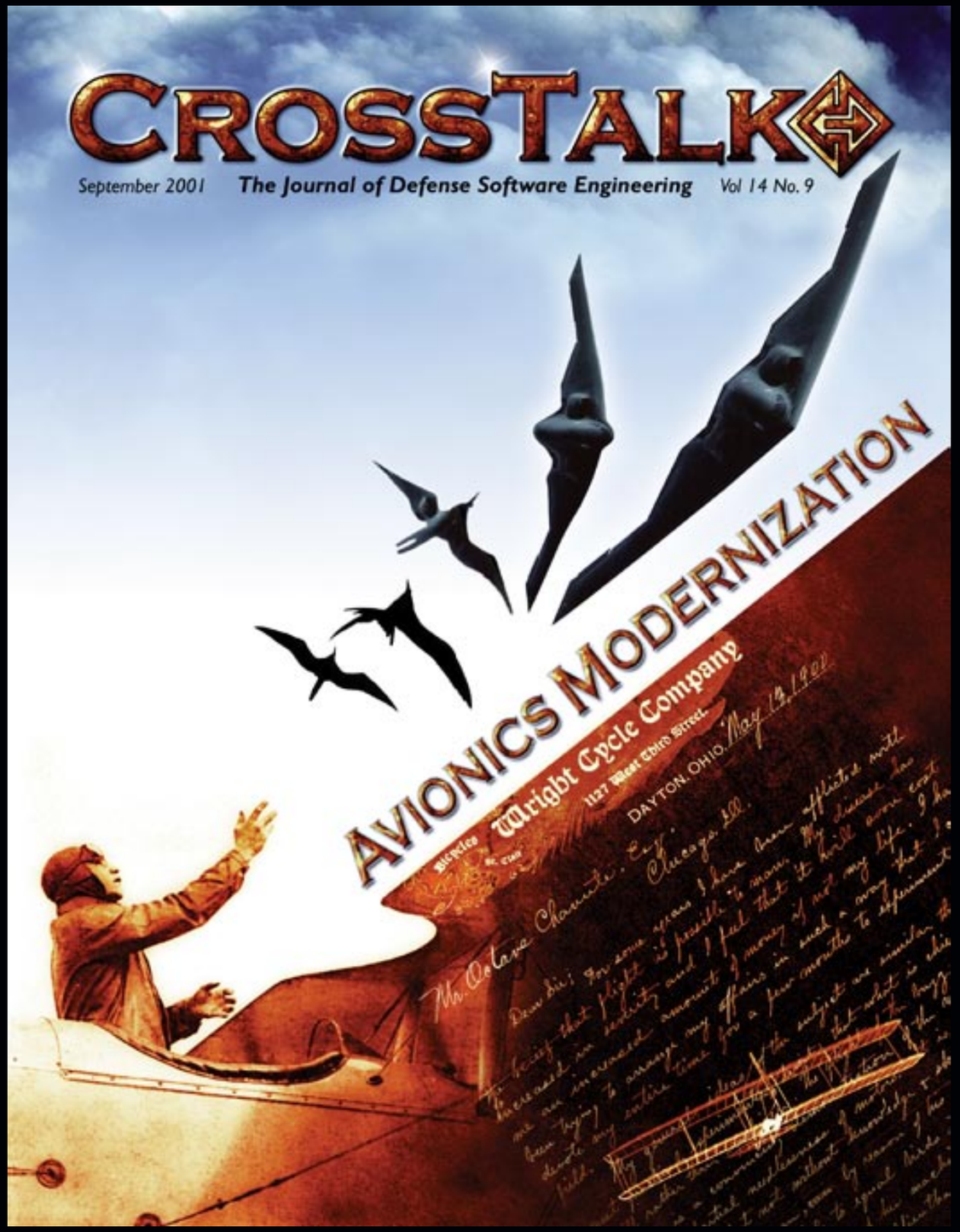
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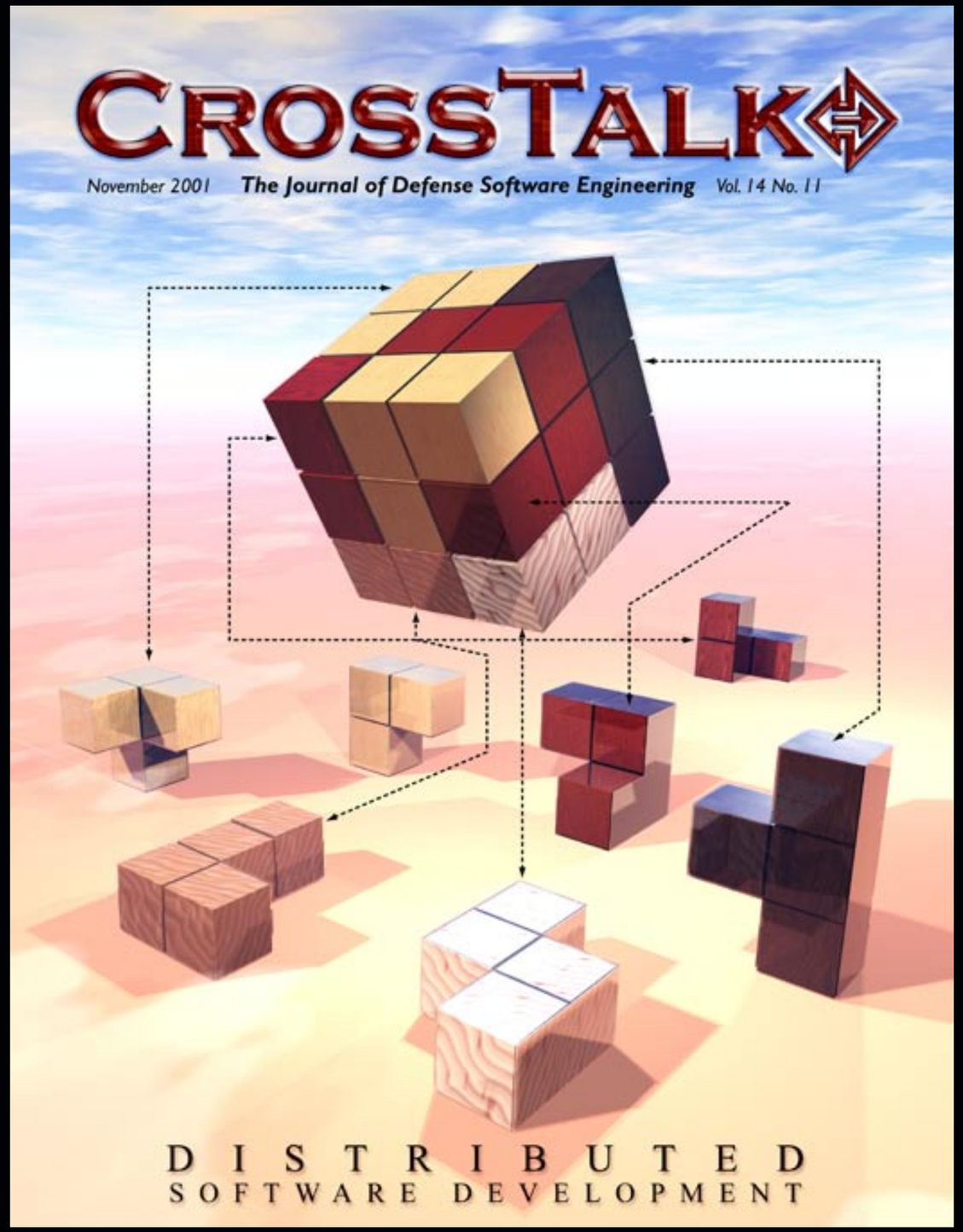
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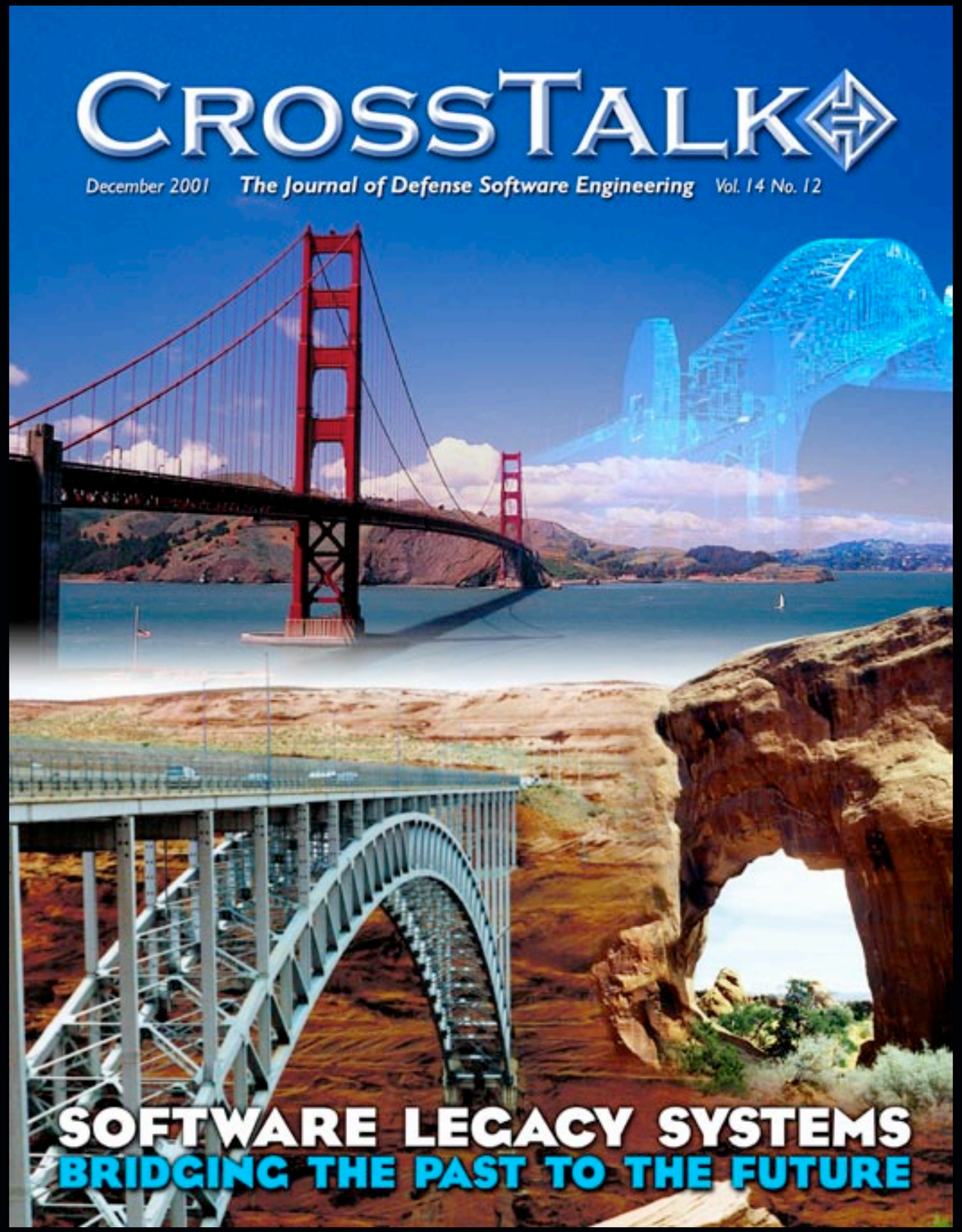
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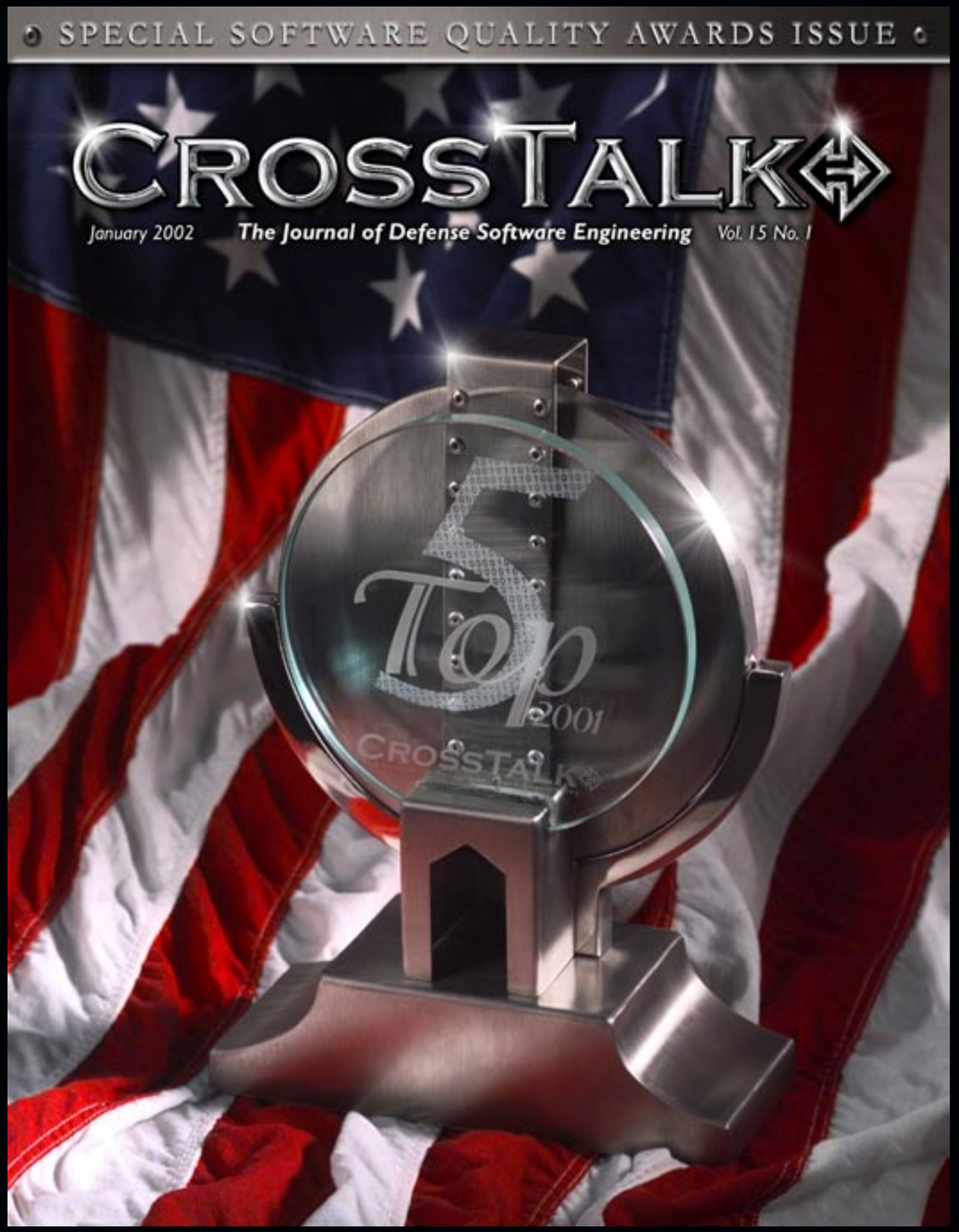
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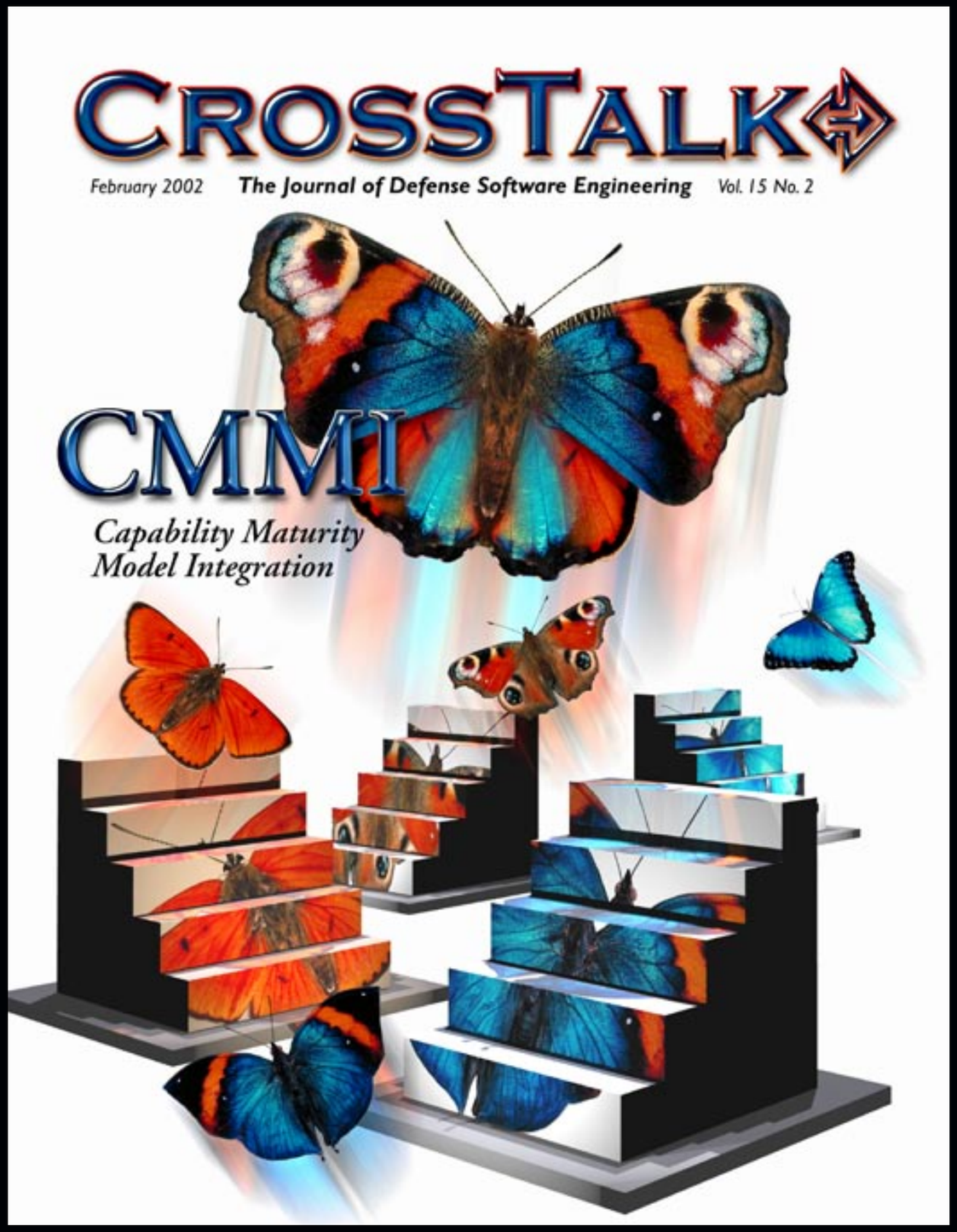
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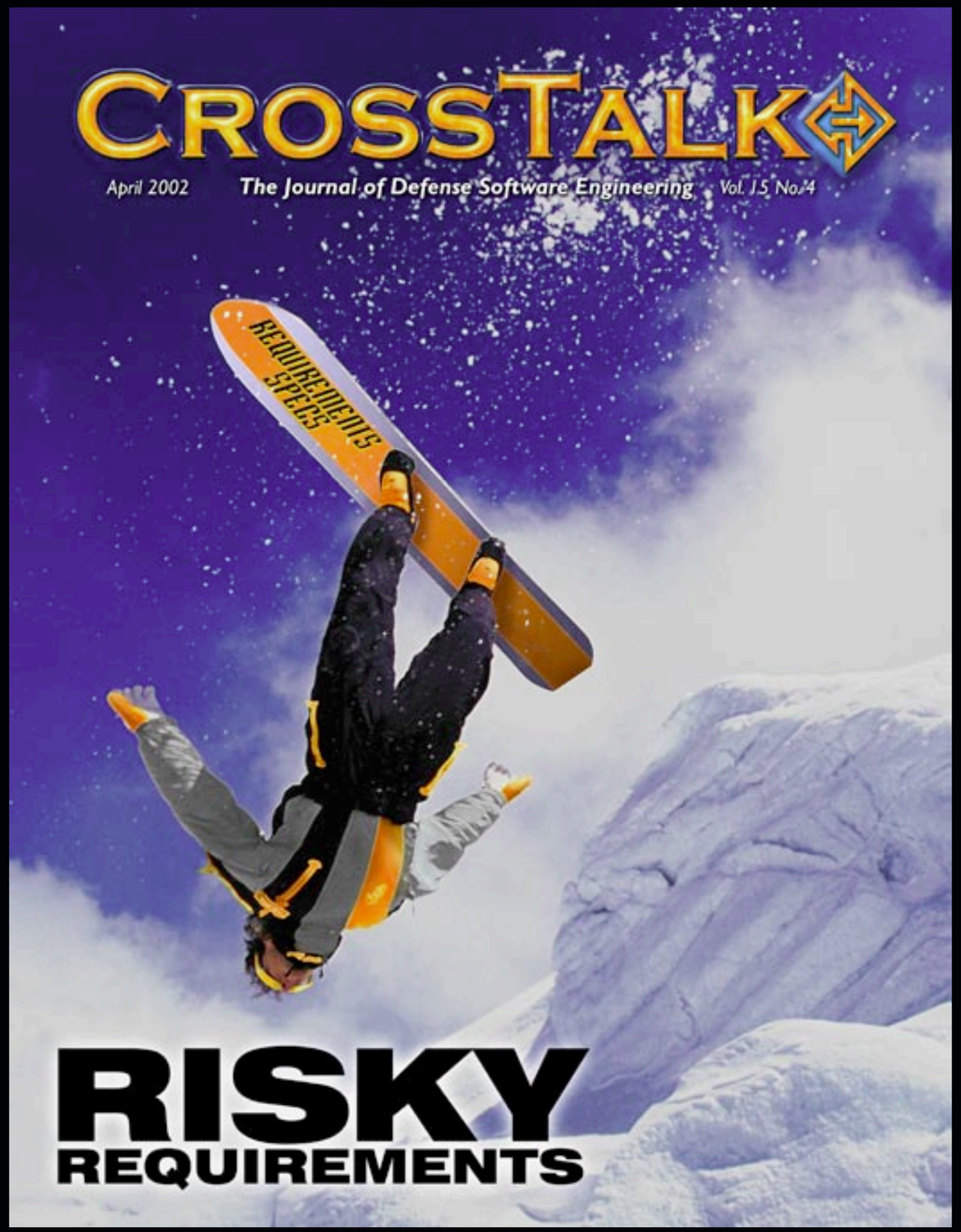
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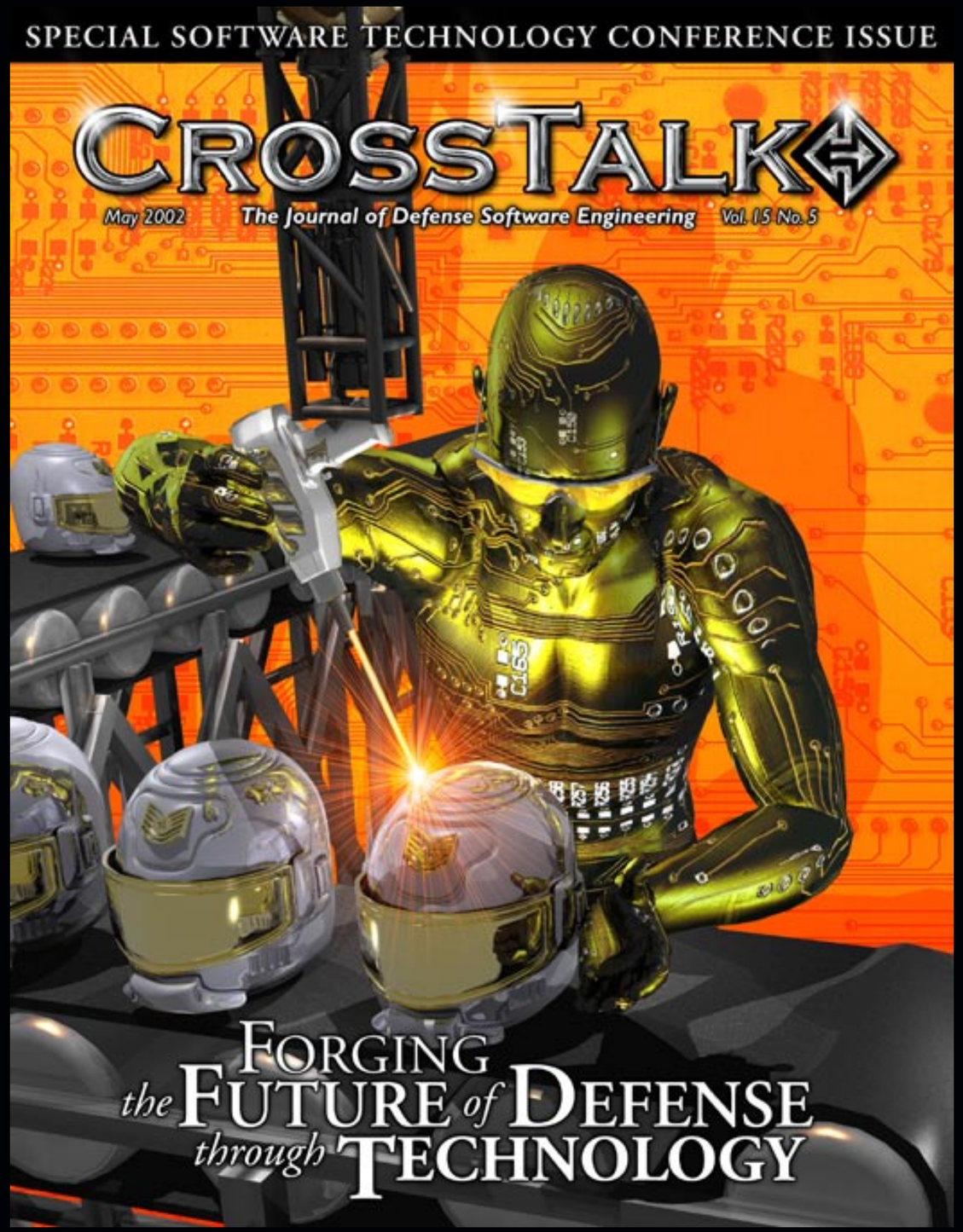
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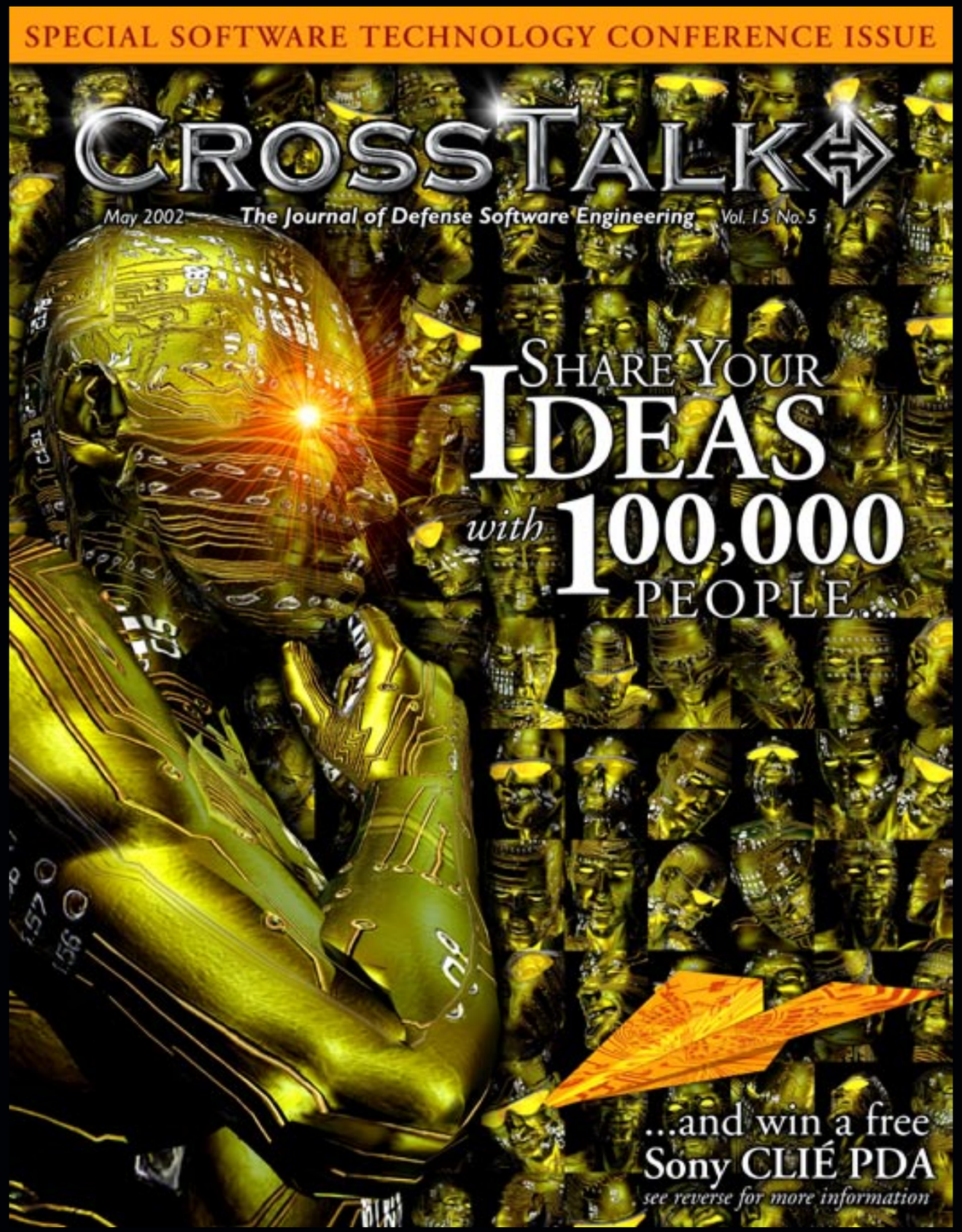
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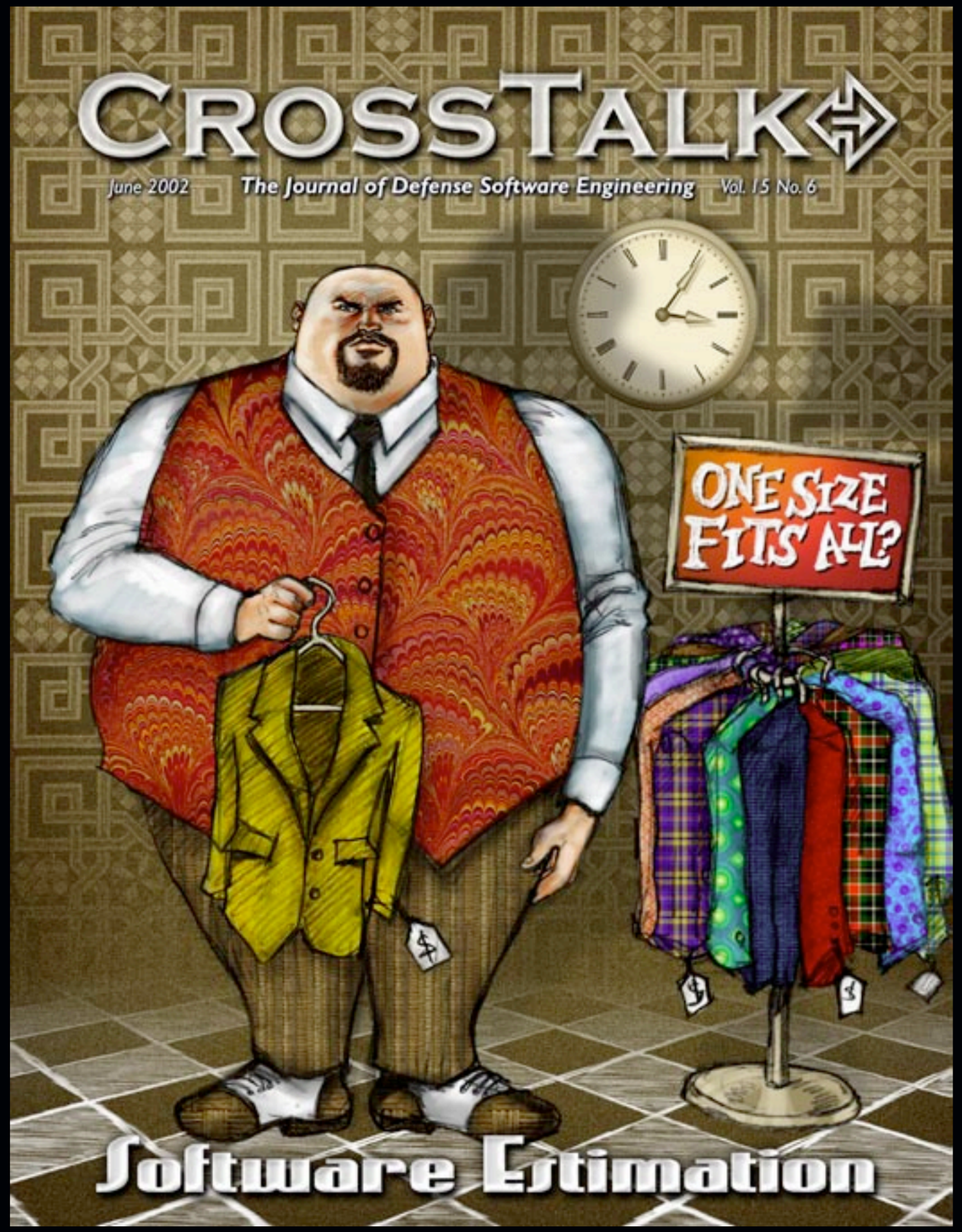
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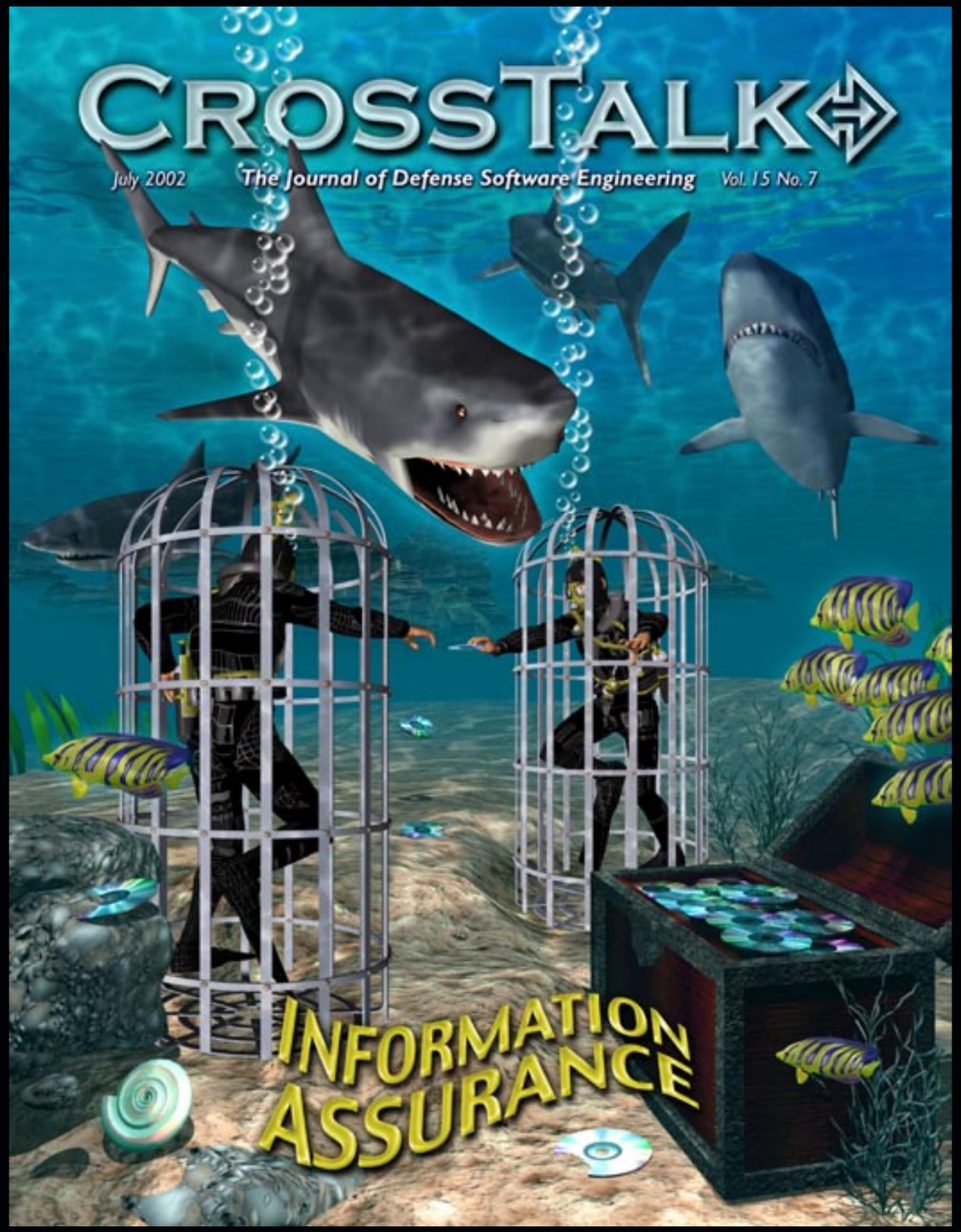
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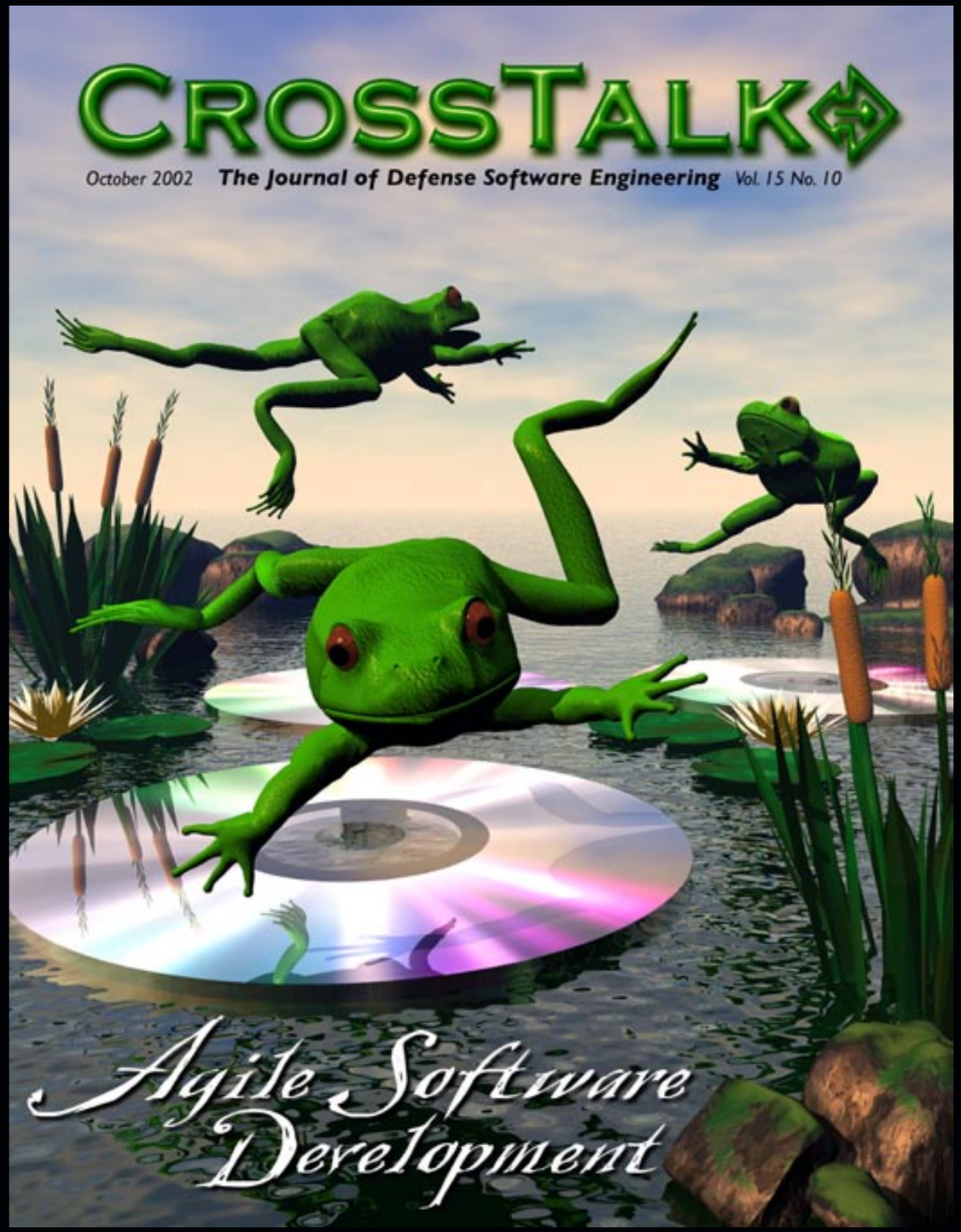
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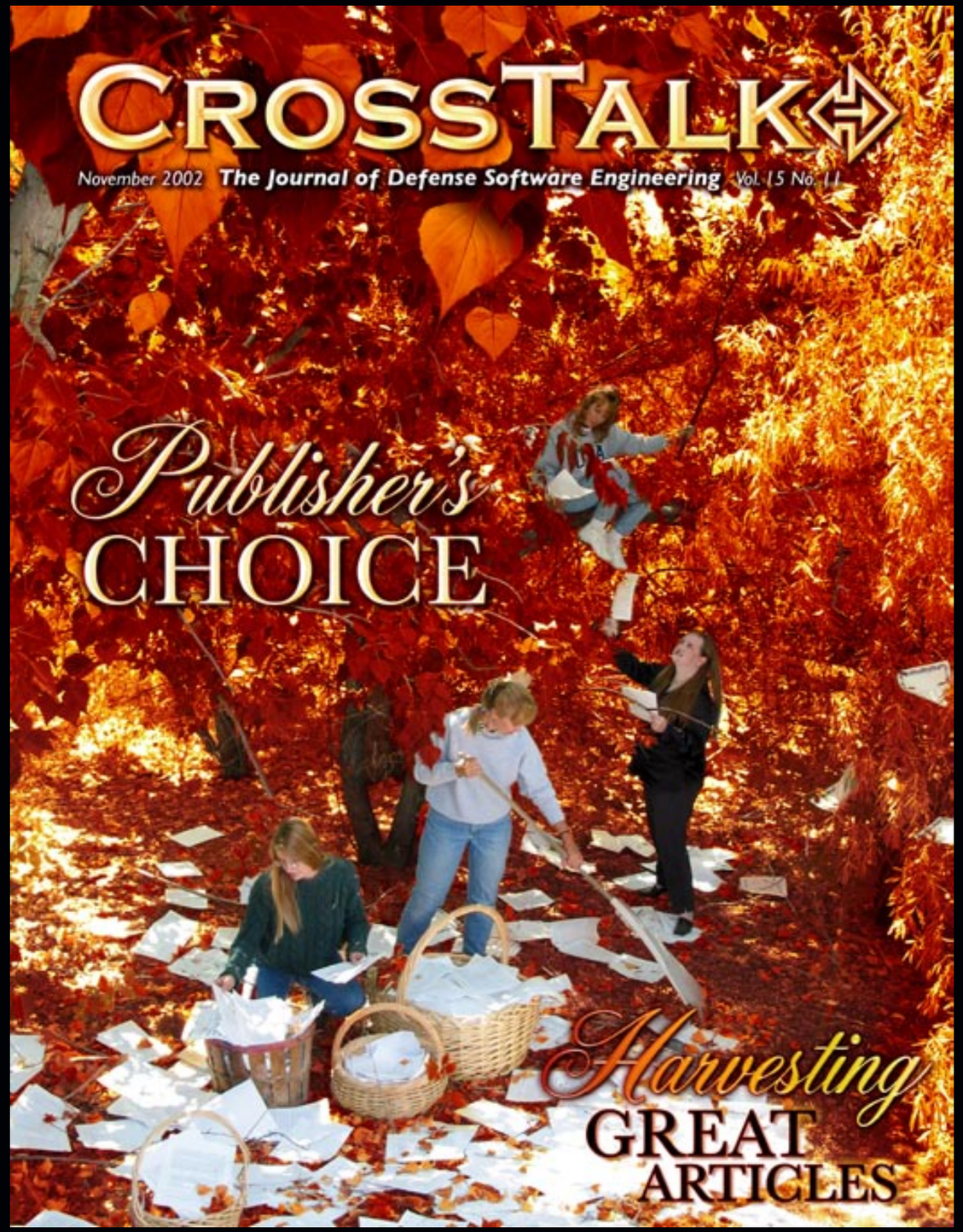
