

# BLACK CHIP

A JOURNAL ABOUT COMPUTING FOR

AND BY ANARCHISTS

ISSUE N°1

## Editorial

Well, here it is, the first issue of our very own little magazine. And believe me it's going to be very little unless I get some response from the readership!!!

Apart from the predictable and traditional lament of the editor I have written a few points on the level of the debate within our great movement with regard to computers, and a few other bits & pieces.

We have a letter, some reviews, a few suggestions for further reading and whatever else I can find to put in, between when I've finished writing this editorial and when I send it off to you.

Richard.

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## Sabotage...



It's as simple as pullin  
a plug...

NICKED FROM:  
PROCESSED WORLD N°5

# Women and computers

If I hadn't gone down to cut the fence at Greenham last October and if a male friend back home hadn't been inspired to capture our experience as a computer game, I would not have given computing a second thought. Base Invaders, as we christened the game, made me take that second thought.

We have advertised Base Invaders as being available on the BBC micro, as a friend had promised to translate it. It might seem like a mere detail, moving a programme from one micro to another. But anyone who's tried to do it will confirm that it's a major task.

## A FIT OF BRAVADO

Anyway, due to personal commitments, the friend couldn't do it. In a fit of bravado, I decided to do it myself. I hadn't worked on a Beeb (the "friendly" name for a BBC micro) before, but in my previous incarnation as a computer person, I had had some dealings with BASIC, the high-level programme language in which the game was written. (A high-level language means it's nearer to the English language than the electronic signals the computer can understand.)

Three weeks of solid staring at our portable TV screen later, I began to think I must have been mad, especially as the TV screen is fuzzier and makes your eyes go even more haywire than a purpose-built computer monitor.

I did it though. Then I sat back and thought about my version as compared with Alan's and realised that mine was more musical and more idiosyncratic—for example, bushes sprouted magically when the peace woman went through the fence.

This was the first time it occurred to me that male and female styles of computing may be different and perhaps the reason I had not got into computers when I worked with them was because I had been working to a male pattern.

## A CAREER FOR LIFE?

Shortly afterwards I was participating in a local women's peace march, when the woman beside me said "Don't you remember me?" She was an ex-computing colleague, much more high-powered than I had been. "What are you doing now?" I asked, expecting to be given details of a high-powered job. Nothing to do with computing was the reply, she'd got out of that several years ago. She was now helping with adult literacy work.