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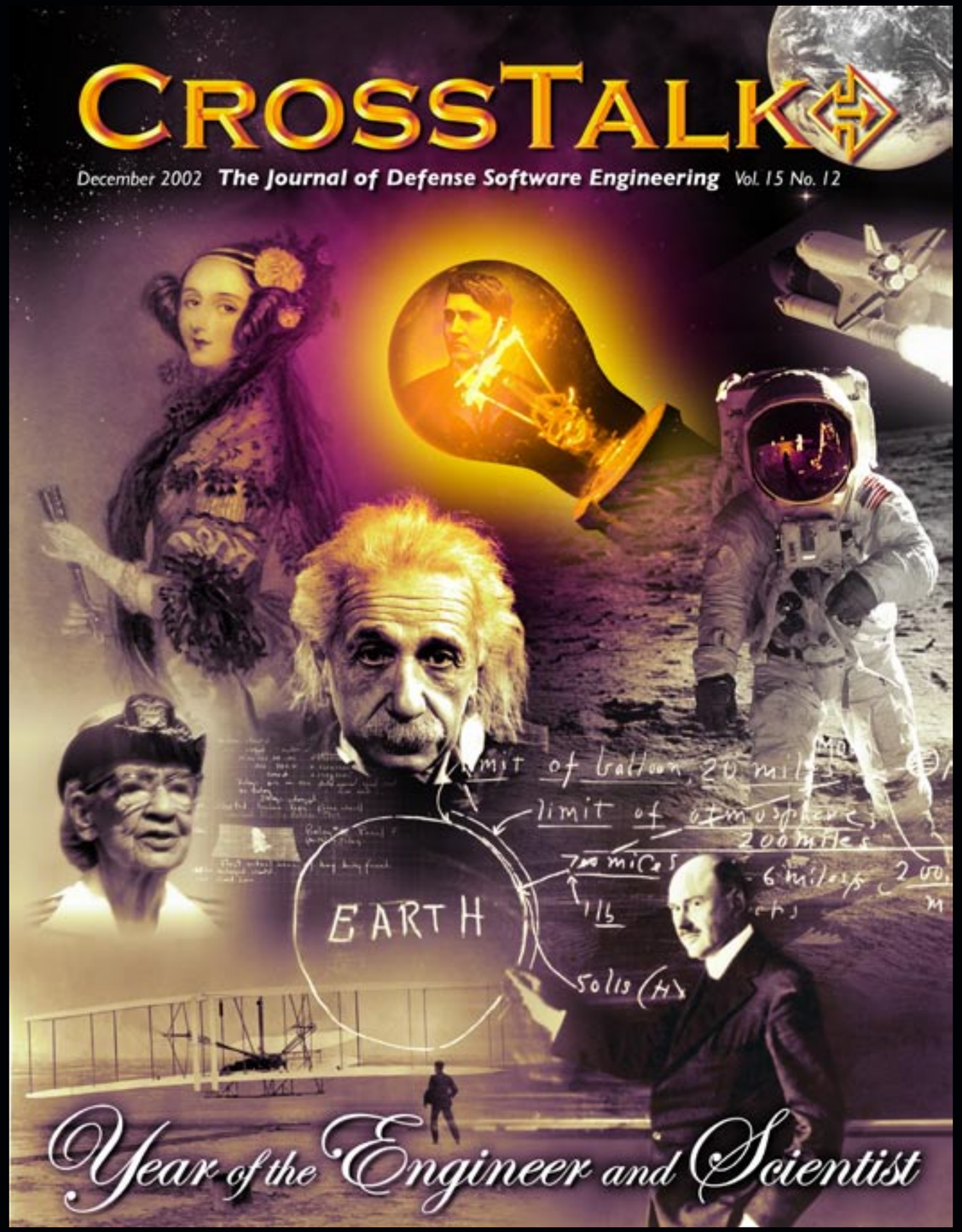
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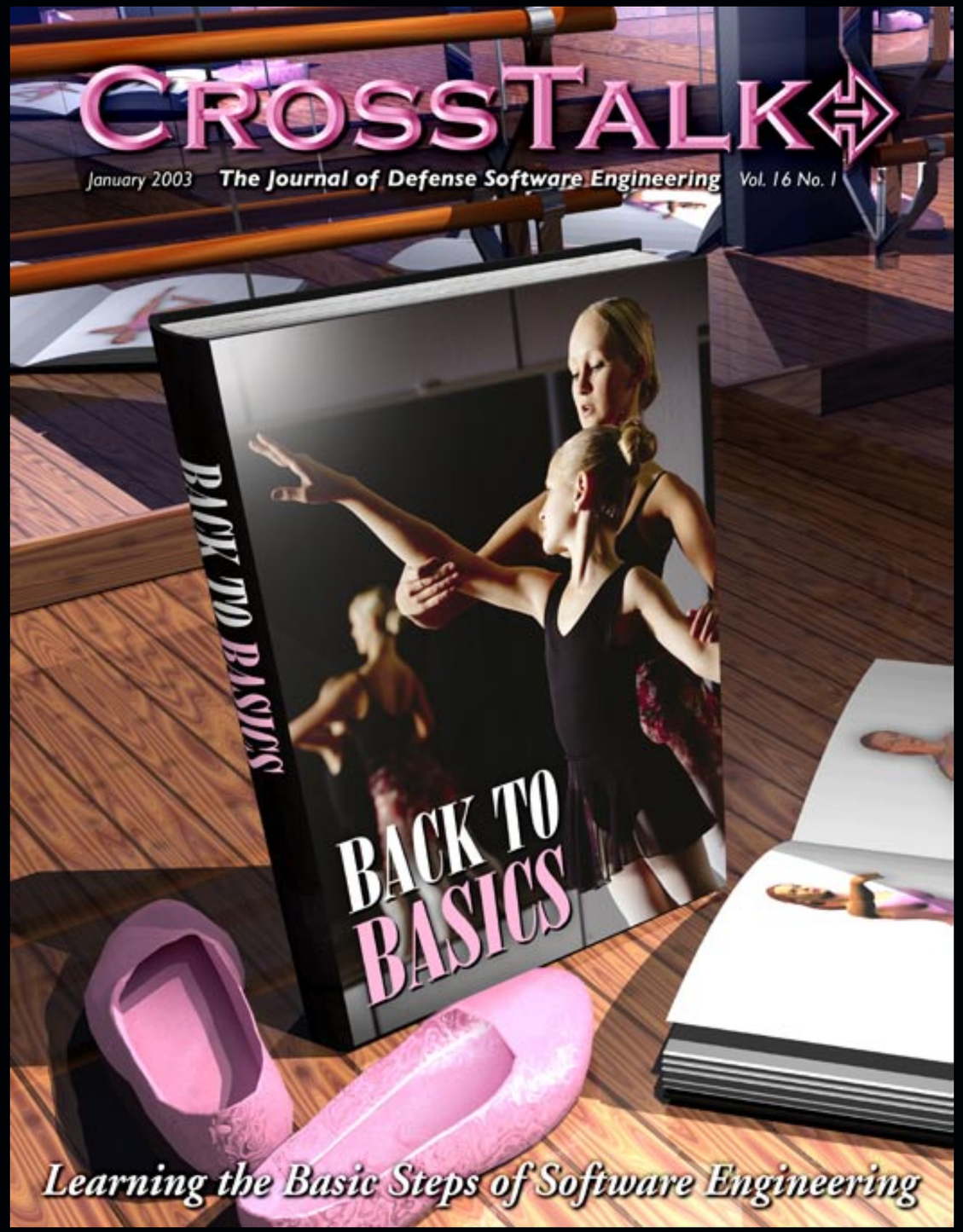
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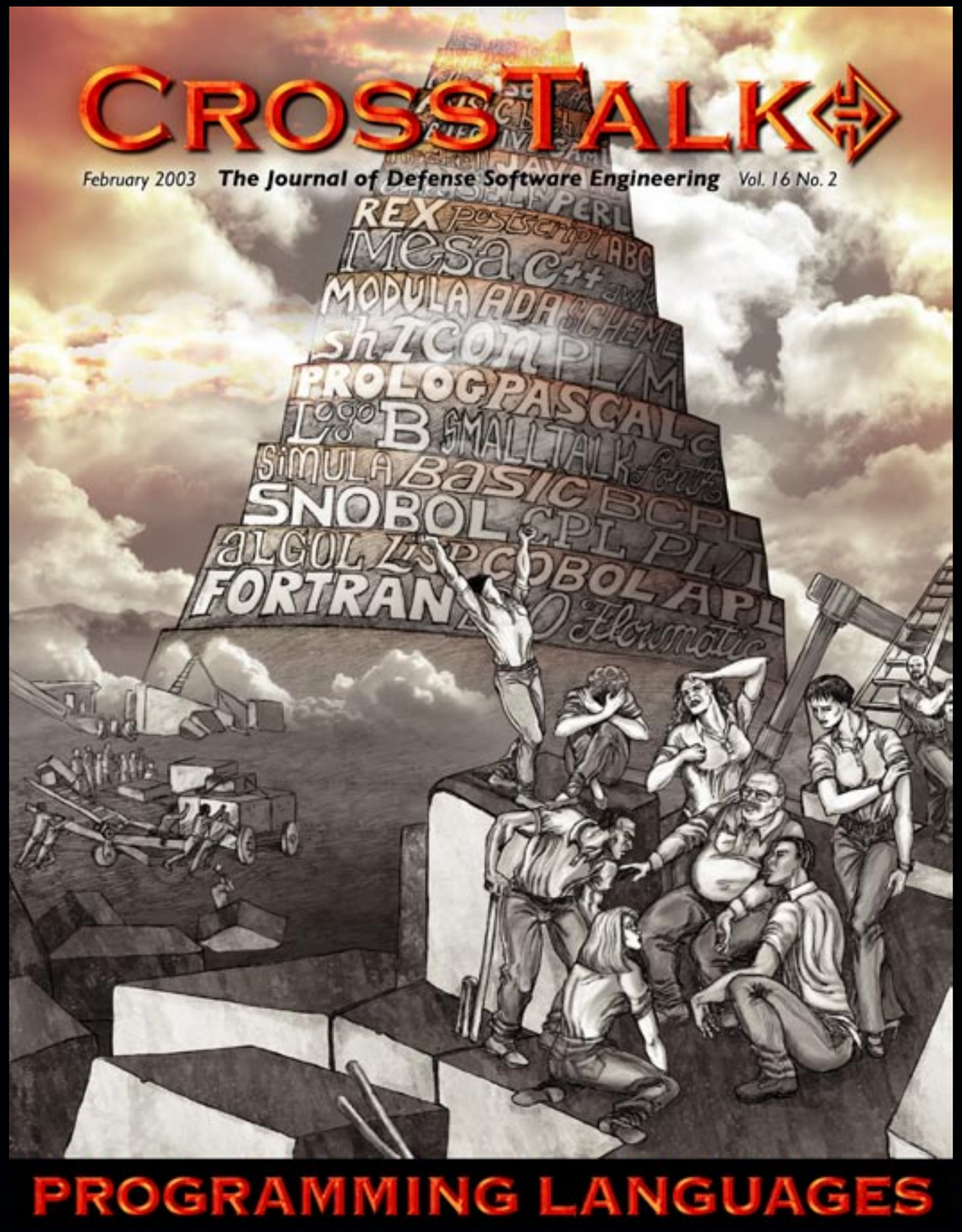
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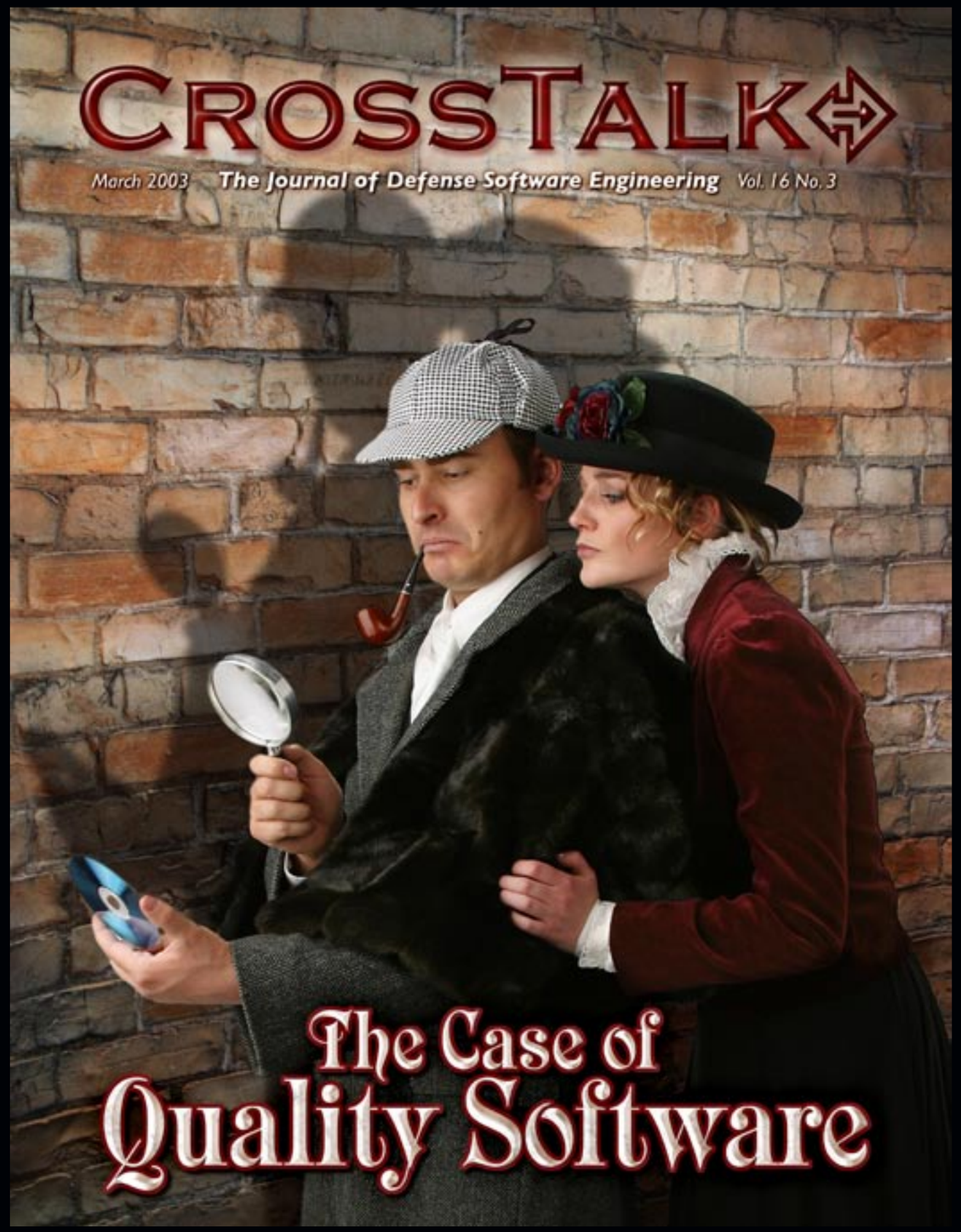
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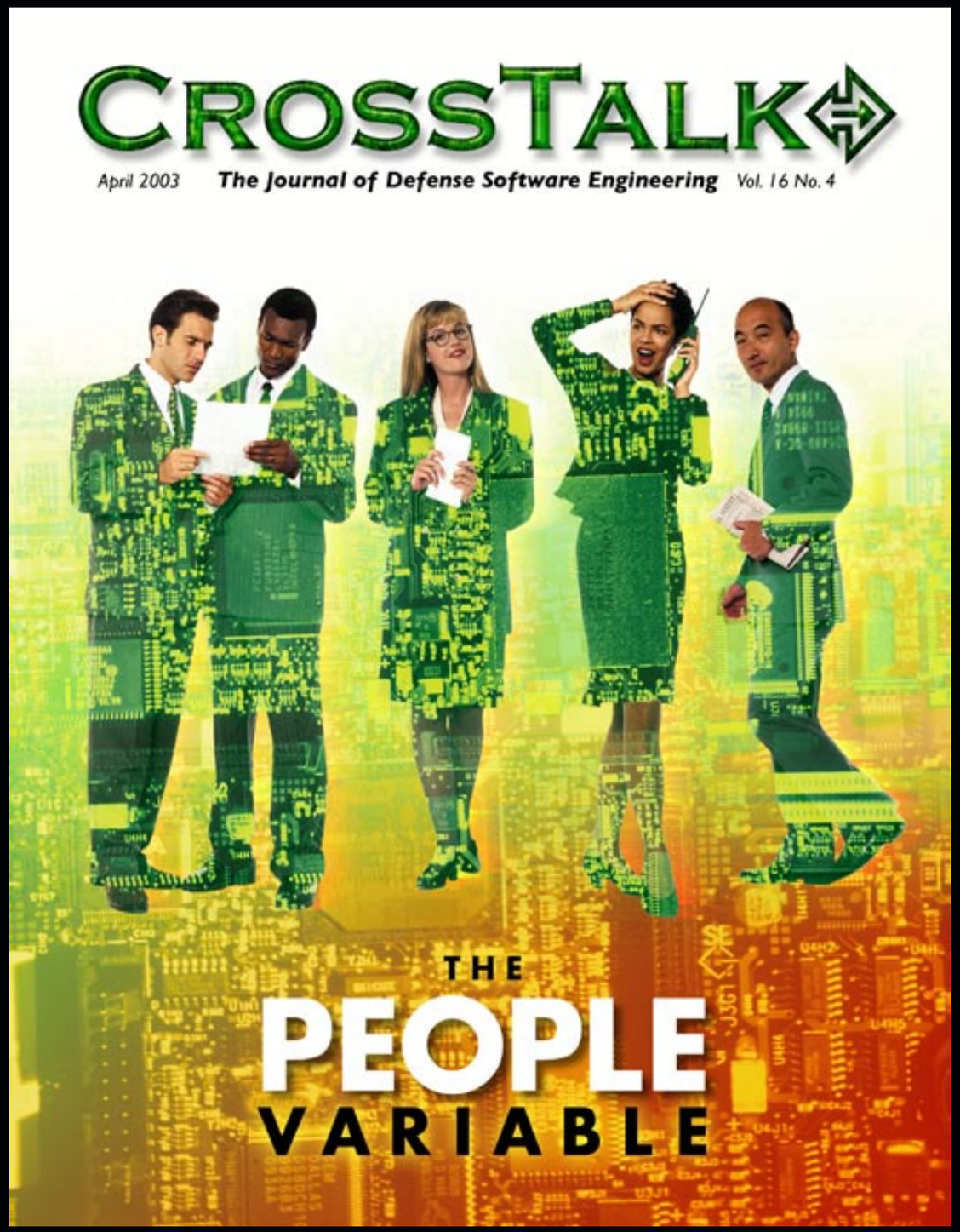
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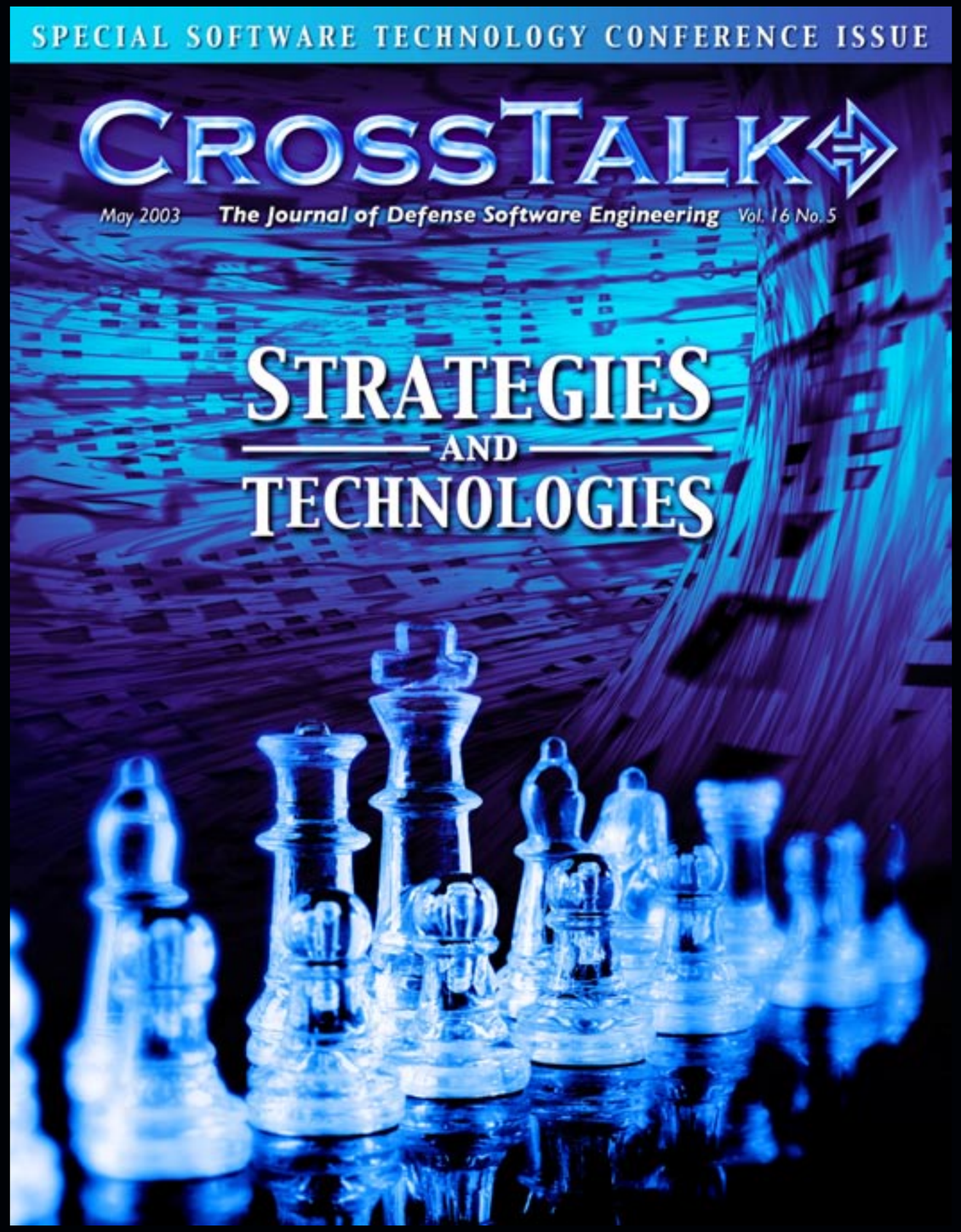
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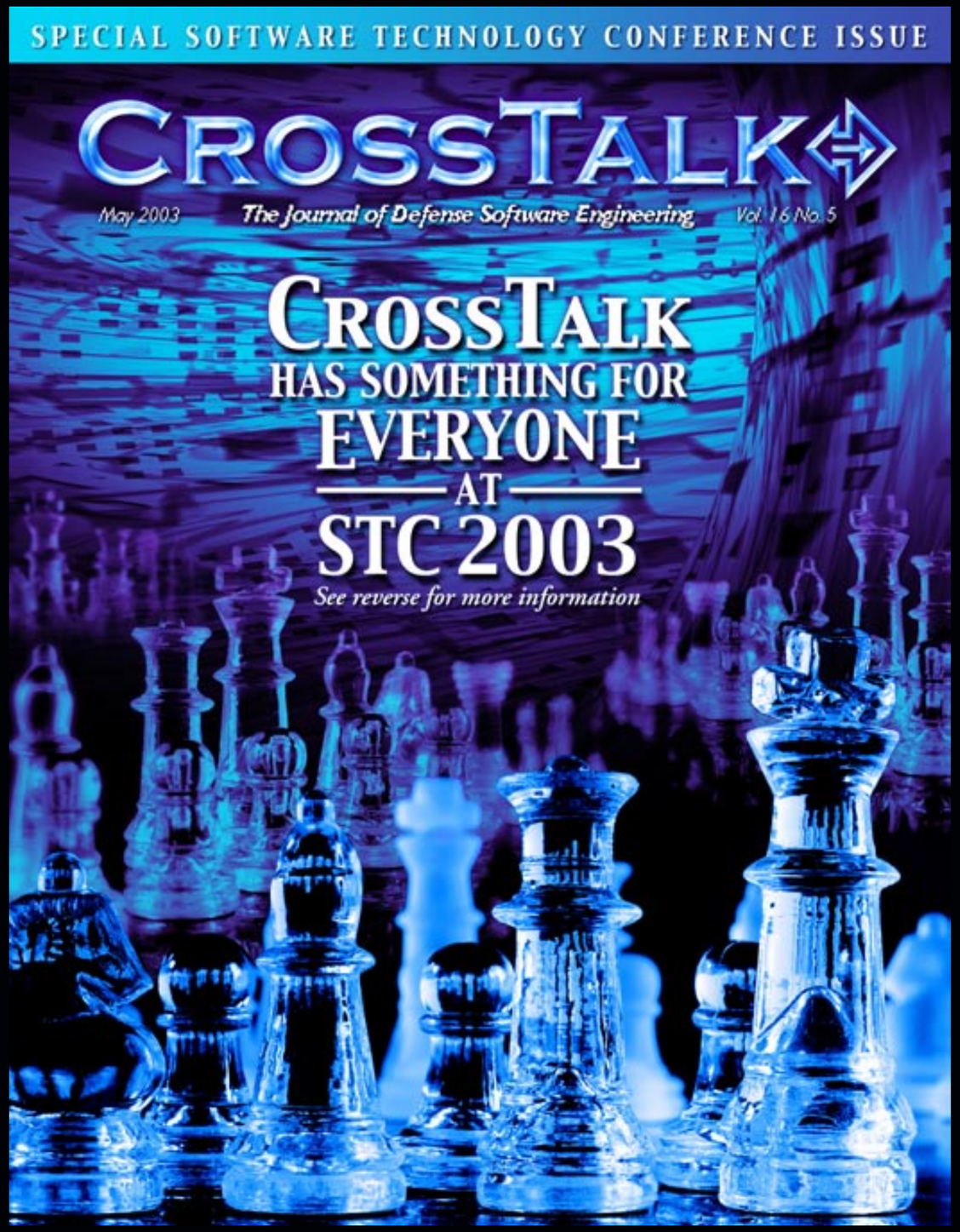
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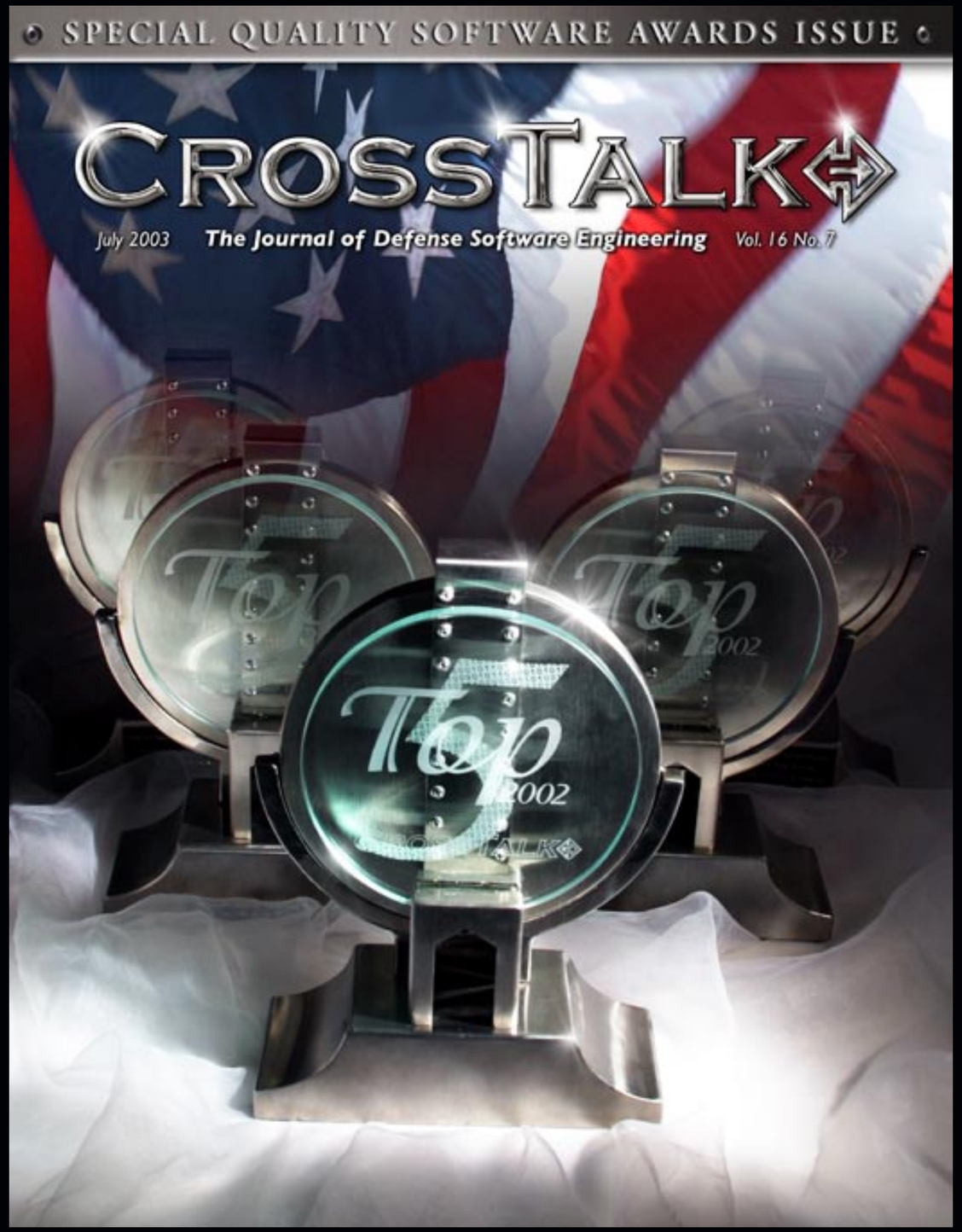
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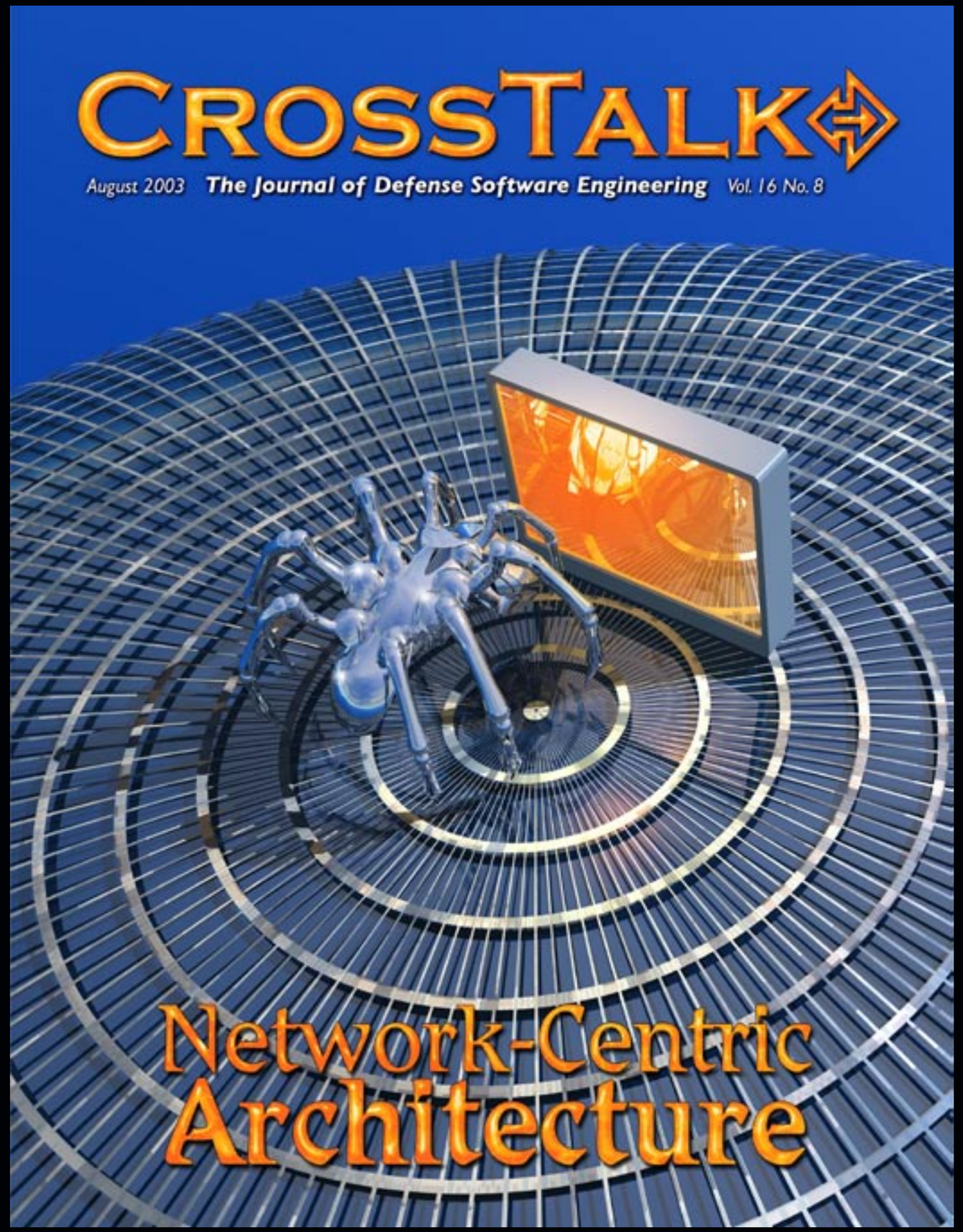
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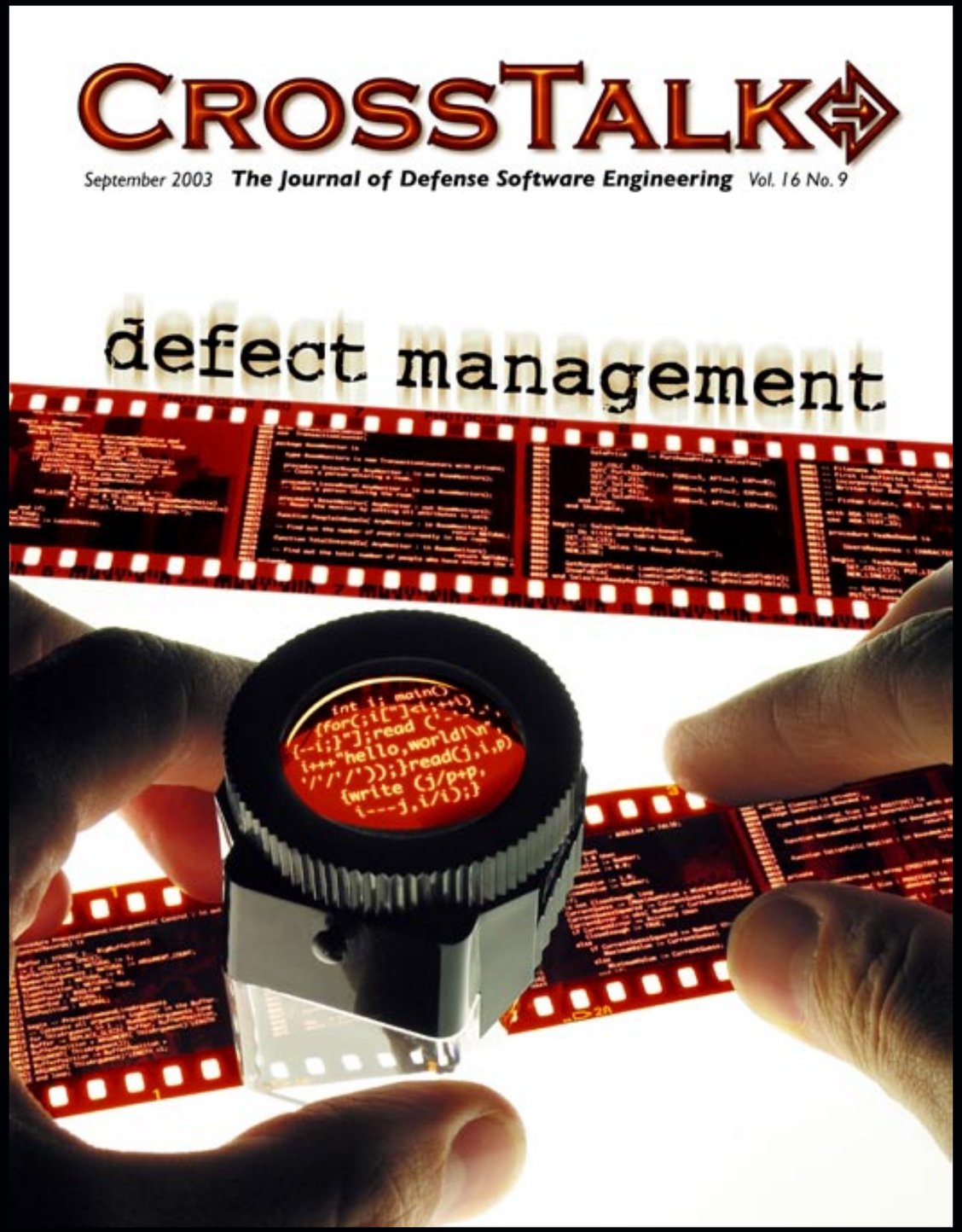
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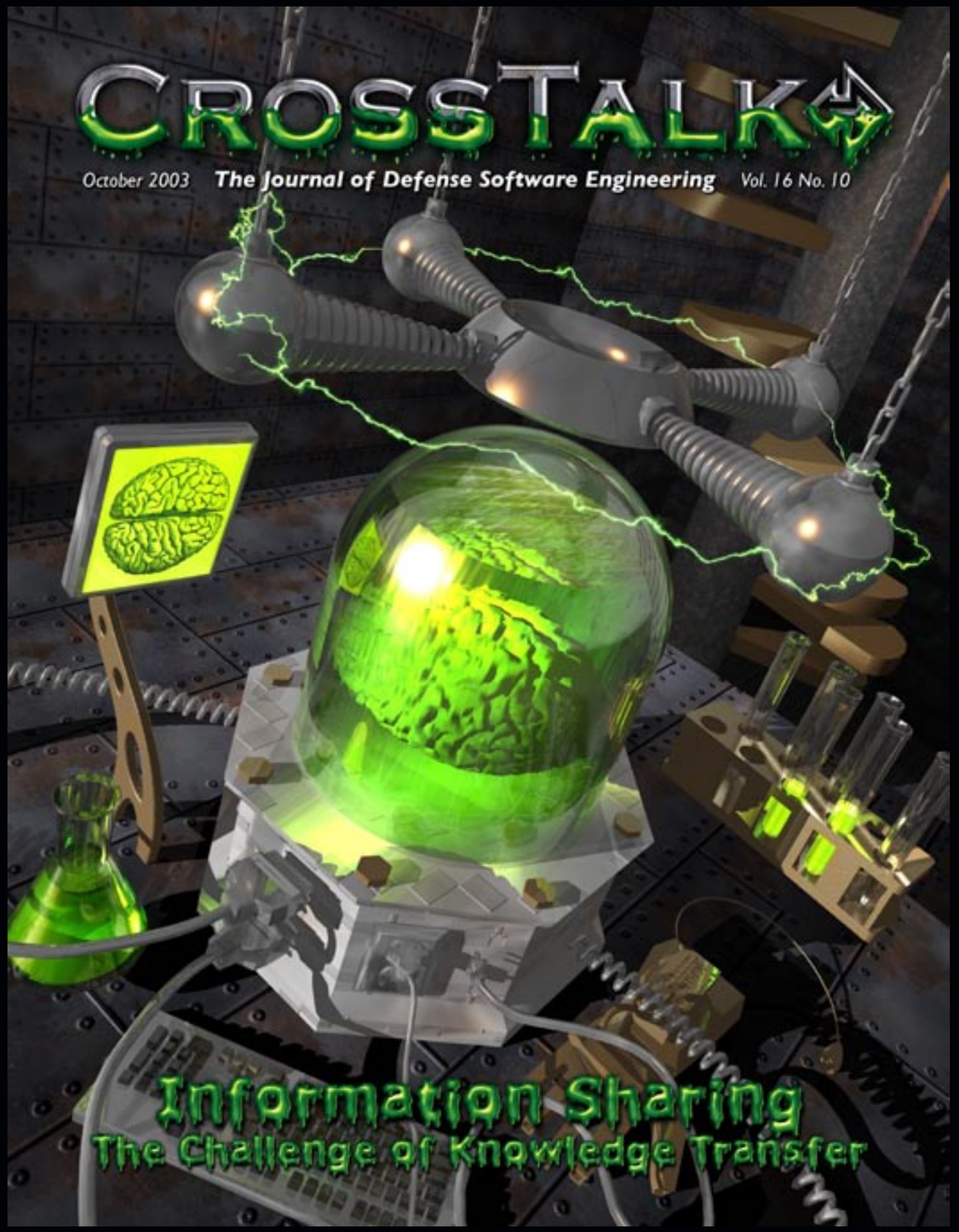
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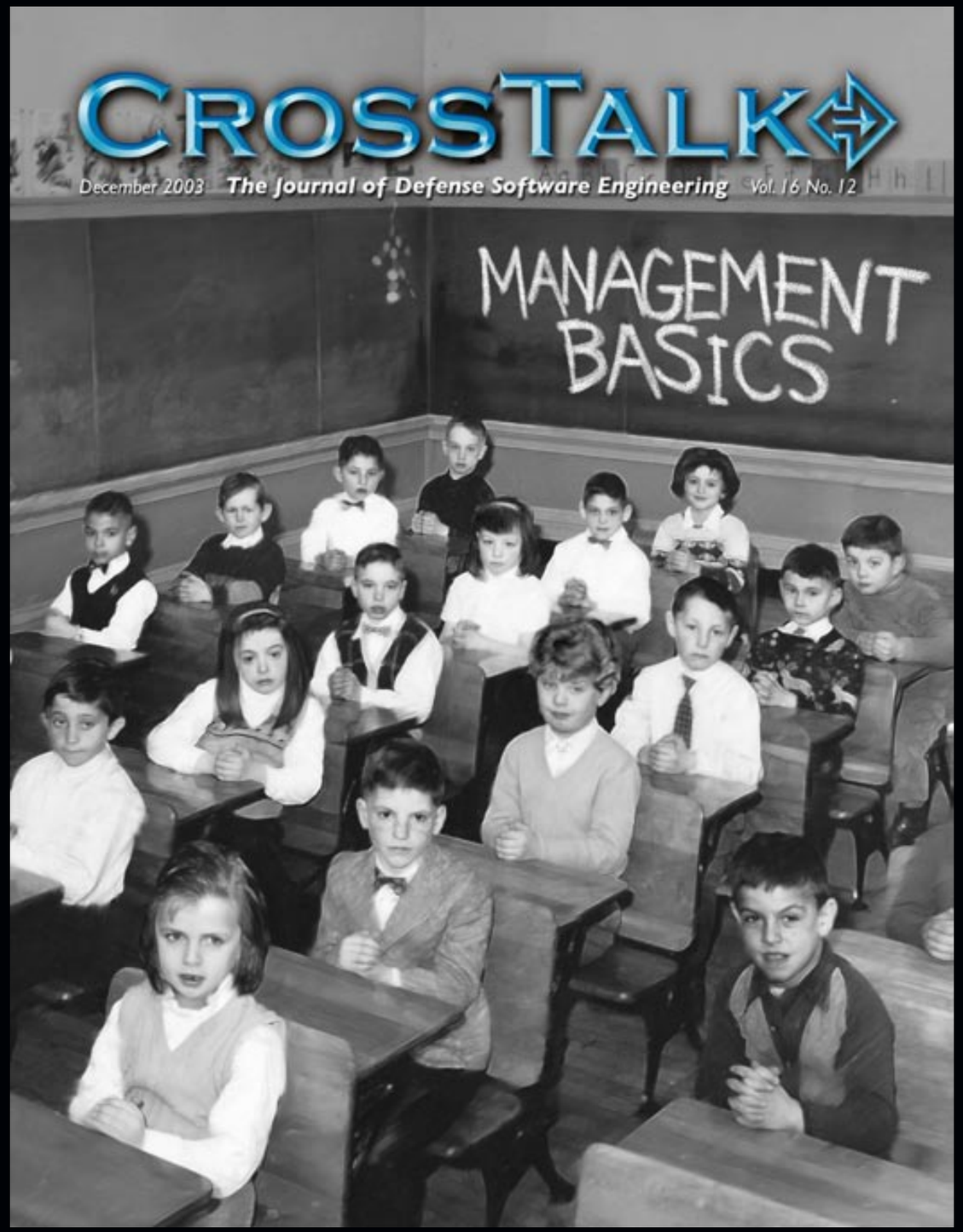
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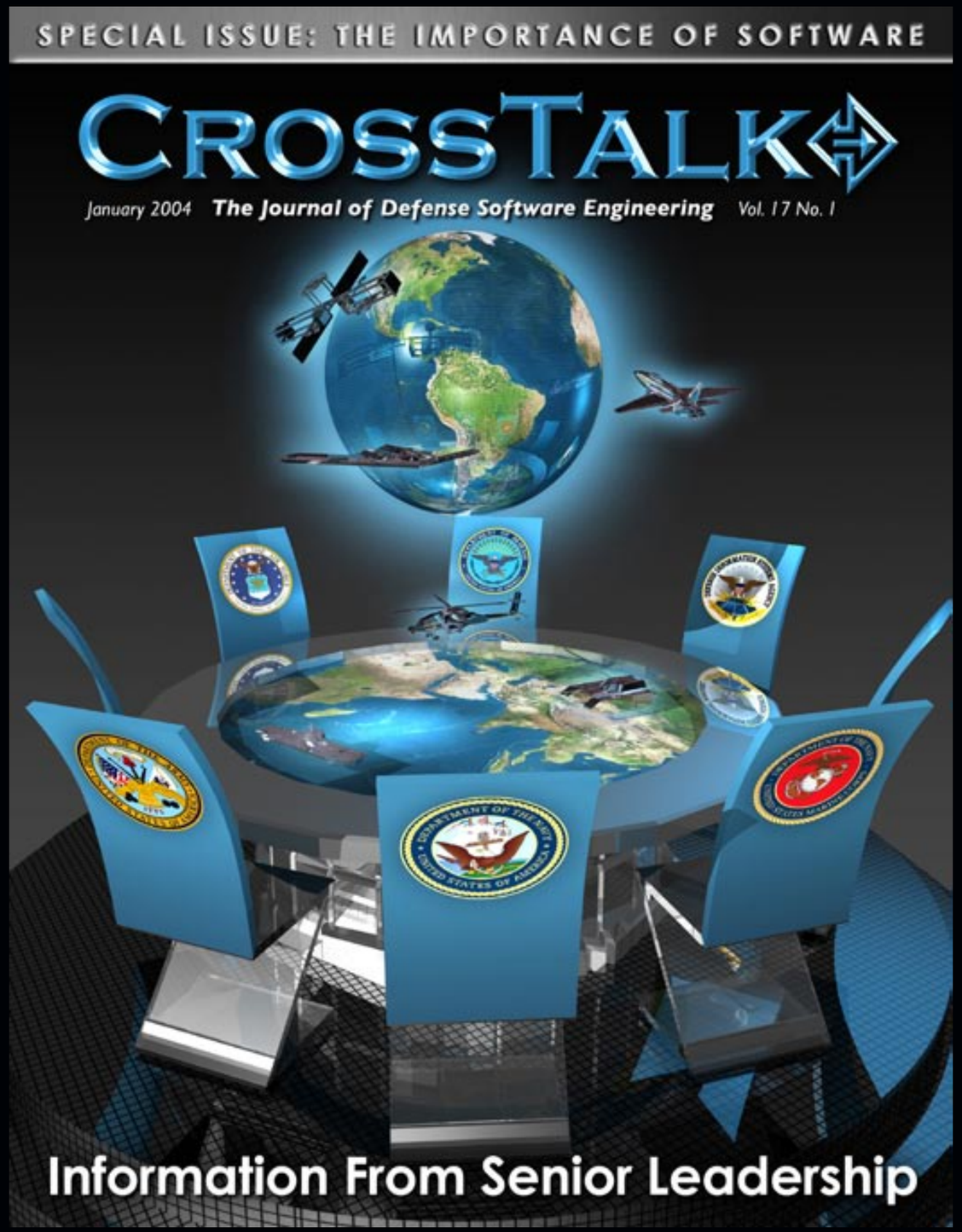
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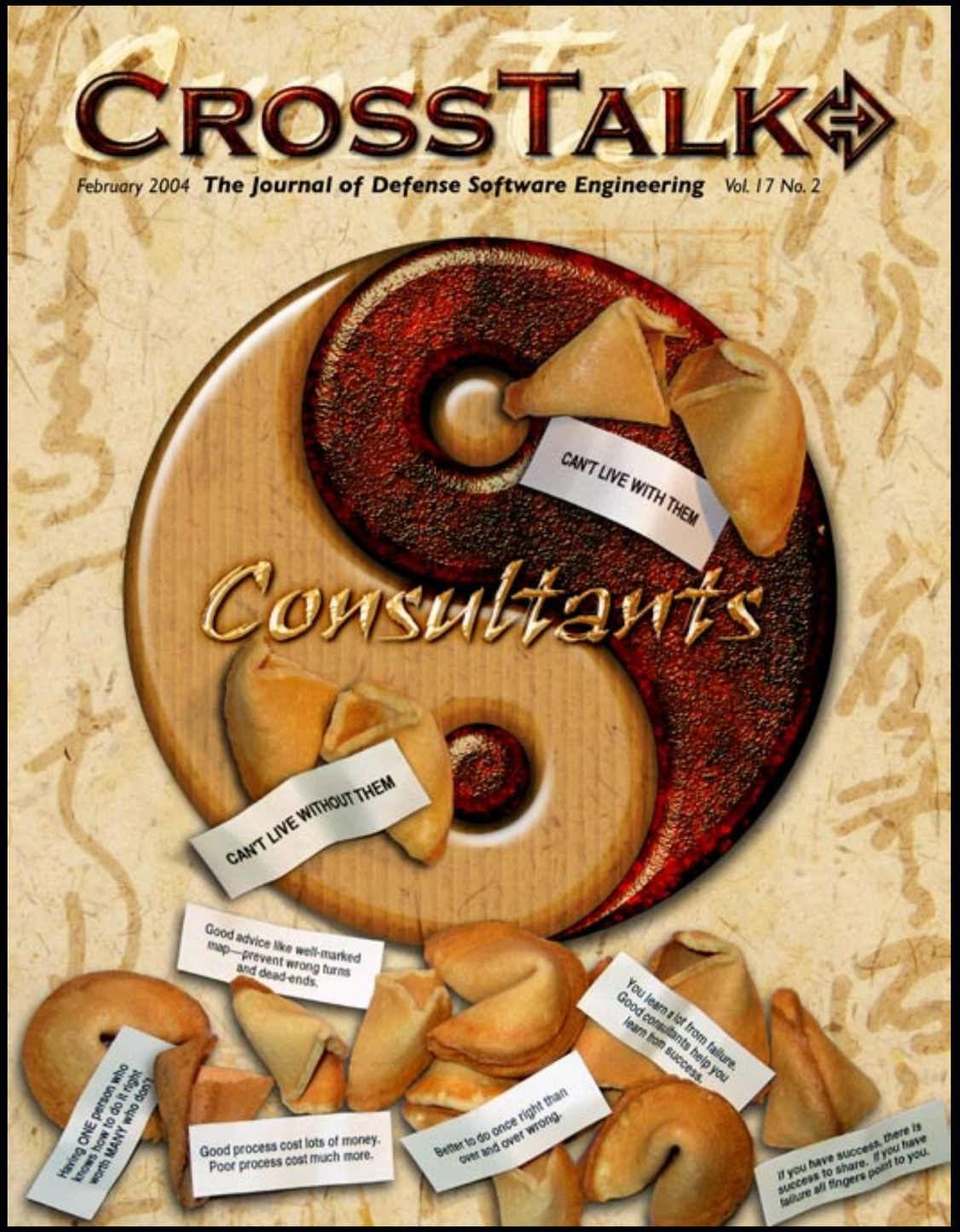
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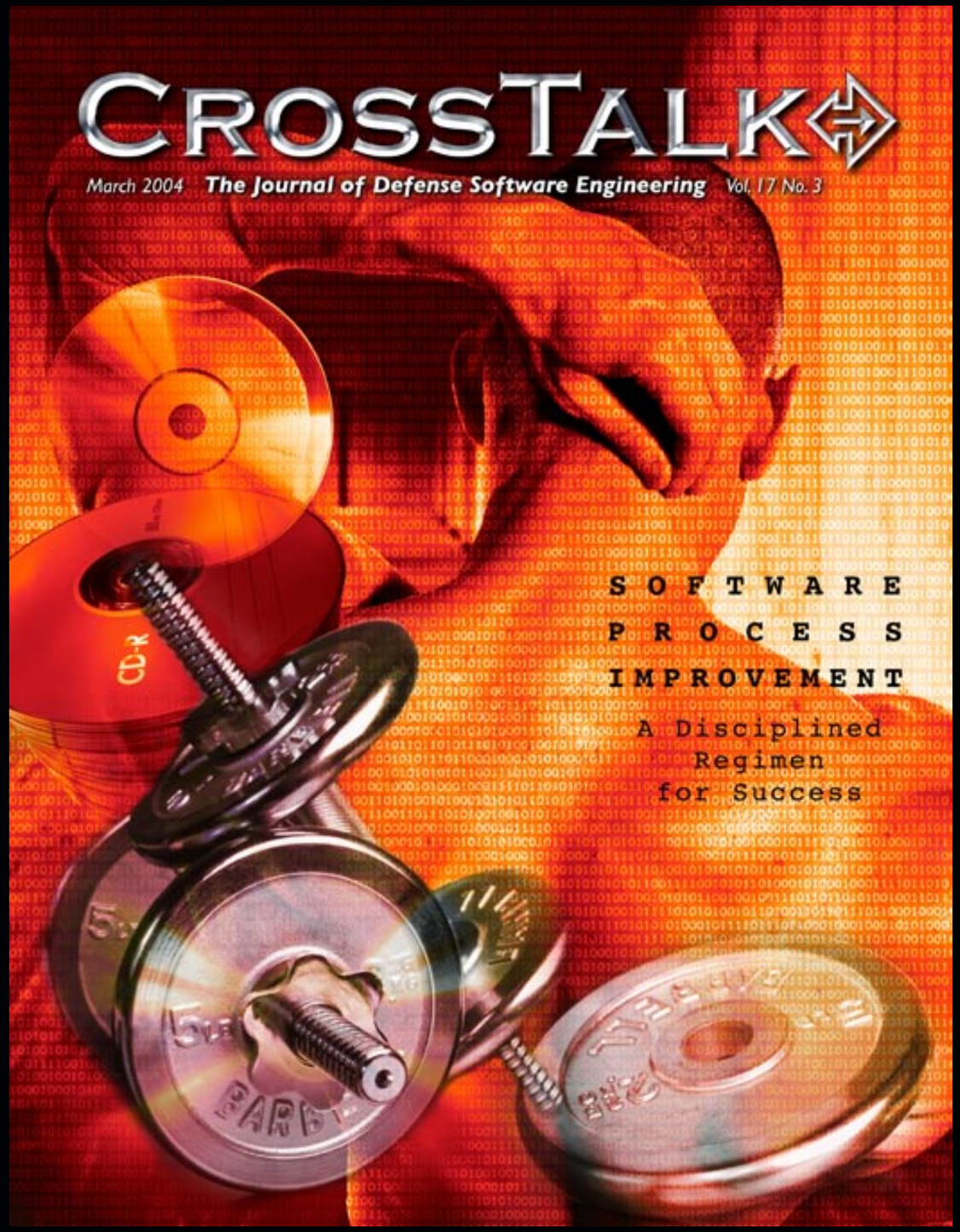
CAN'T LIVE WITH THEM
Consultants
CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT THEM
Good advice like well-marked map—prevent wrong turns and dead-ends.
You learn a lot from failure. Good consultants help you learn from success.
Having ONE person who knows how to do it right worth MANY who don't
Good process cost lots of money. Poor process cost much more.
Better to do once right than over and over wrong.
If you have success, there is success to share. If you have failure all fingers point to you.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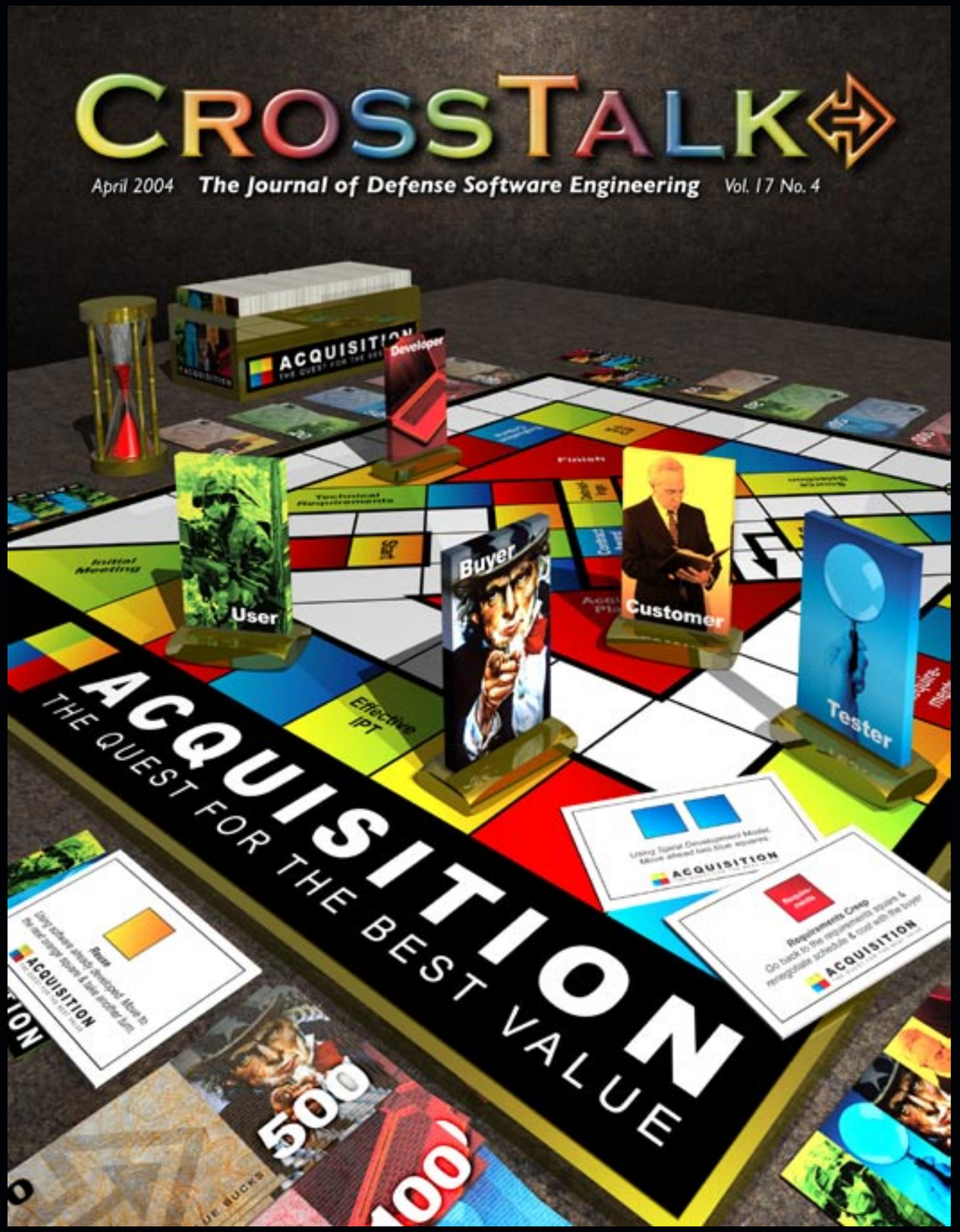
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THE QUEST FOR THE BEST VALUE
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Tester
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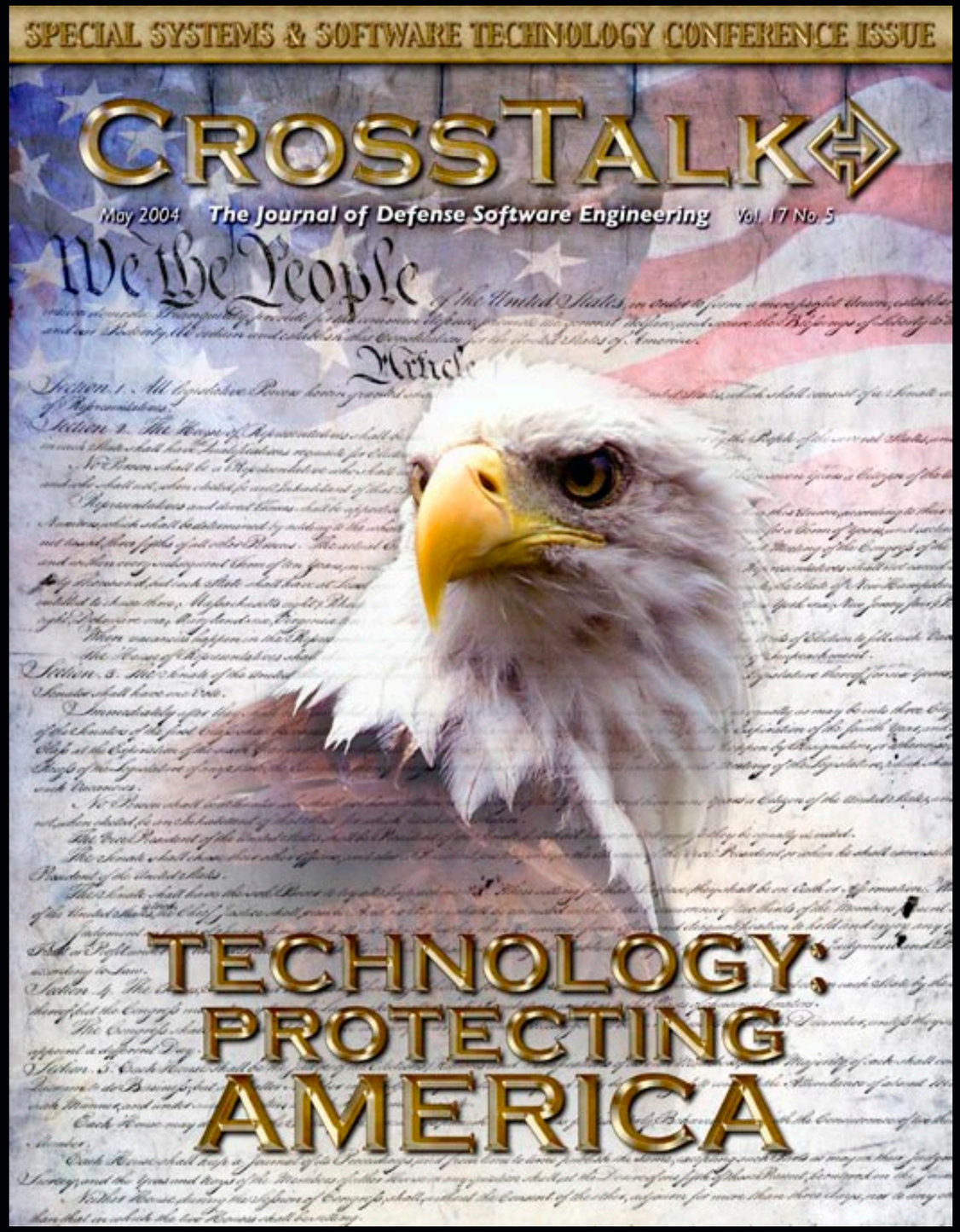
Initial Meeting
Technical Requirements
Finish
Requirements Creep
Go back to the requirements boxes & renegotiate schedule & cost with the buyer
Reuse
500
100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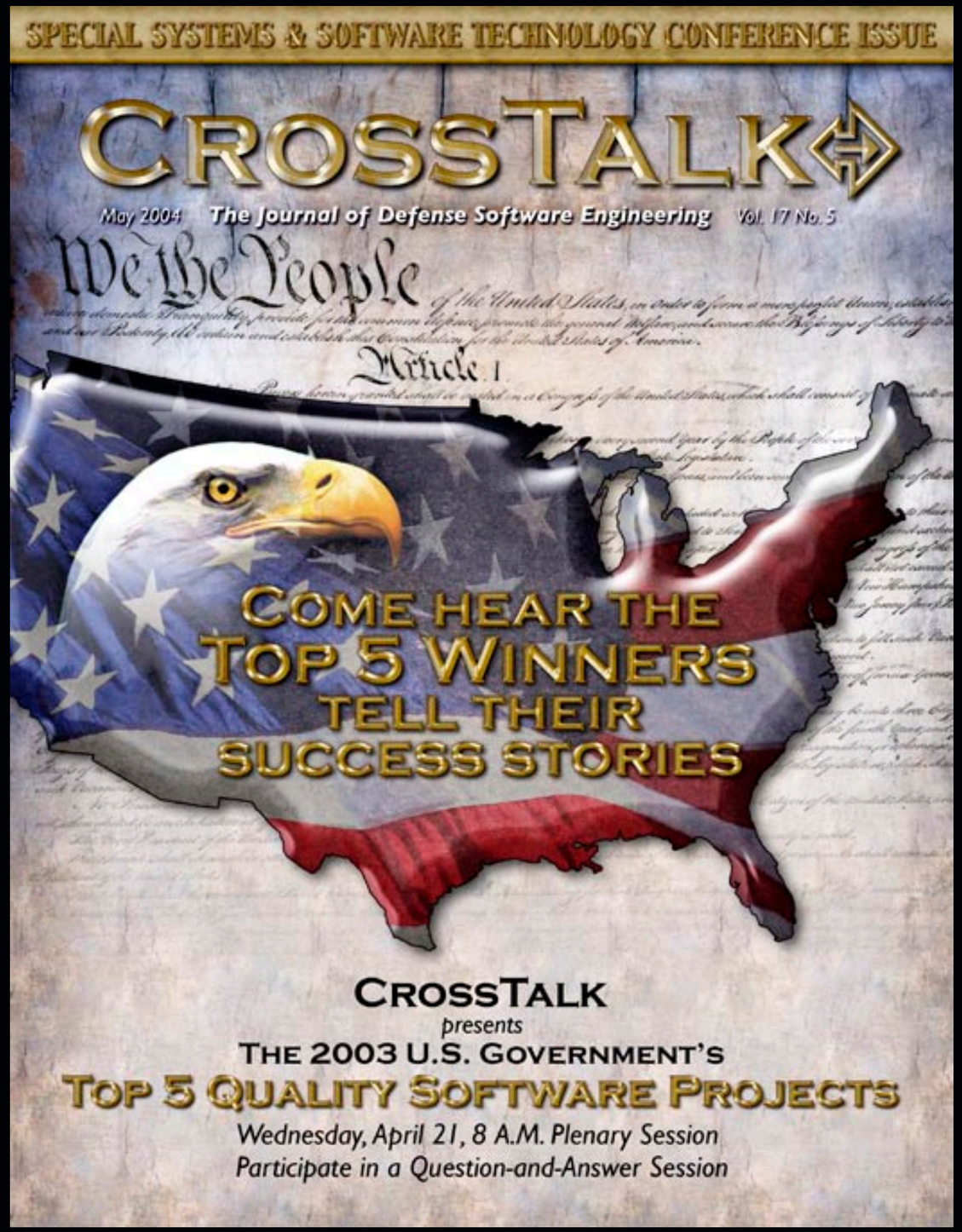
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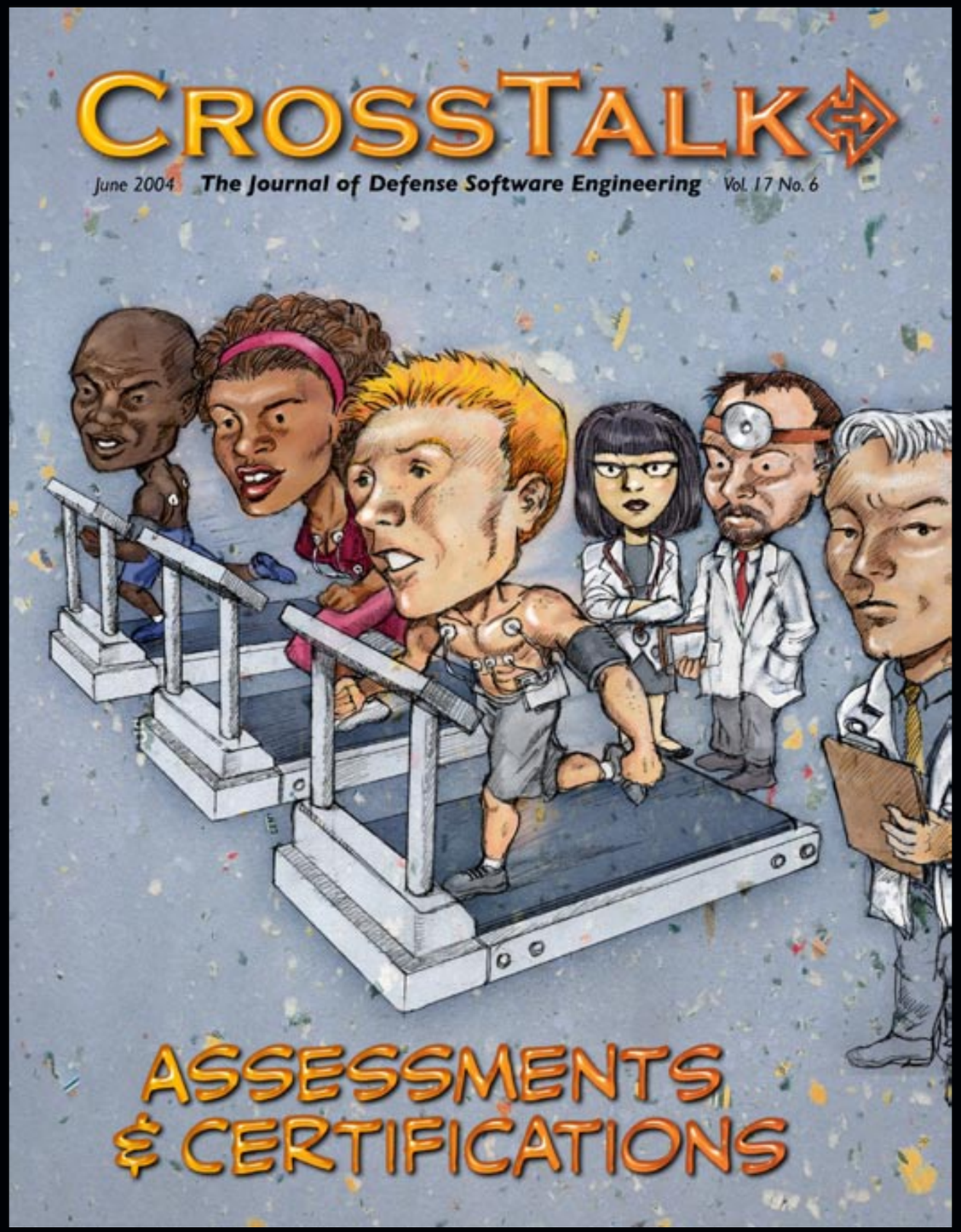
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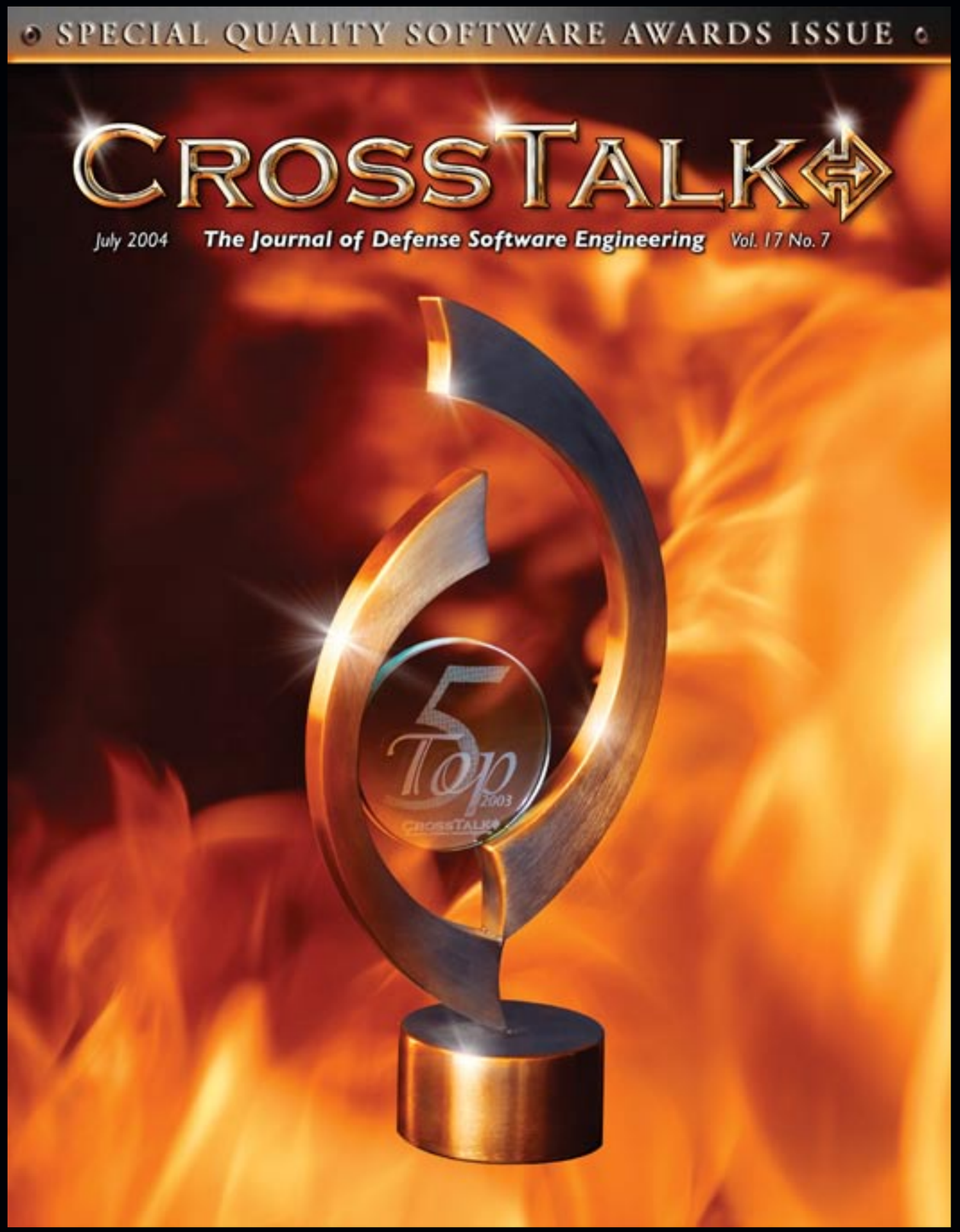
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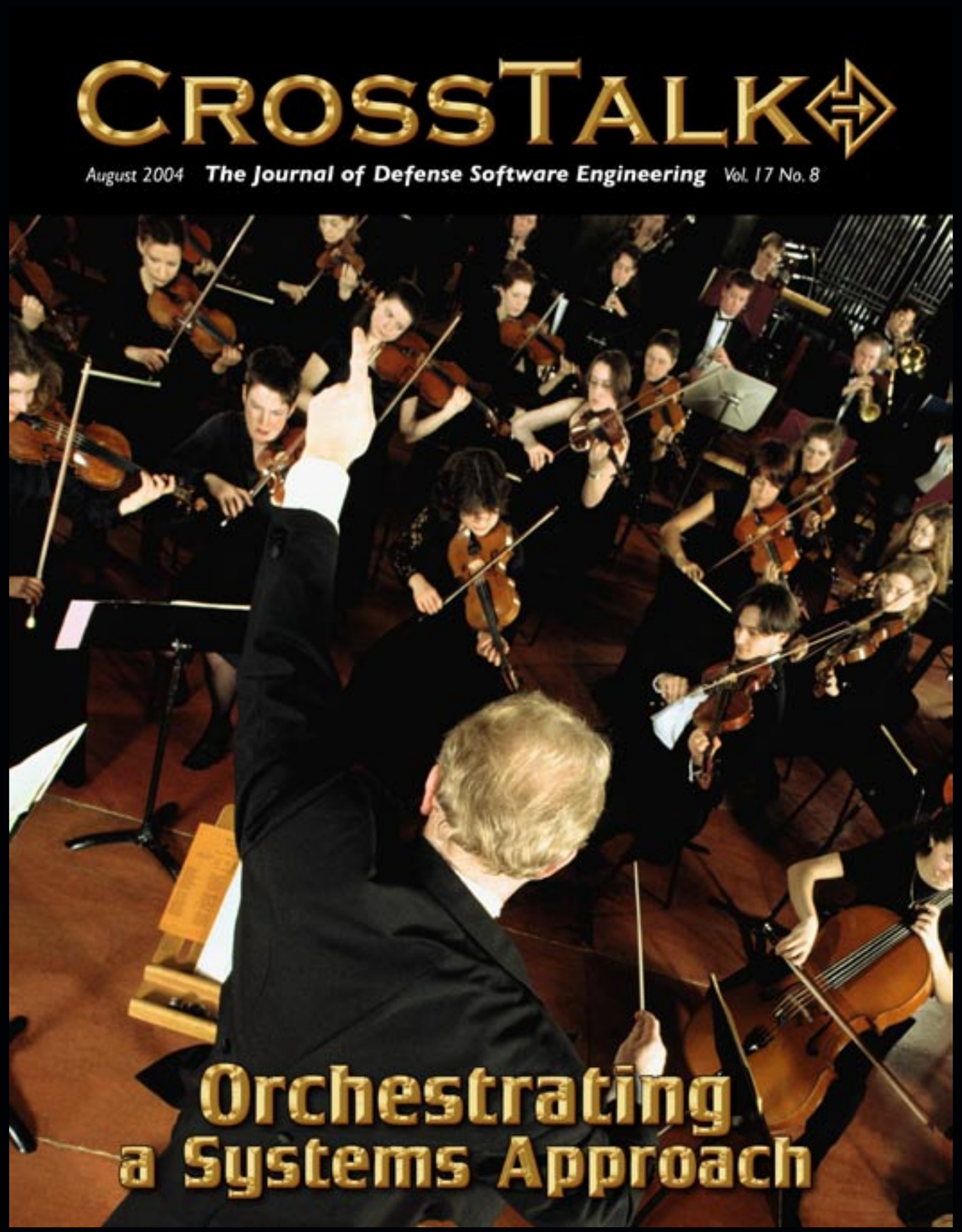
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August 2004 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 17 No. 8
Orchestrating
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CROSSTALK
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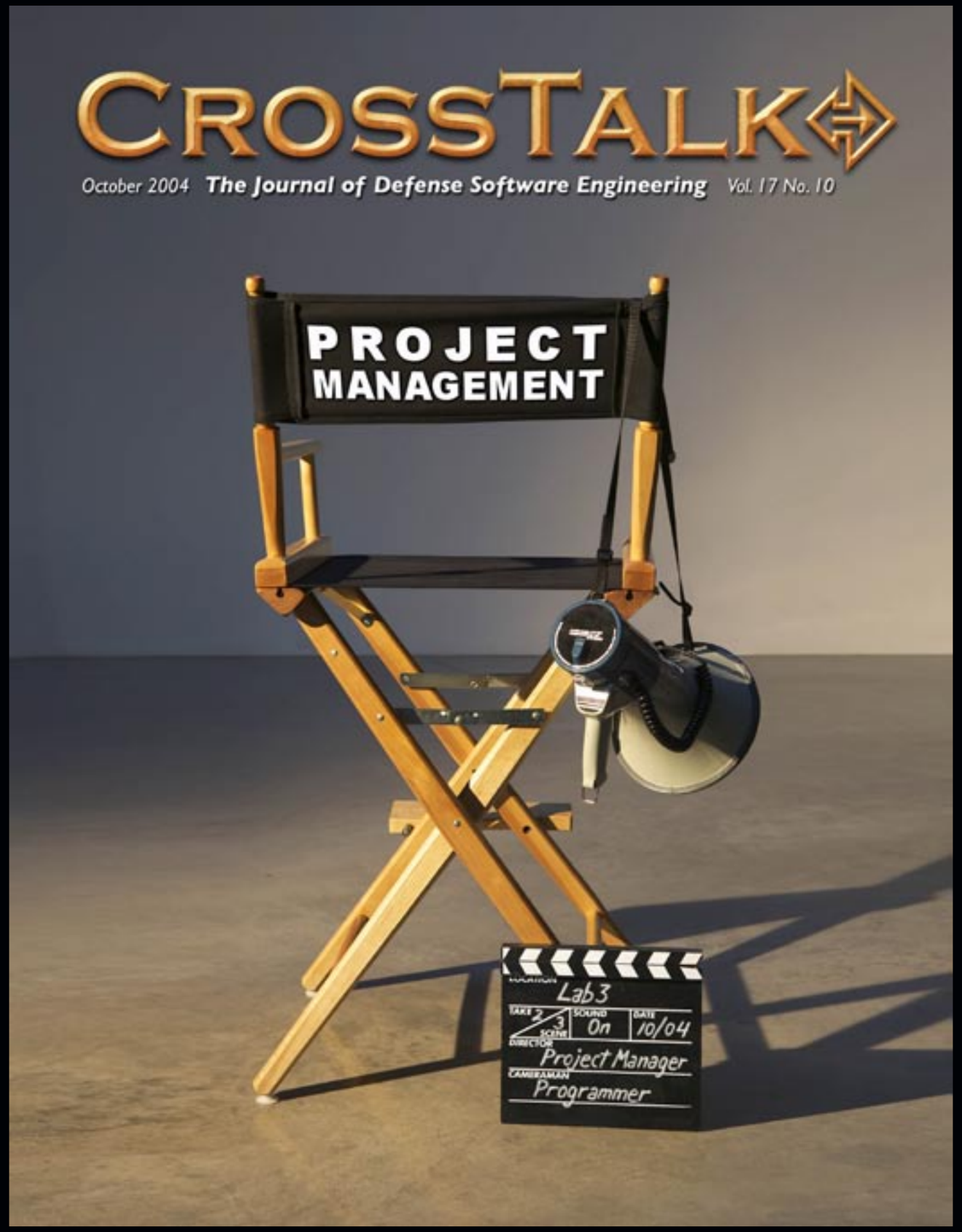
THE SOFTWARE EDGE:
ENABLING THE WARFIGHTER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October 2004 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 17 No. 10
PROJECT MANAGEMENT
Lab 3
On
10/04
Project Manager
Programmer

SPECIAL SOFTWARE TOOLBOX ISSUE

CrossTalk

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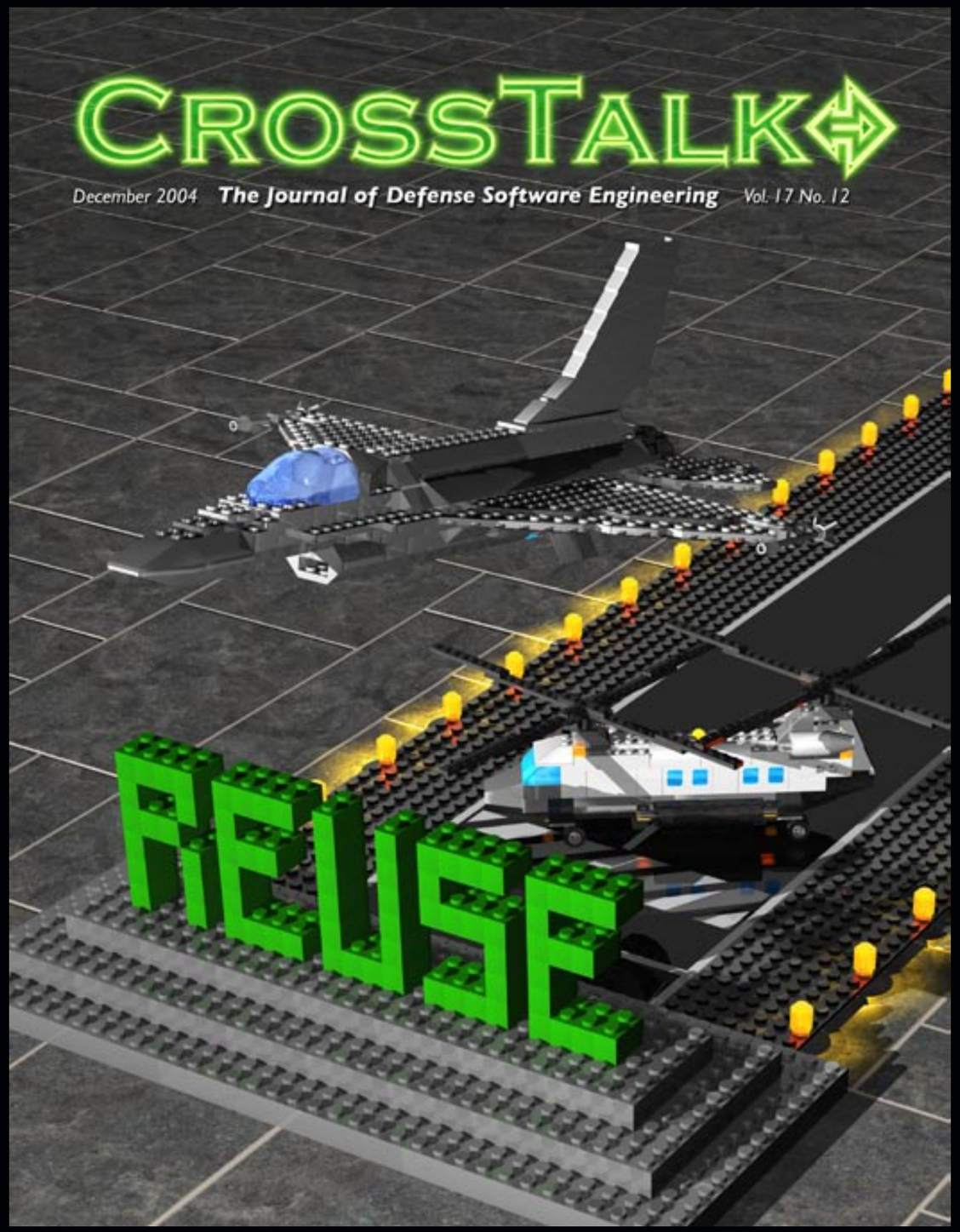
CrossTalk

December 2004 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 17 No. 12



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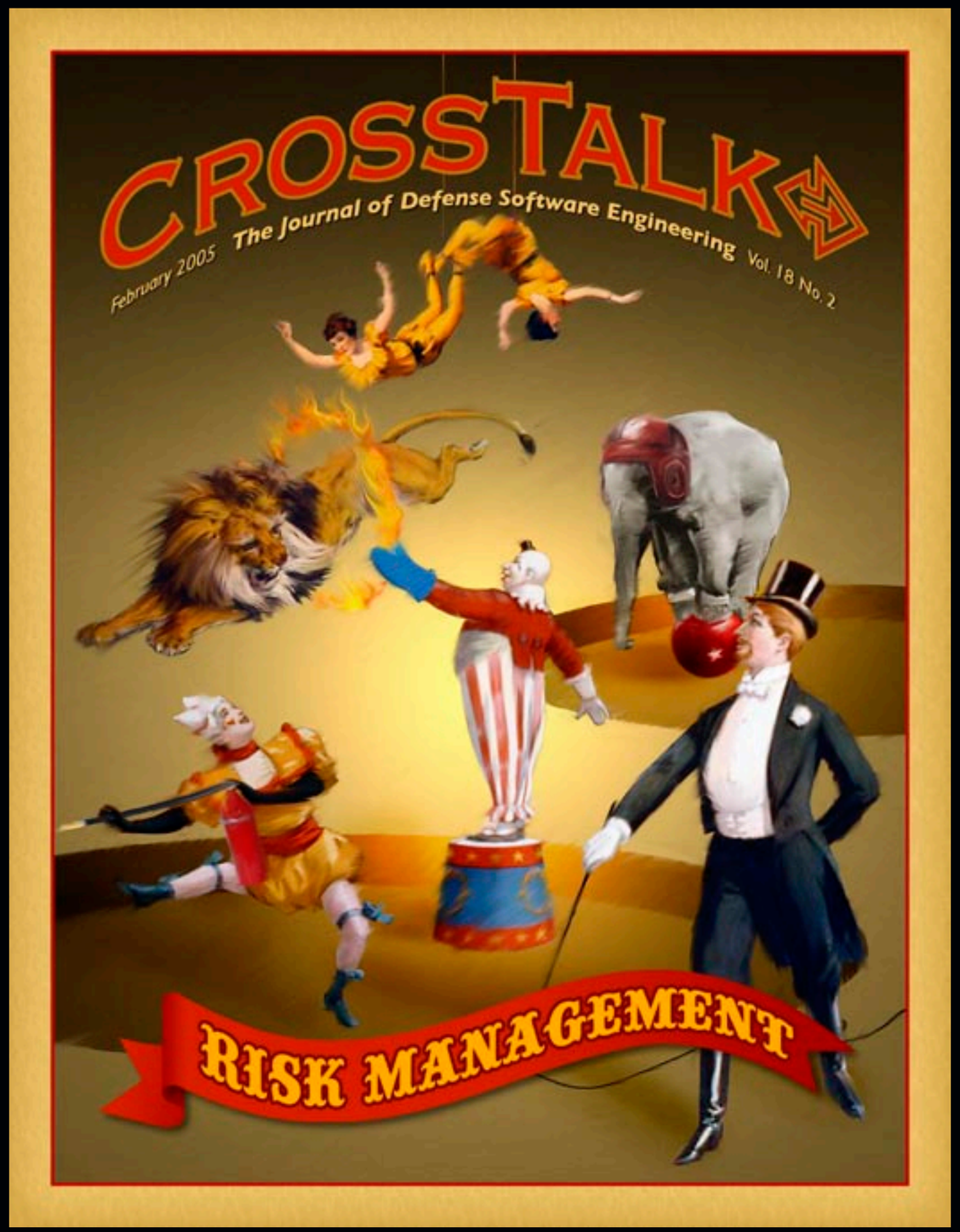
January 2005 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 18 No. 1
OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE
Sharing From a Well of Ideas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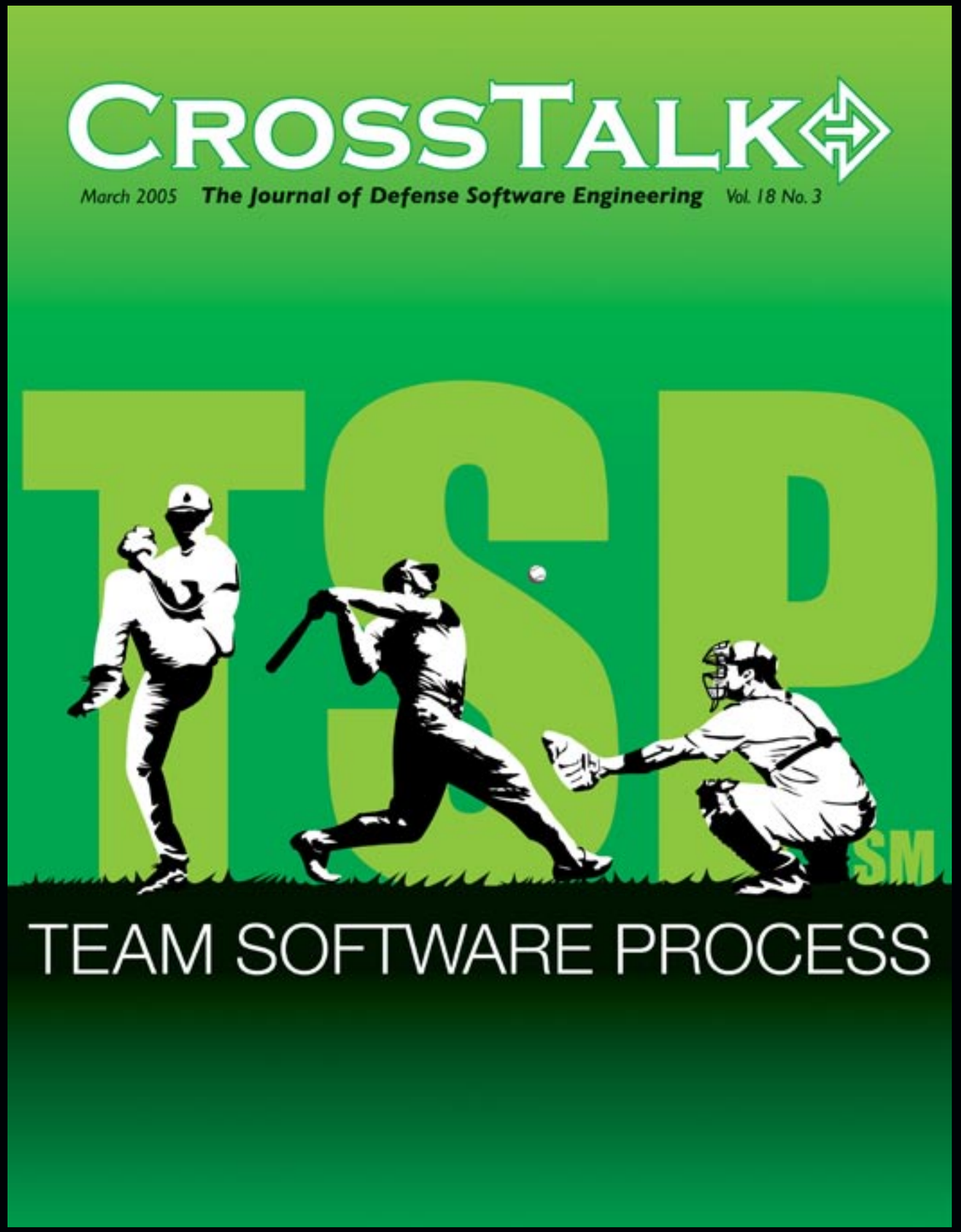
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March 2005 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 18 No. 3
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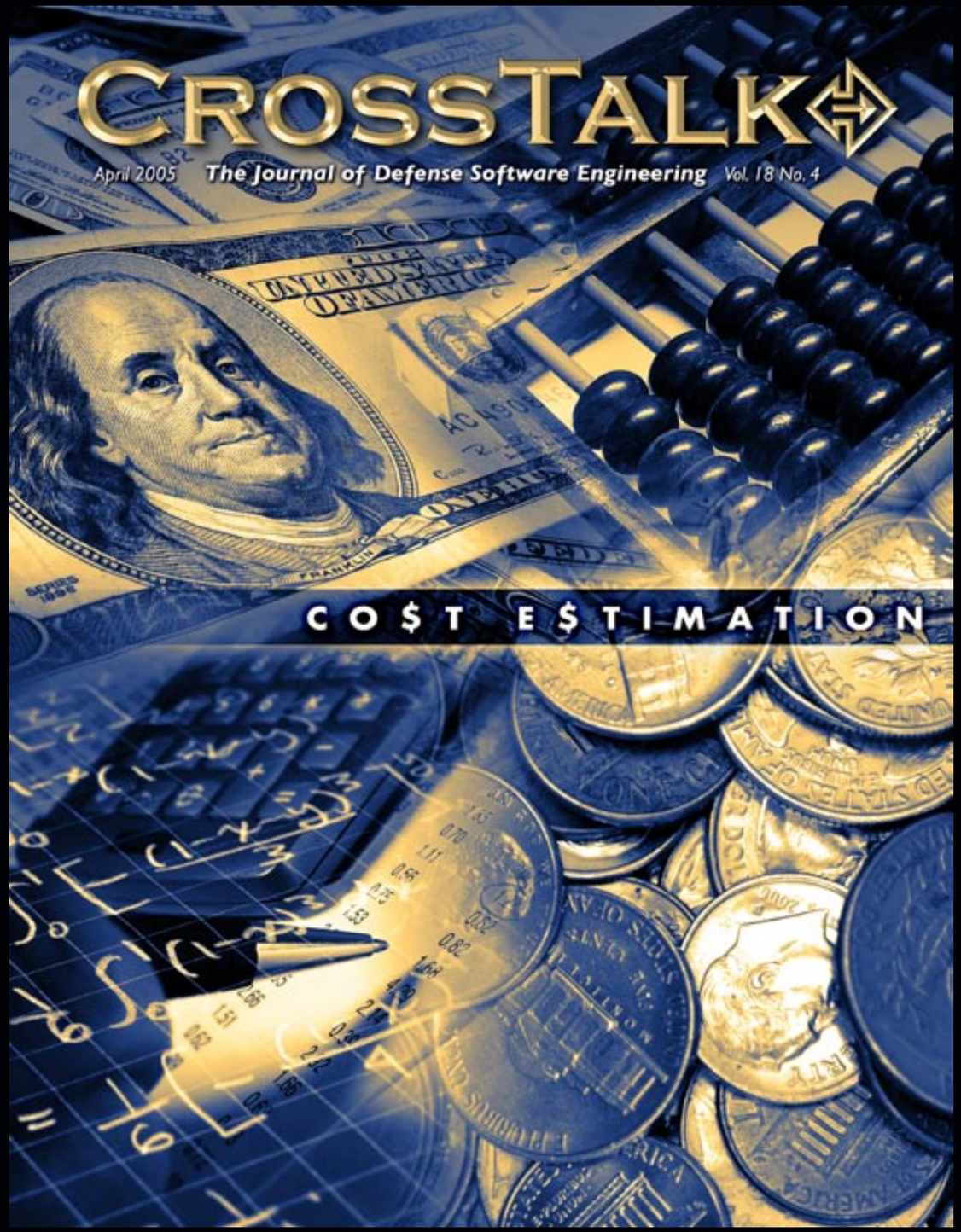
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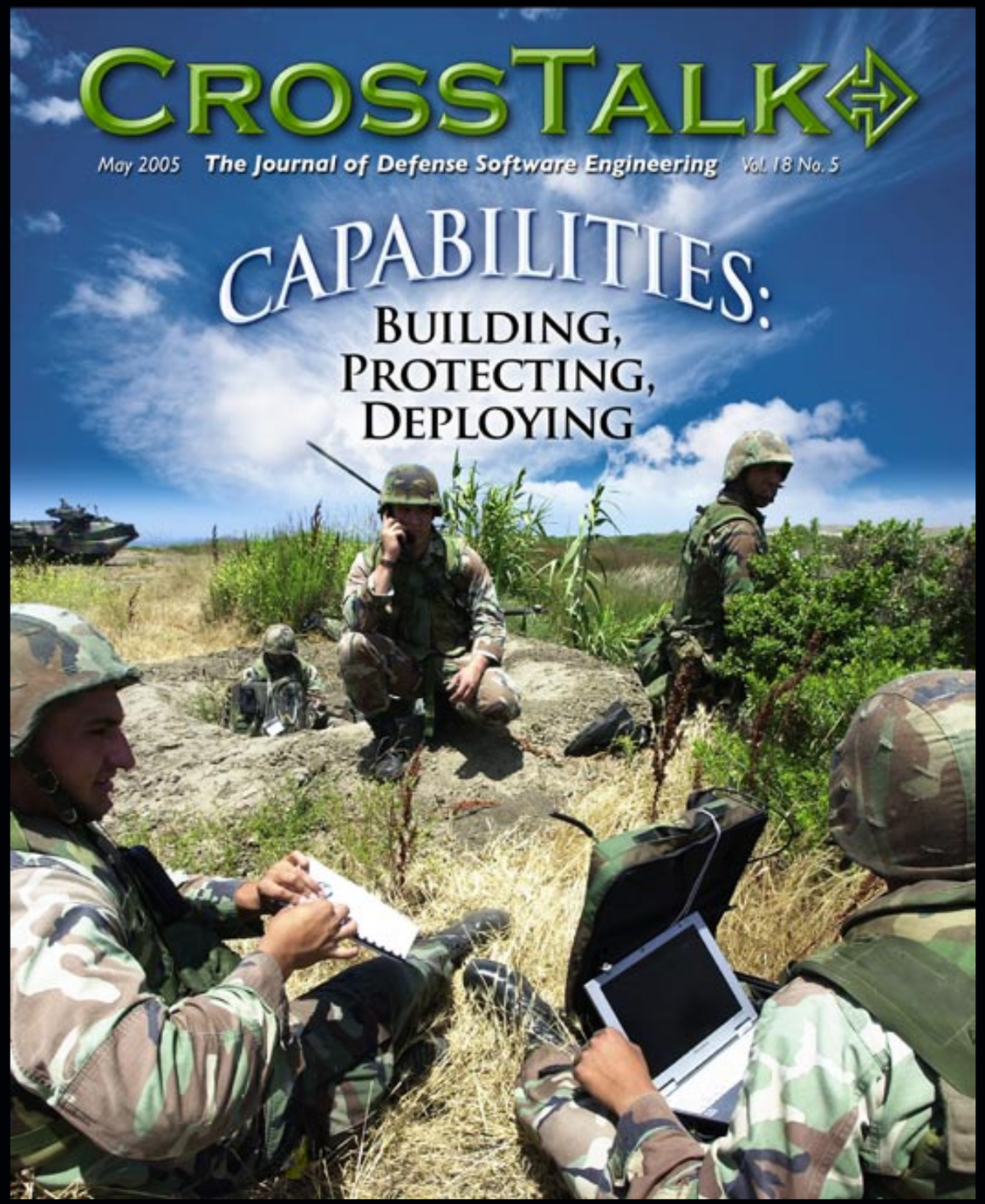
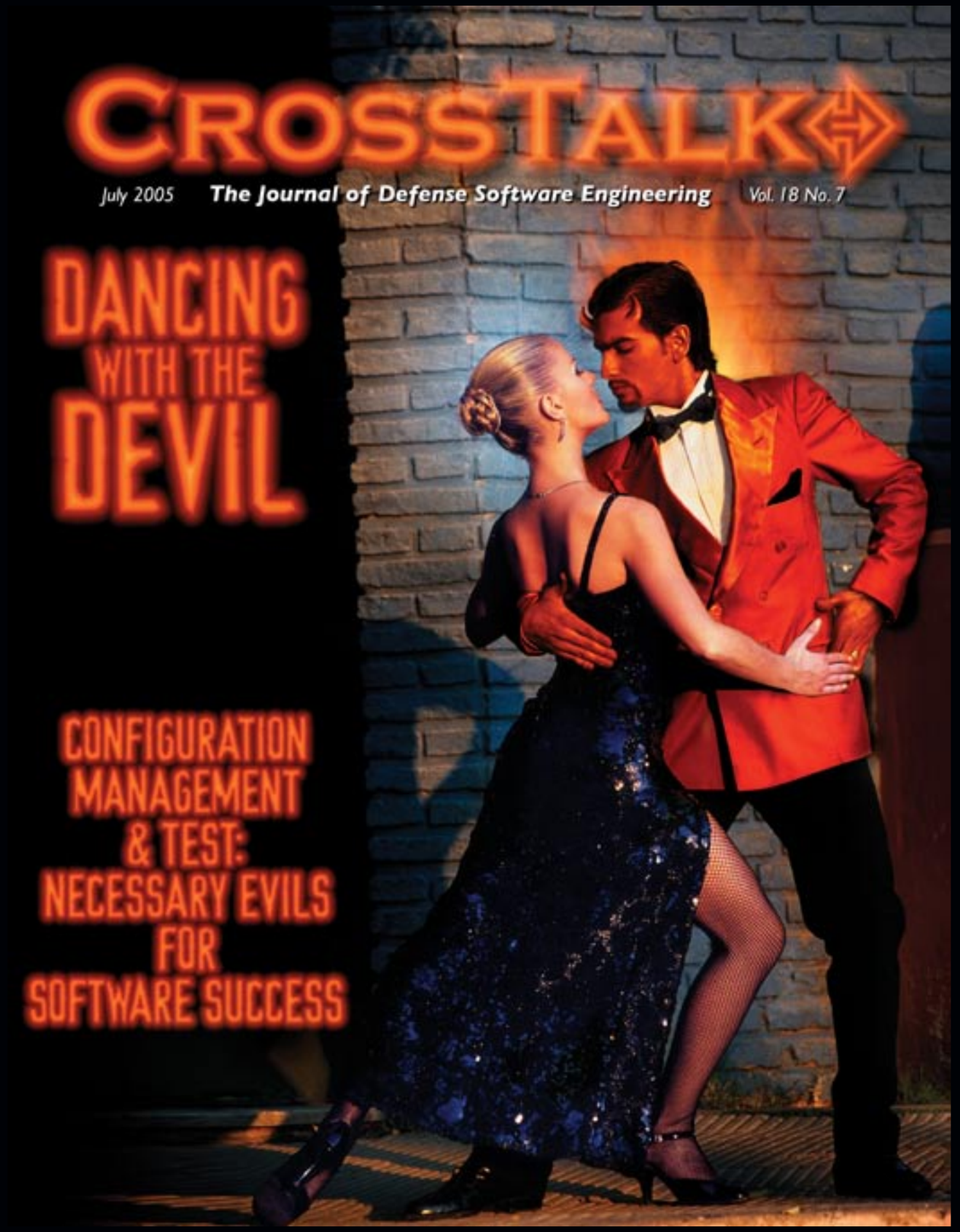
April 2005 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 18 No. 4
CO$T E$TIMATION

SPECIAL SYSTEMS & SOFTWARE TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE ISSUE

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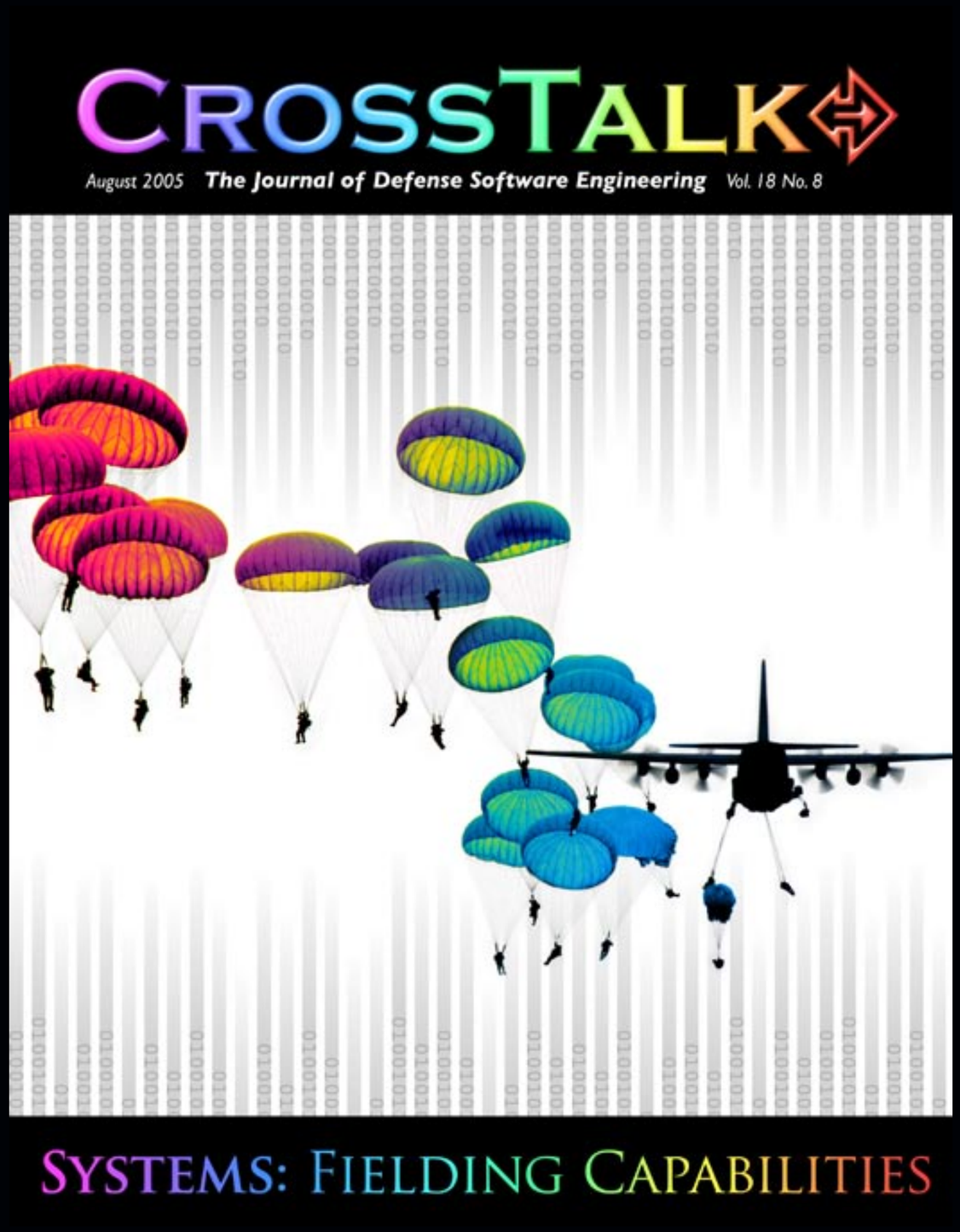
July 2005 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 18 No. 7
DANCING WITH THE DEVIL
CONFIGURATION MANAGEMENT & TEST: NECESSARY EVILS FOR SOFTWARE SUCCESS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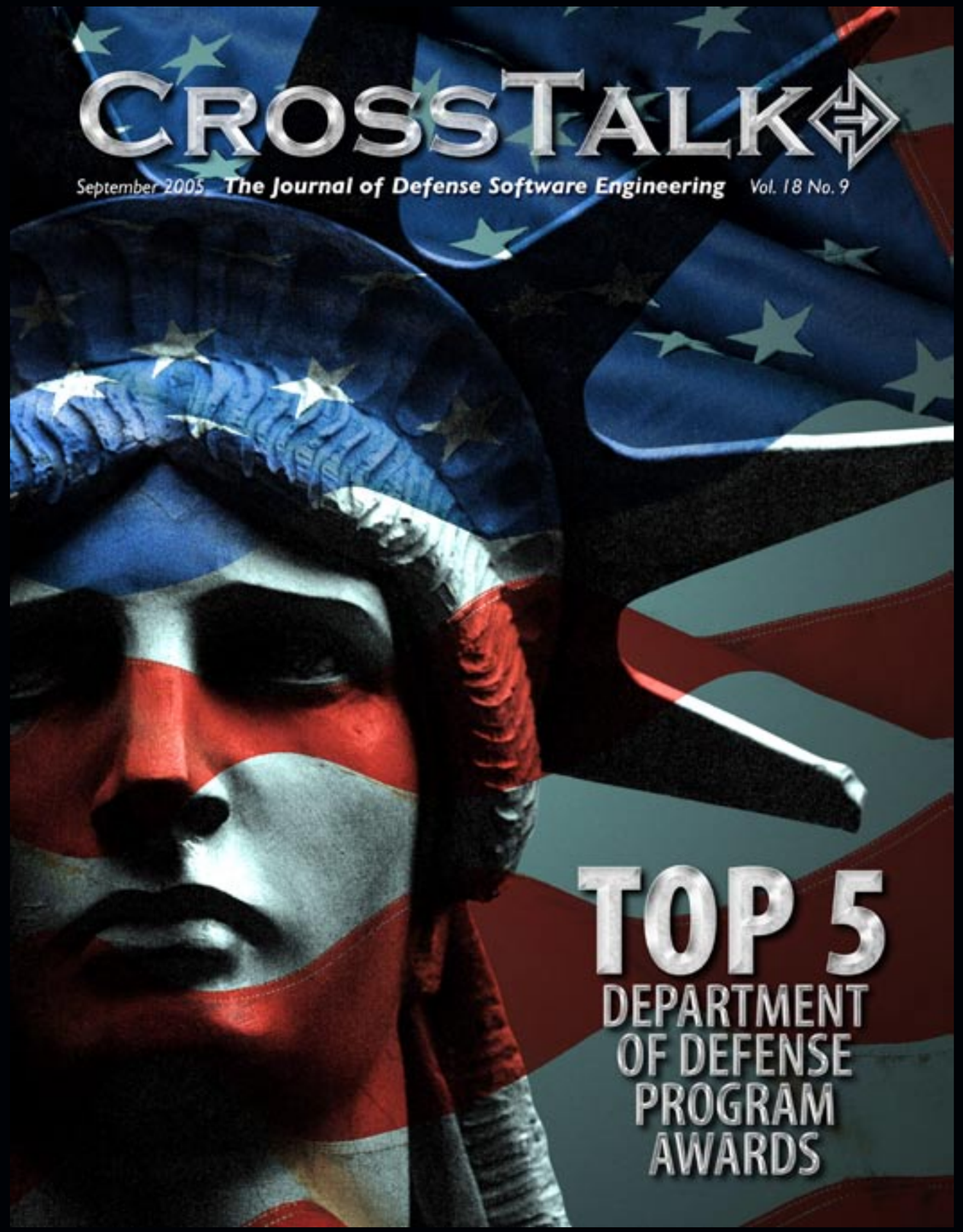
SYSTEMS: FIELDING CAPABILITIES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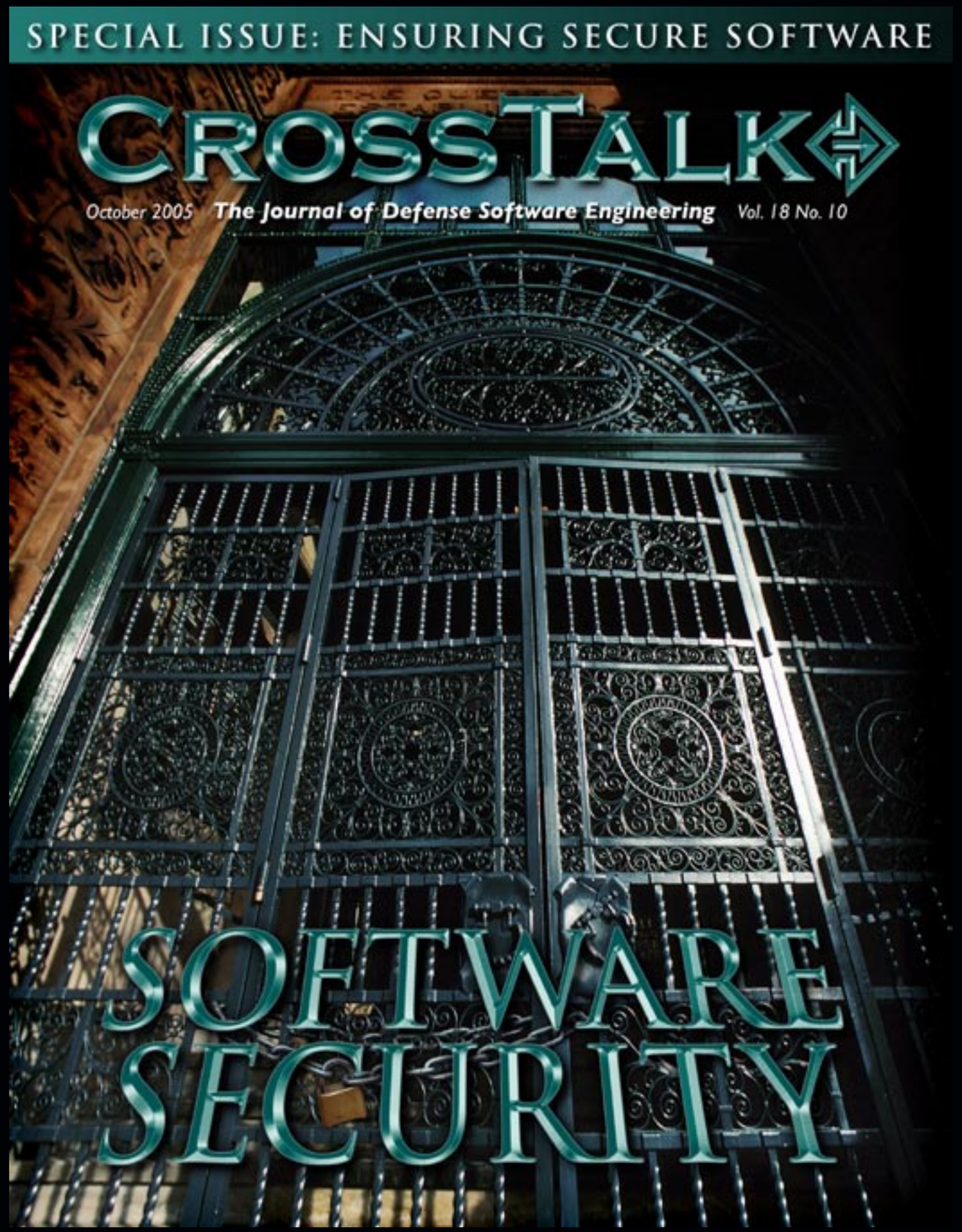
September 2005 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 18 No. 9
TOP 5
DEPARTMENT
OF DEFENSE
PROGRAM
AWARDS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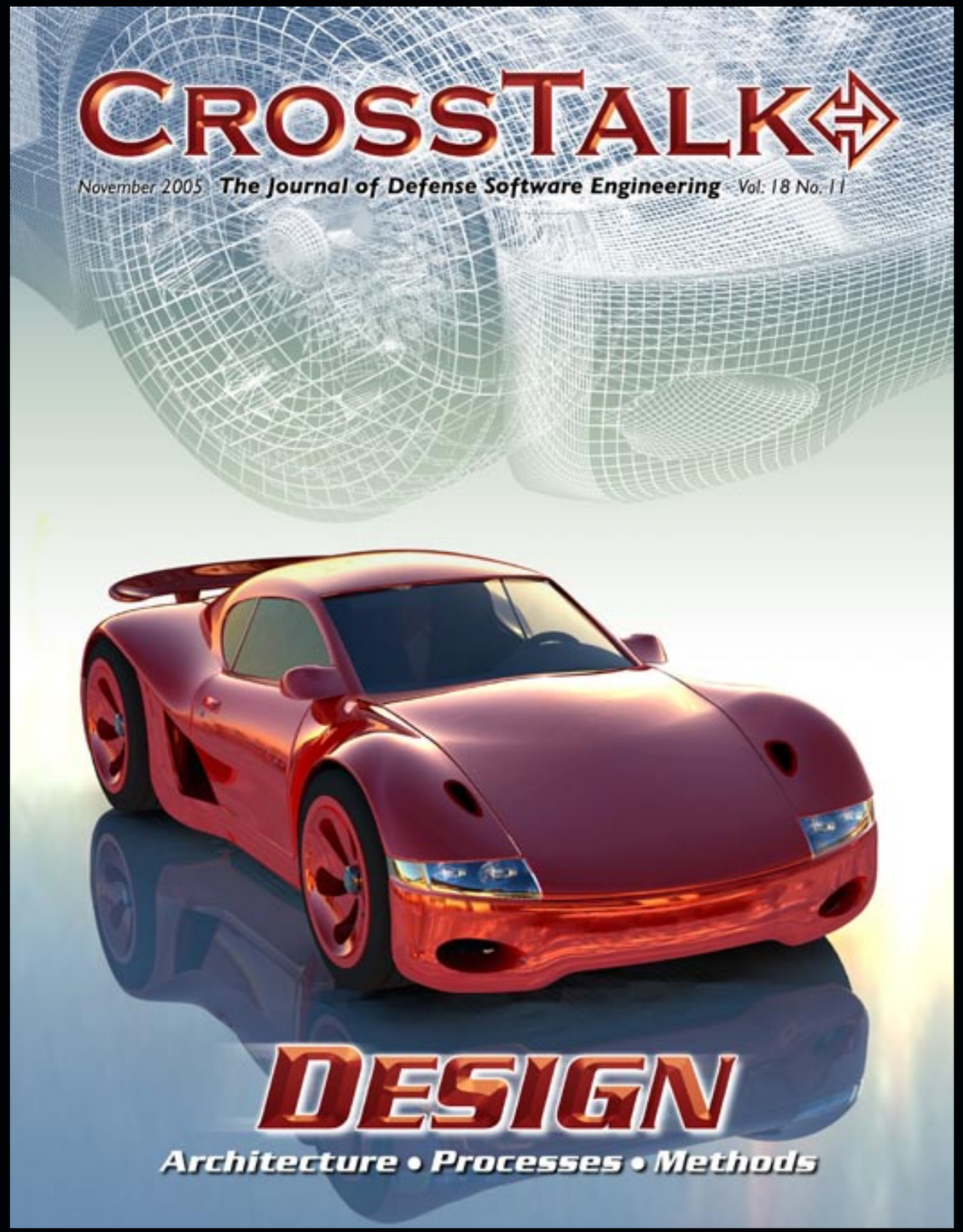
October 2005 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 18 No. 10
SOFTWARE
SECURITY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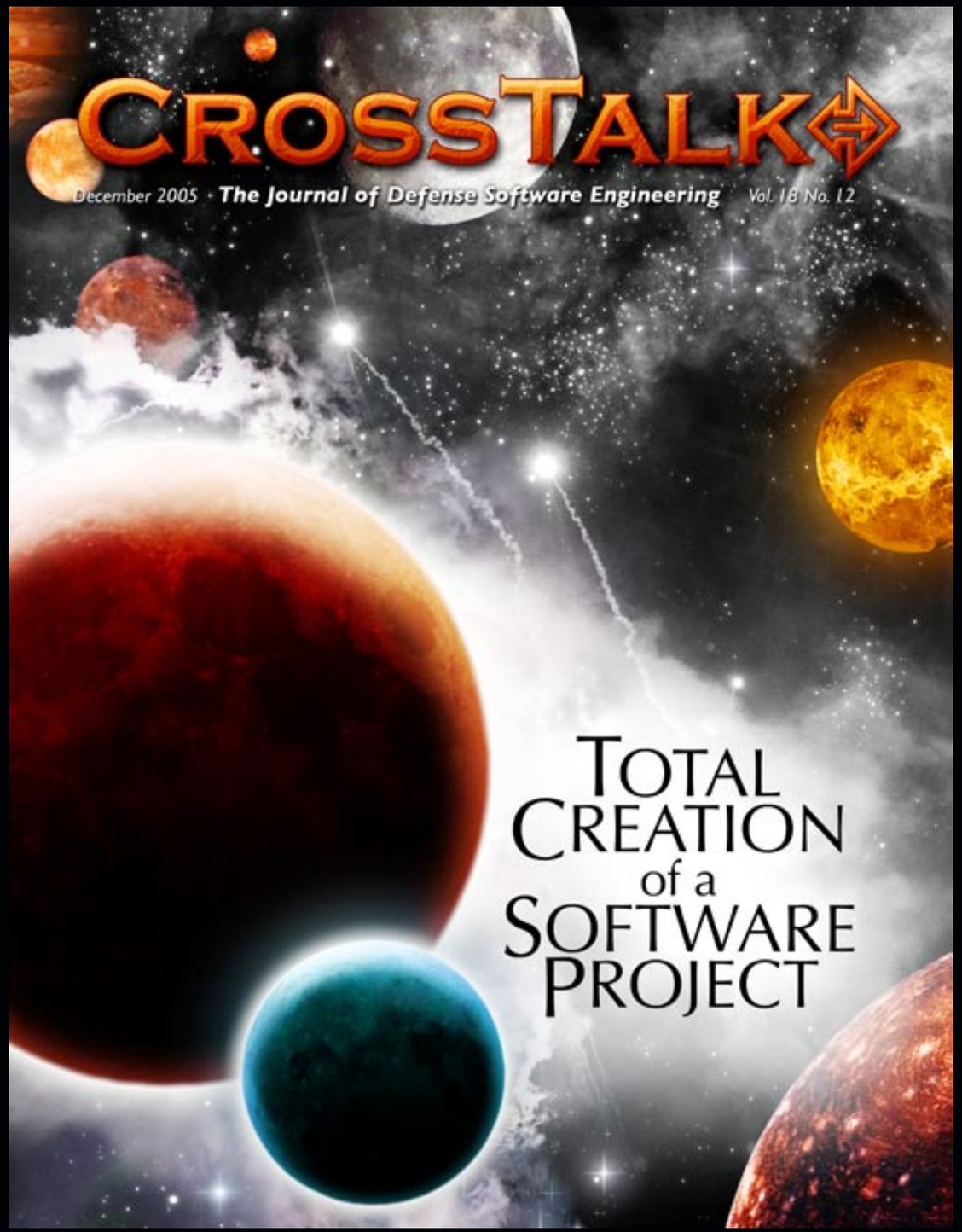
November 2005 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 18 No. 11
DESIGN
Architecture • Processes • Methods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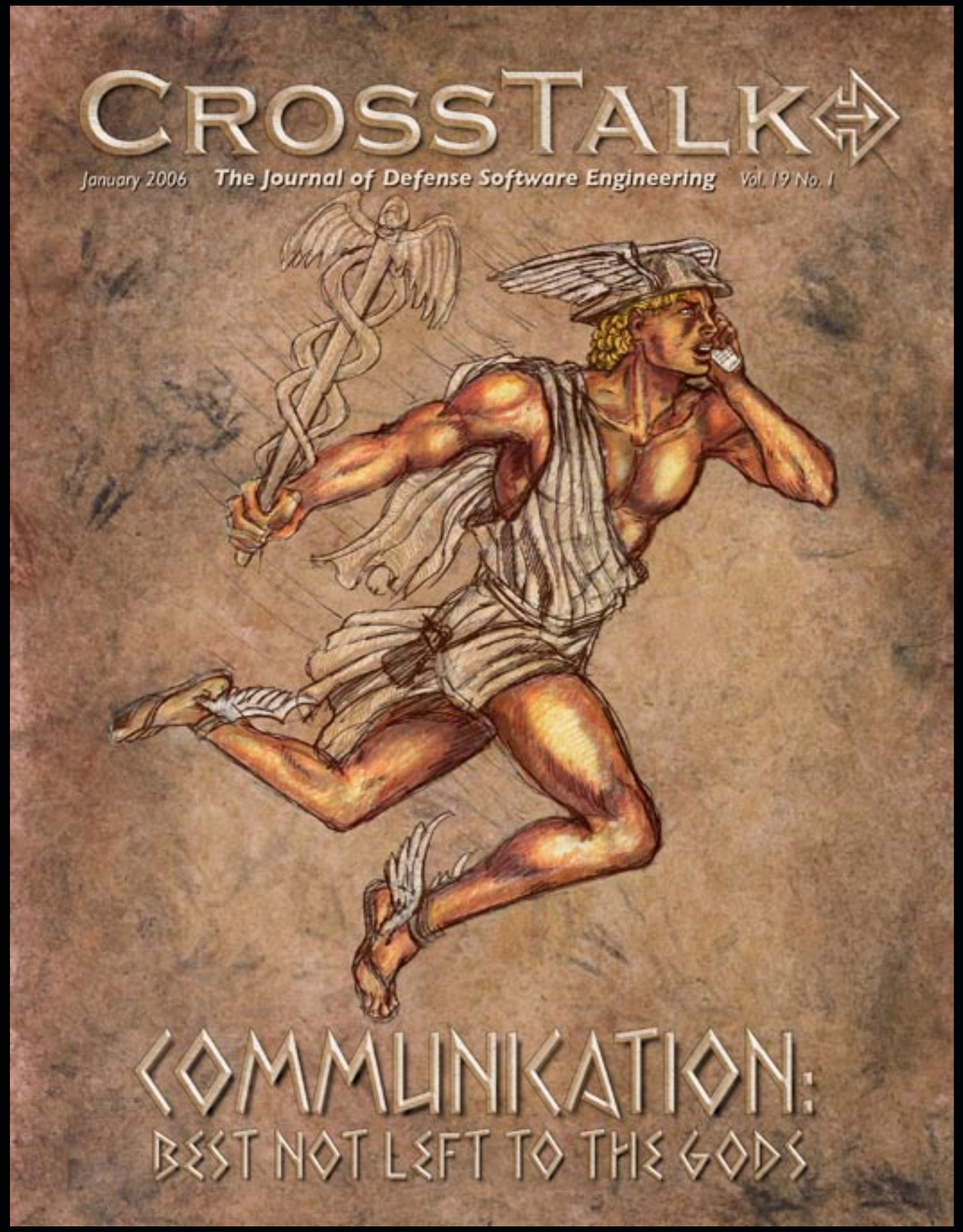
December 2005 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 18 No. 12
Total Creation of a Software Project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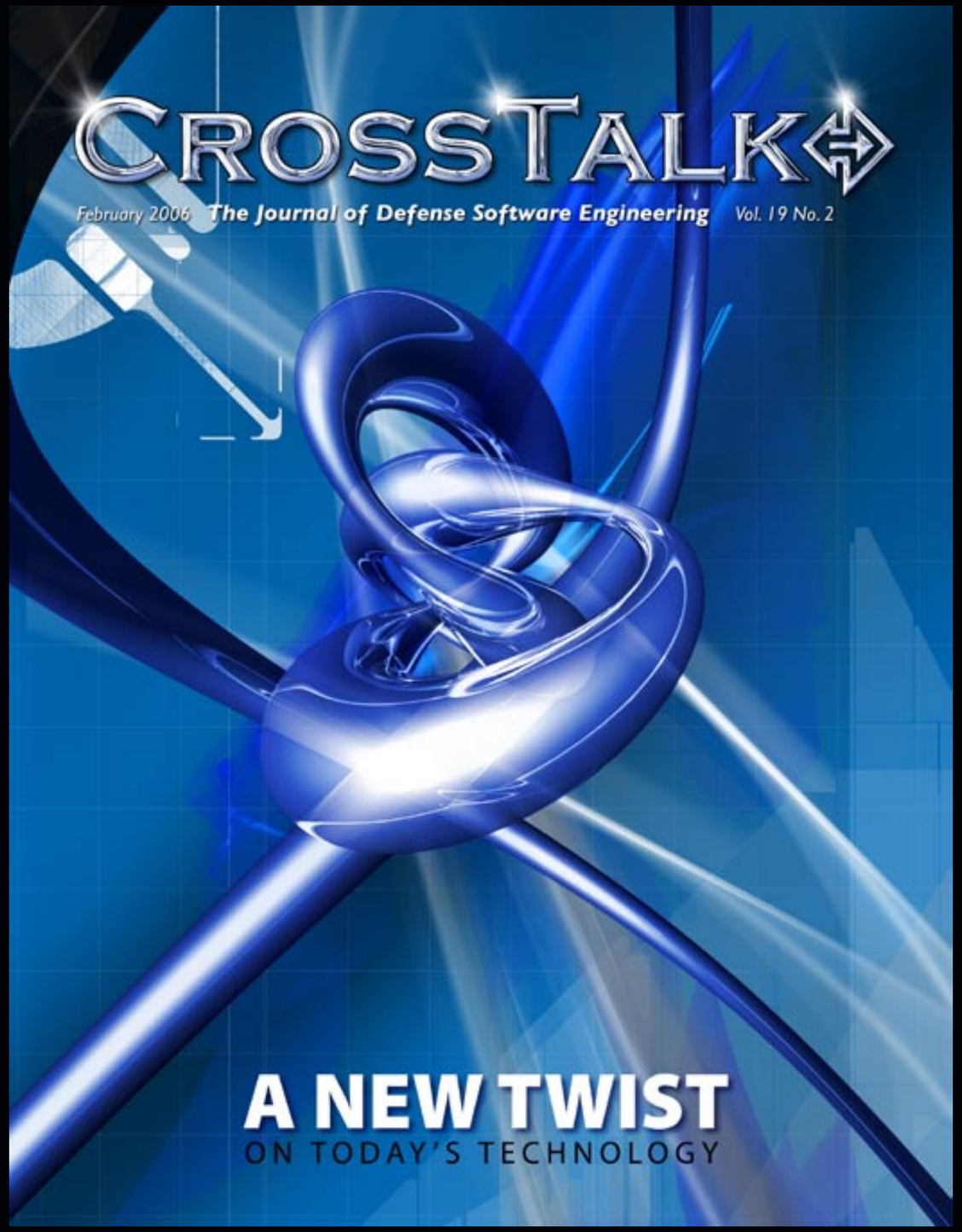
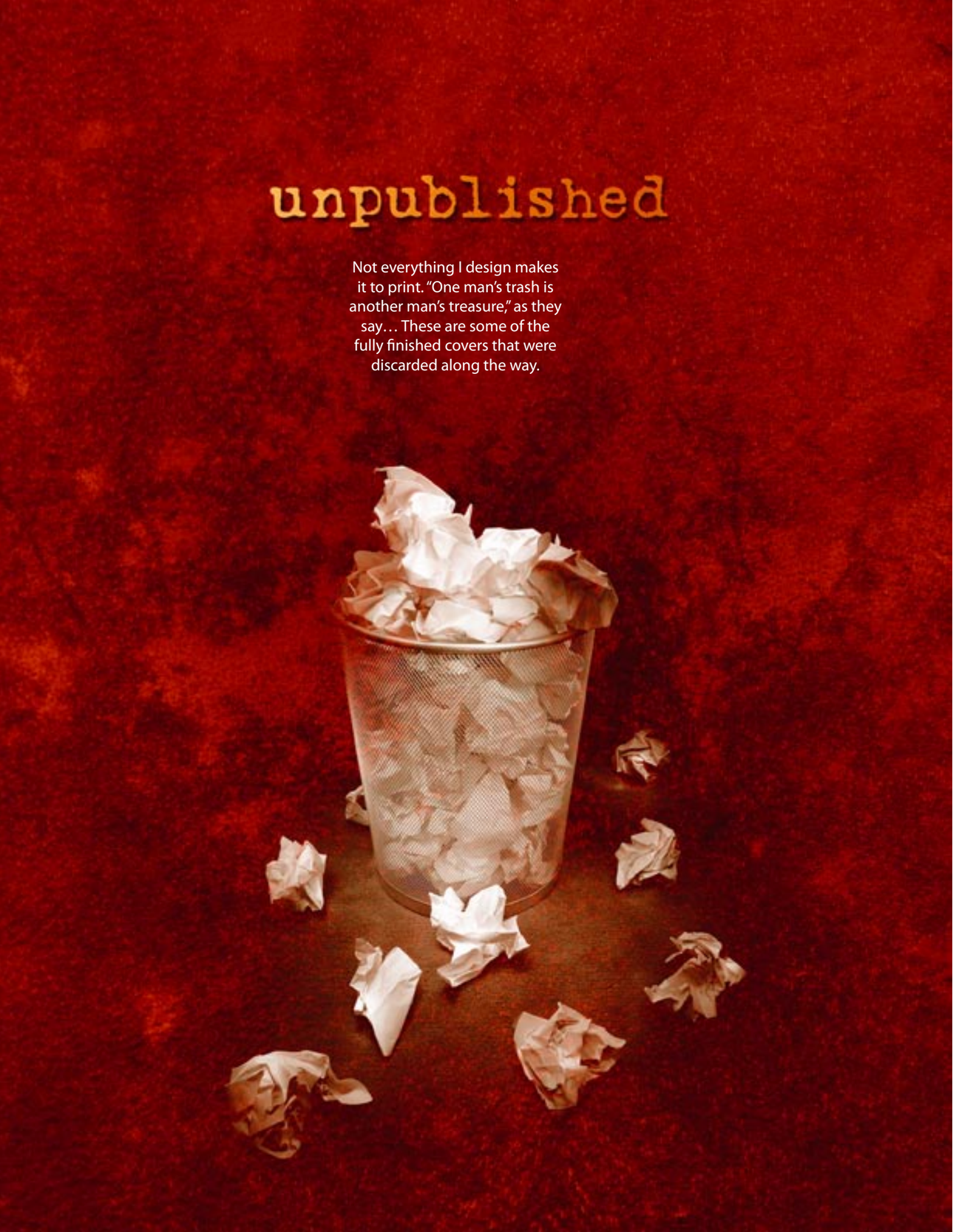
COMMUNICATION:
BEST NOT LEFT TO THE GODS


CrossTalk
February 2006 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 19 No. 2
A NEW TWIST
ON TODAY'S TECHNOLOGY

unpublished

Not everything I design makes it to print. "One man's trash is another man's treasure," as they say… These are some of the fully finished covers that were discarded along the way.



The Ones That Got Away: Notes on the Unpublished Covers

These are images that were fully completed, including masthead and copy, that were never printed.

Software Odyssey, page 112

Since the year was 2001, the theme for the annual Software Technology Conference was a homage to *2001: A Space Odyssey*. To immerse myself in the theme, I both rented the DVD and even went so far as to read the book. I used many of the elements from the story: the "Star Child," the spaceships, the monolith, etc. to create the image.

Project Management, page 113

I liked the colored skin/colored bubble combination that highlighted several of the people in this montage of business people interacting.

Software Measurement, page 113

I attempted to do a humorous piece for this theme by showing an ancient architect with a distorted face standing in front of the leaning tower of Pisa.

Devil Babies, page 113

I didn't completely finish this design, as I intended to do fully colored stained glass. I thought my "devil babies" were cute, but I think they came across as a little too demented and evil-looking for publication.

Ancient Egypt, page 114

An Egyptian motif, with a pyramid dissected into 5 sections (to represent the five levels of the Capability Maturity Model Integrated) and other Egyptian statues, masks, and hieroglyphics.

Stair Illusion, page 115

Another unused CMMI image created to look like a Escher-esque optical illusion. I liked the interesting mix of colored gradient blends. It was a nice color palette to work from.

Software Estimation, page 115

Another take on the "Tower of Pisa" image, but without the facial warps on the architect.

The Pit Crew, page 115

The figures in this cover were a combination of both wire frame and fully-rendered 3-D images created in the figure design software, *Poser*. The idea was to create a pit crew that looked "digital" instead of real.

Sherlock Holmes, page 115

There were several great photos to work from to create the March 2003 Sherlock Holmes cover (see page 72). This is one of the best unused images.

The Software Edge, page 116

This military-centered montage is stylistically typical of the type of work I do in my regular day job, designing for the Air Force.

Process Improvement, page 117

This cover demonstrated the evolution of illumination, from a candle, to a lantern, and through several advances in light bulb technology.

Trophy covers, page 117

These are two unused versions of the July 2004 "Top 5 Awards" cover with alternate backgrounds and variations of the camera angle.

People Variable, page 117

This idea used colorized portraits of a man and a woman created from several layers of binary code.

Spice Up Your Life, page 118

I designed this for a "Multiple Flavors of Design theme," but when the articles for that month came in, the theme ending up being altered to "Design: Architecture, Processes, Methods," so the image no longer fit the theme. I really liked both the color scheme and the curves/design of the spice rack.

Director's Chair, page 119

When I submitted the sketches/mock-ups for this design, my intent was to create a 3-D image of a director's chair, but they were expecting a photographic rendition instead. I would have saved myself a lot of work if I had been listening better to the editor.

Handprint, page 119

The five fingers of this flag-filled handprint were supposed to represent the Top 5 Award Department of Defense Program Awards.

Gelato, page 119

Another image created for the "Multiple Flavors of Design" theme that was changed. Here I used a stylized close up of Italian "gelato" to portray different flavors.

The Creation, page 119

This was a cosmic spin on Michaelangelo's painting, "the Creation."

The Hatching, page 120

This group of scientists observing the hatching of some giant alien egg had science fiction elements reminiscent of the movies *Alien* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

Tank Blueprint, page 121

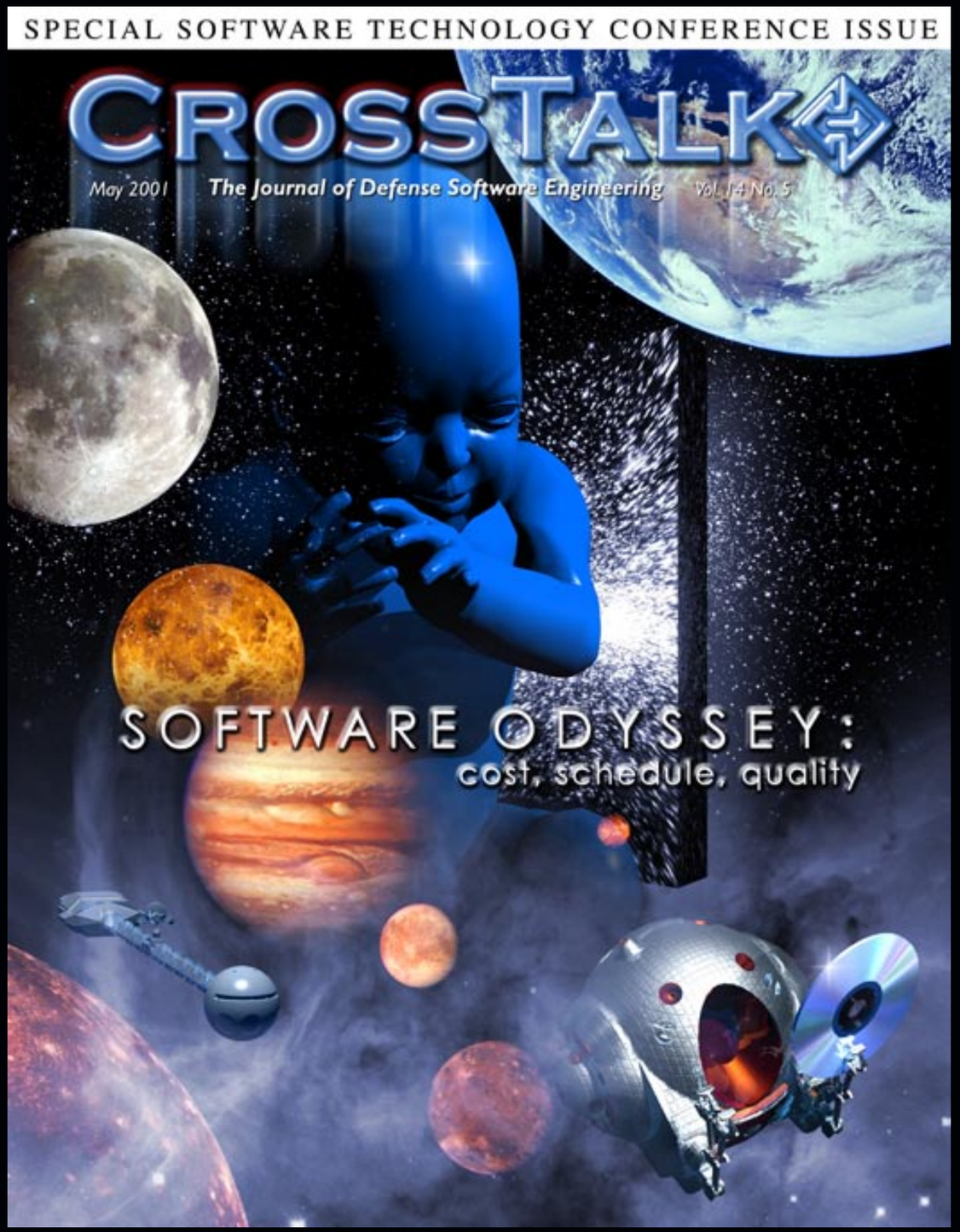
This was an image that I worked up after getting requests to change many elements of the sports car cover (page 101). After doing the requested changes, the clients decided they liked it the first way better, so I went back to the original image.

Various Communication metaphors, page 121

A watercooler, hand signals and a man wielding a megaphone were all presented for the "Communication" theme.

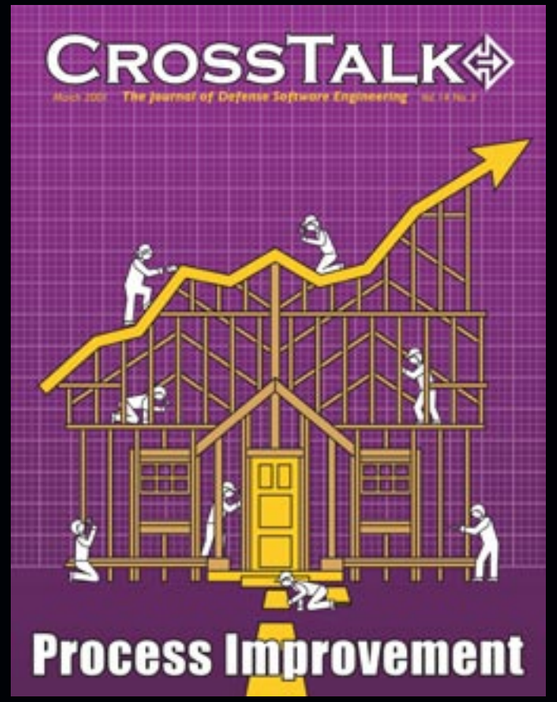
Another Twist, page 122

This image took its inspiration from several iPod commercials, but with large swirled designs to represent the theme, "A New Twist on Today's Technology." My daughter described it as "Jamba Juice meets the iPod."

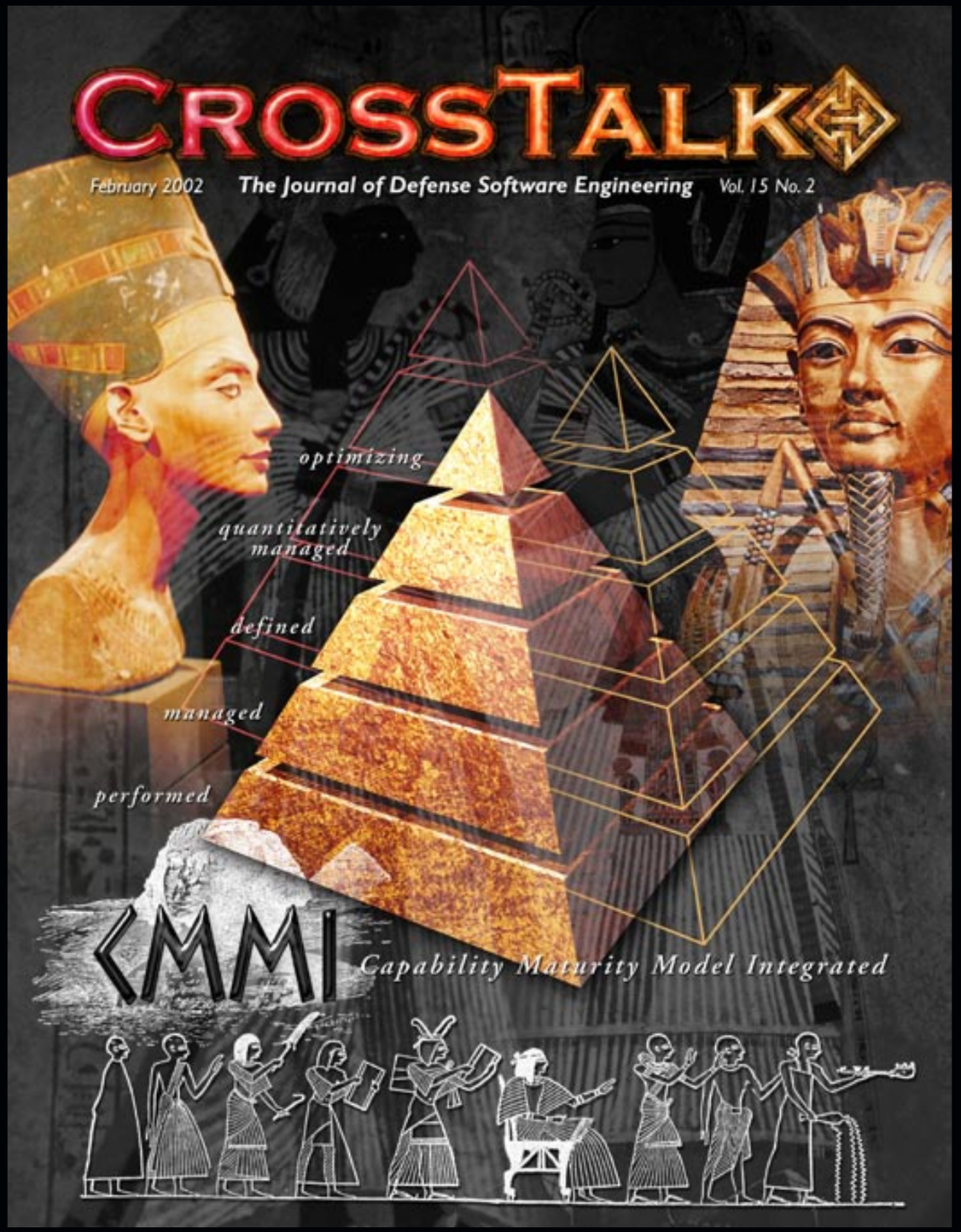

SPECIAL SOFTWARE TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE ISSUE
CROSSTALK
May 2001
The Journal of Defense Software Engineering
Vol. 14 No. 5
SOFTWARE ODYSSEY:
cost, schedule, quality

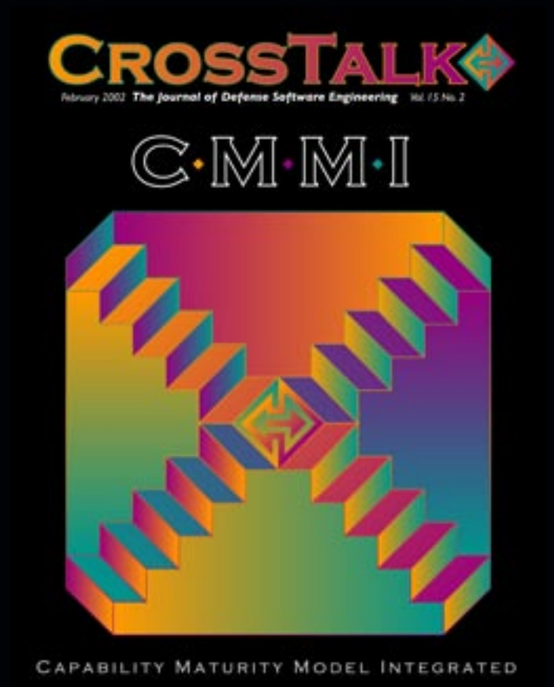
CROSSTALK
The Journal of Defense Software Engineering
PROJECT management

CROSSTALK
The Journal of Defense Software Engineering
Software Measurement


CROSSTALK
The Journal of Defense Software Engineering
Process Improvement

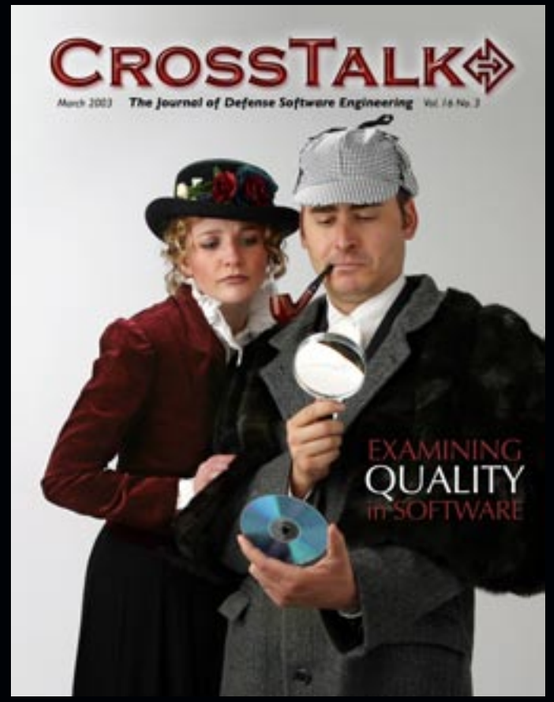
CROSSTALK
July 2001 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 14 No. 7
NECESSARY EVILS: TESTING AND CM


CROSSTALK
February 2002 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 15 No. 2
optimizing
quantitatively managed
defined
managed
performed
CMMI
Capability Maturity Model Integrated


CROSSTALK
February 2002 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 15 No. 2
C·M·M·I
CAPABILITY MATURITY MODEL INTEGRATED

CROSSTALK
June 2002 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 15 No. 6
Software Estimation

CROSSTALK
The Journal of Defense Software Engineering
TEAM SOFTWARE PROCESS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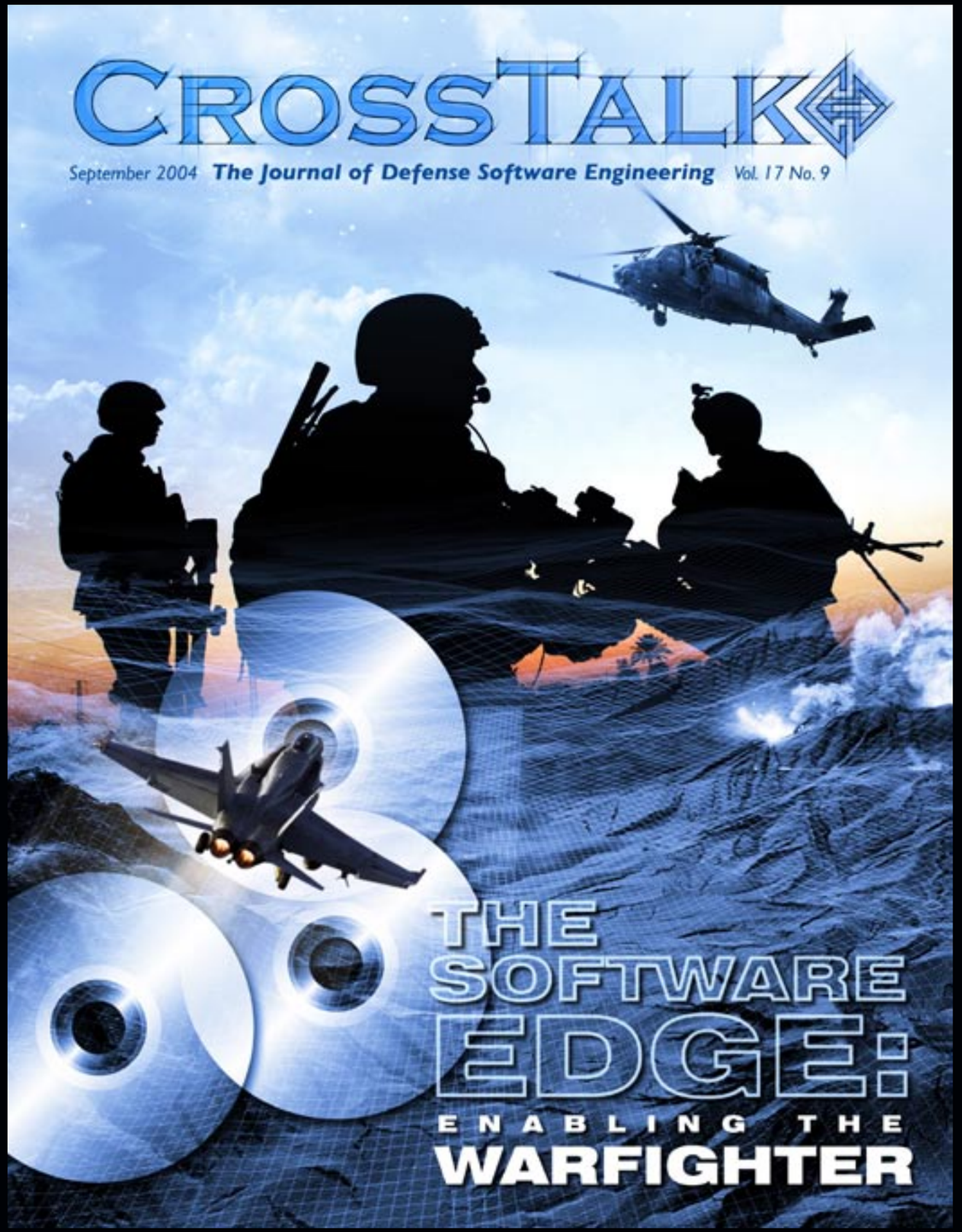
March 2003 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 16 No. 3
EXAMINING QUALITY in SOFTWARE


CROSSTALK
September 2004 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 17 No. 9
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ENABLING THE WARFIGHTER

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SOFTWARE PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

SPECIAL QUALITY SOFTWARE AWARDS ISSUE
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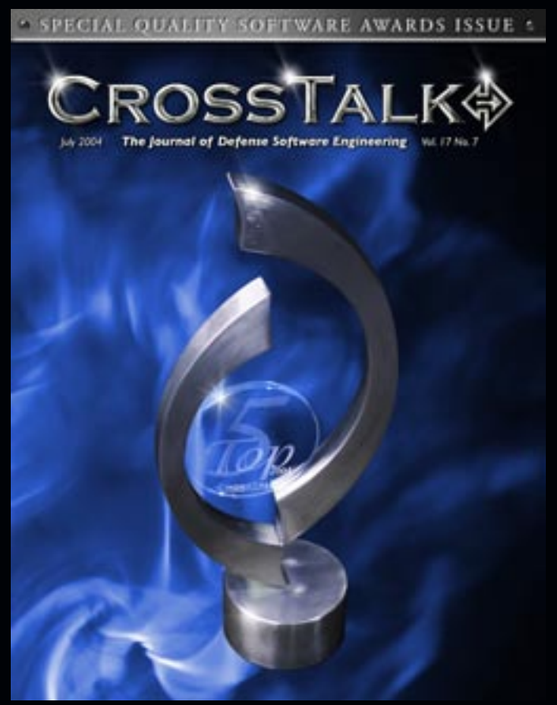
July 2004 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 17 No. 7
Top 5


SPECIAL QUALITY SOFTWARE AWARDS ISSUE
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July 2004 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 17 No. 7
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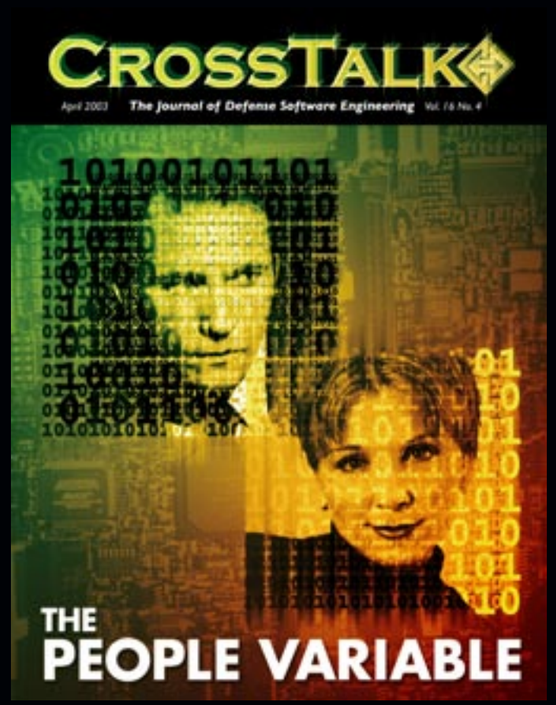
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April 2003 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 16 No. 4
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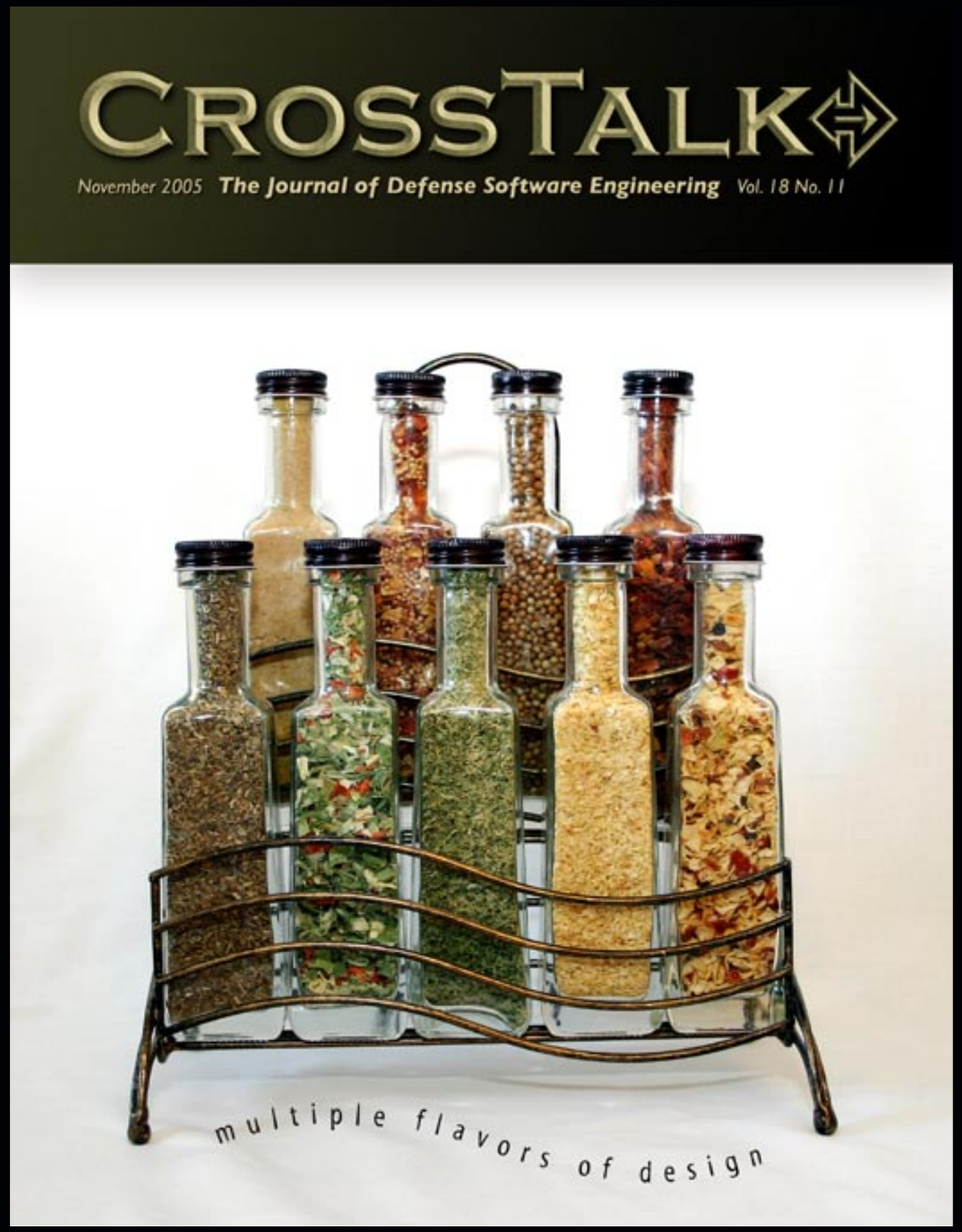
THE PEOPLE VARIABLE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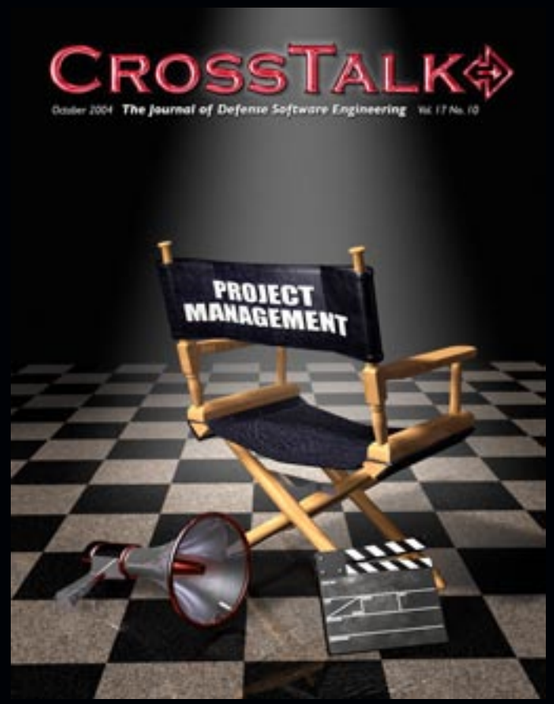
November 2005 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 18 No. 11
multiple flavors of design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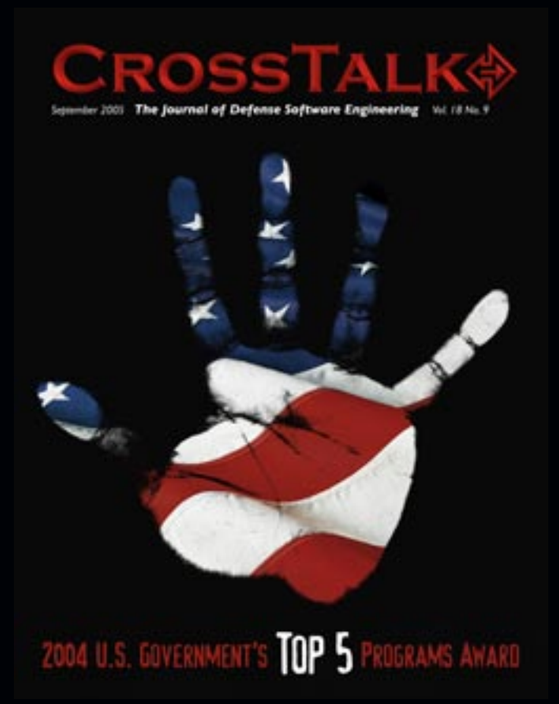
October 2004 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 17 No. 10
PROJECT MANAGEMENT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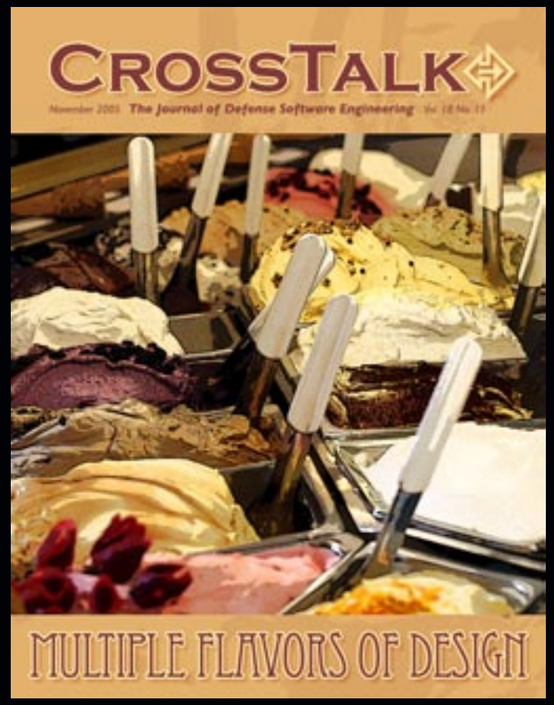
September 2005 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 18 No. 9
2004 U.S. GOVERNMENT'S TOP 5 PROGRAMS AWARD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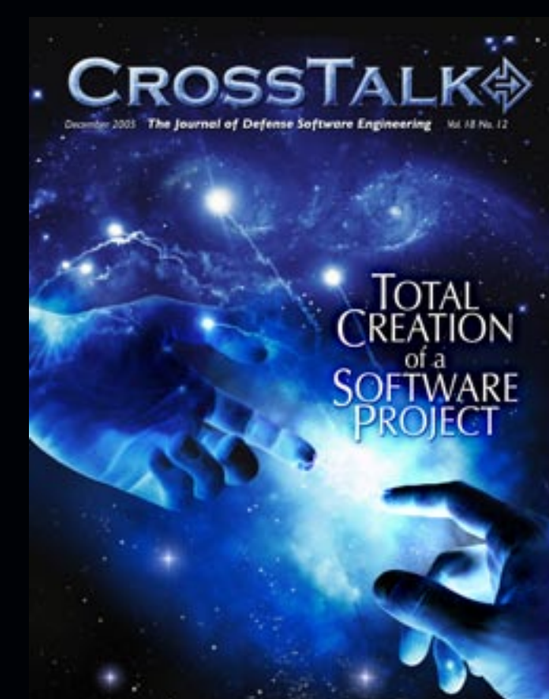
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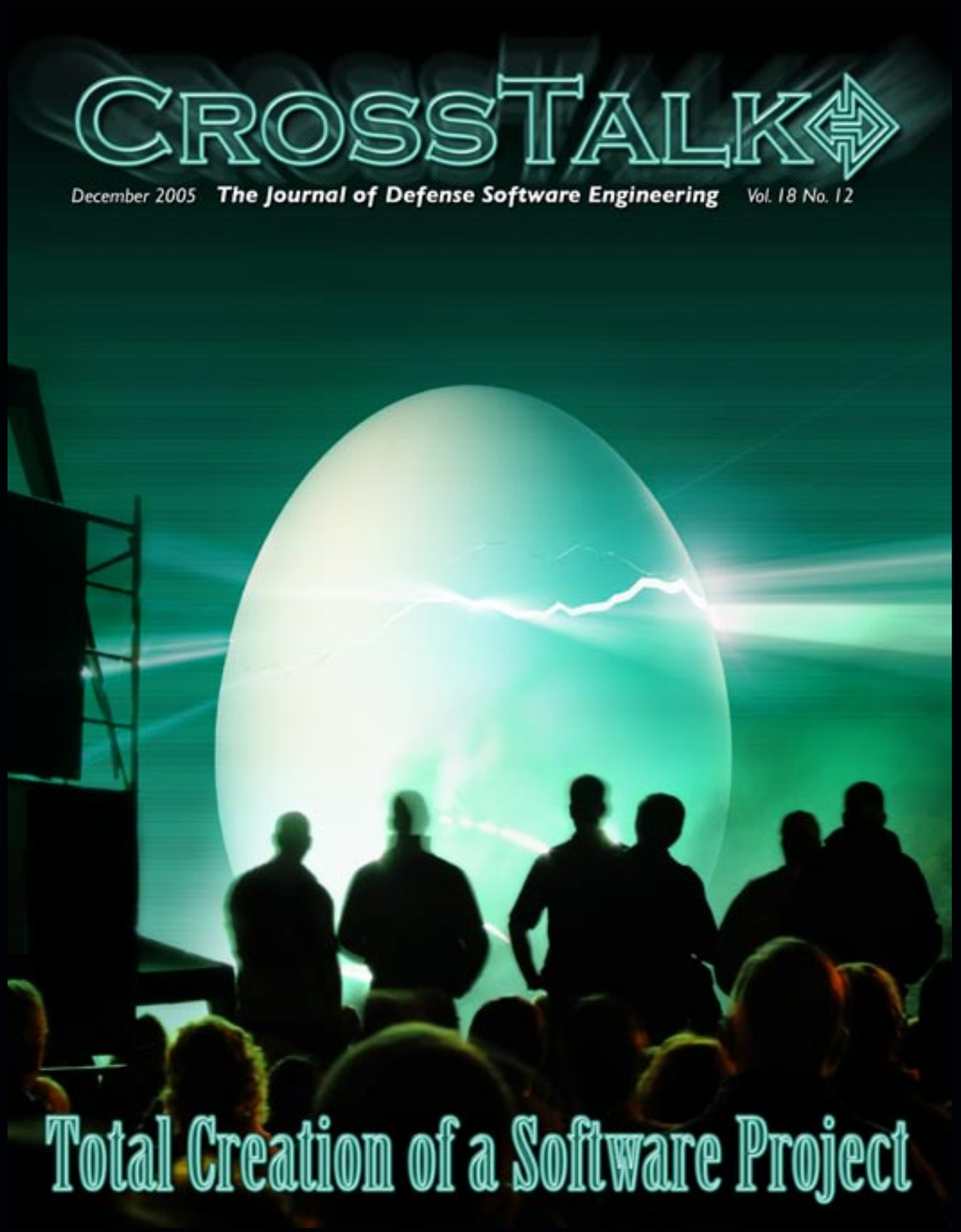
TOTAL CREATION of a SOFTWARE PROJECT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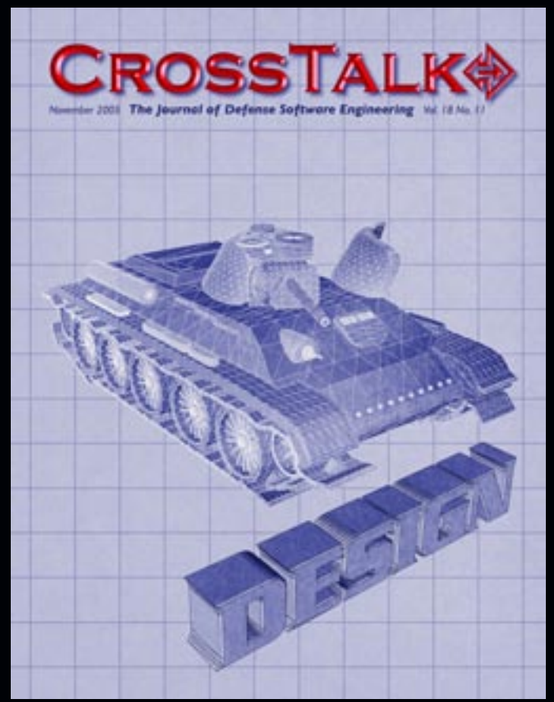
Total Creation of a Software Project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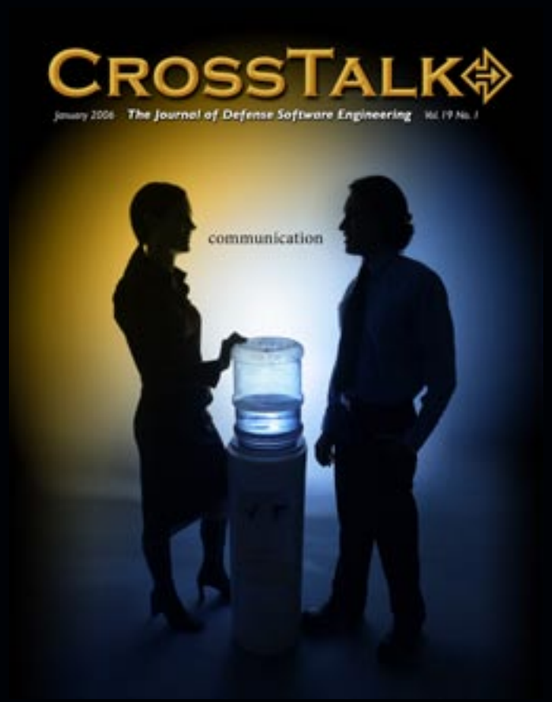
The Journal of Defense Software Engineering
DESIGN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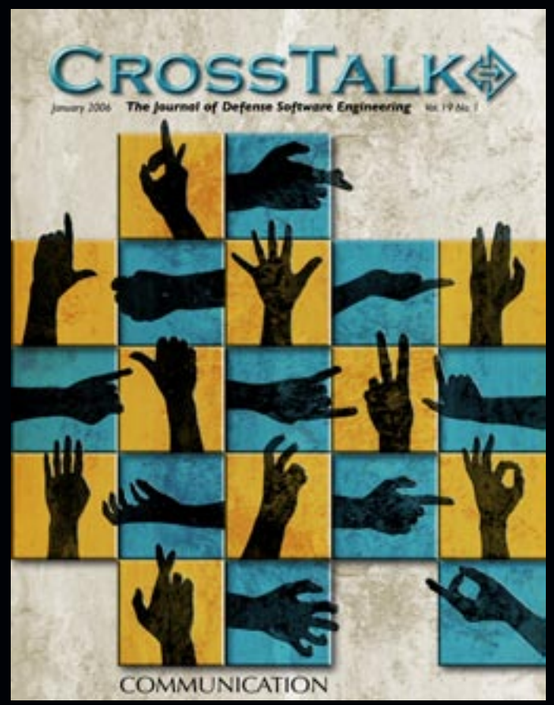
January 2006 The Journal of Defense Software Engineering Vol. 19 No. 1
communication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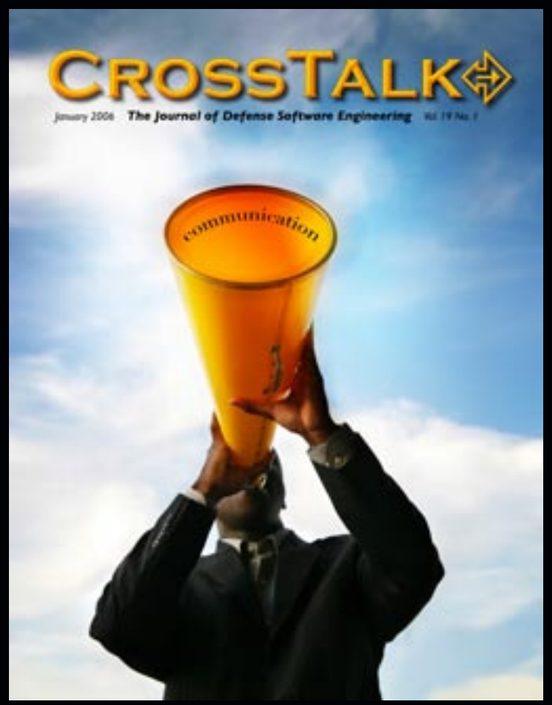
COMMUNICATION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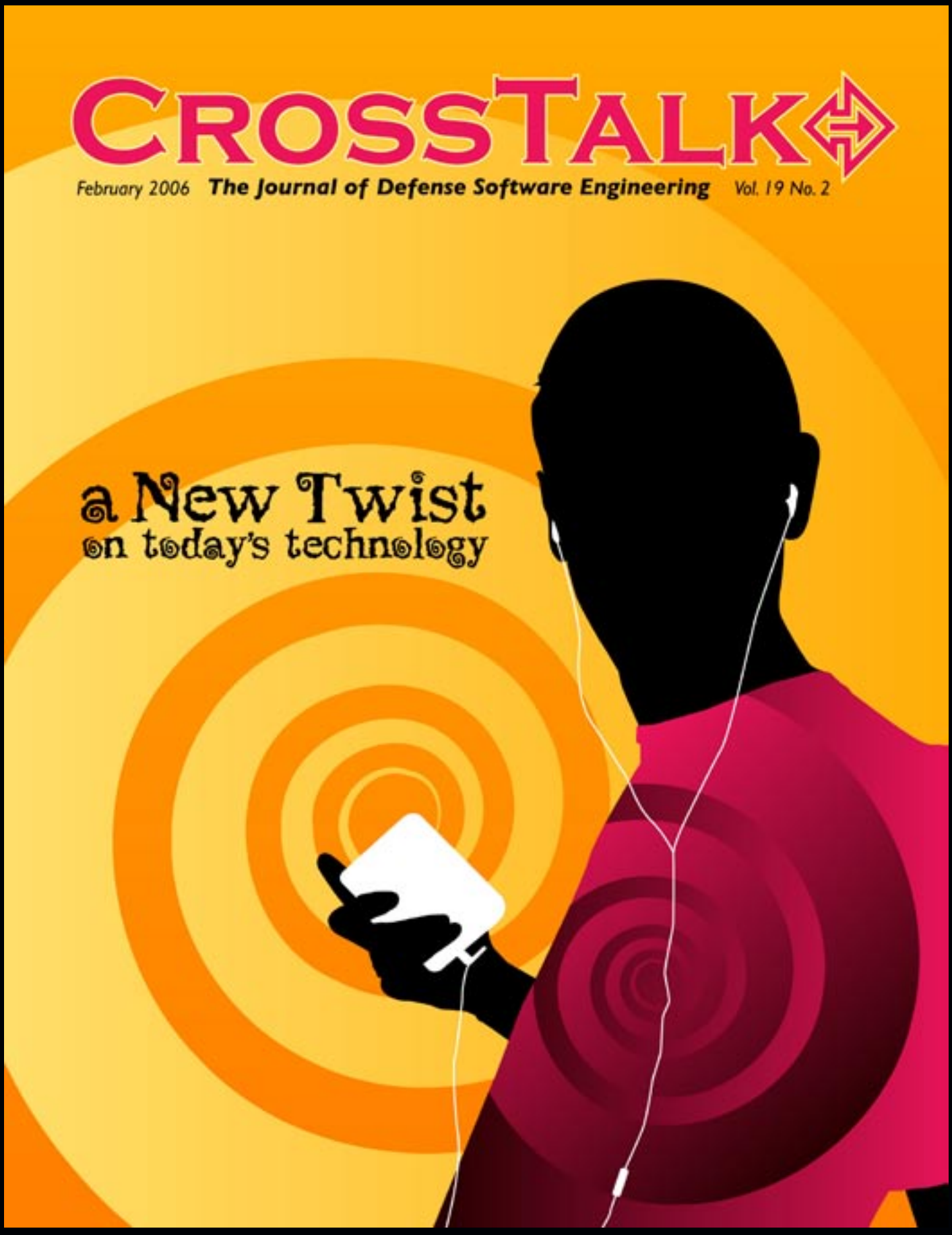
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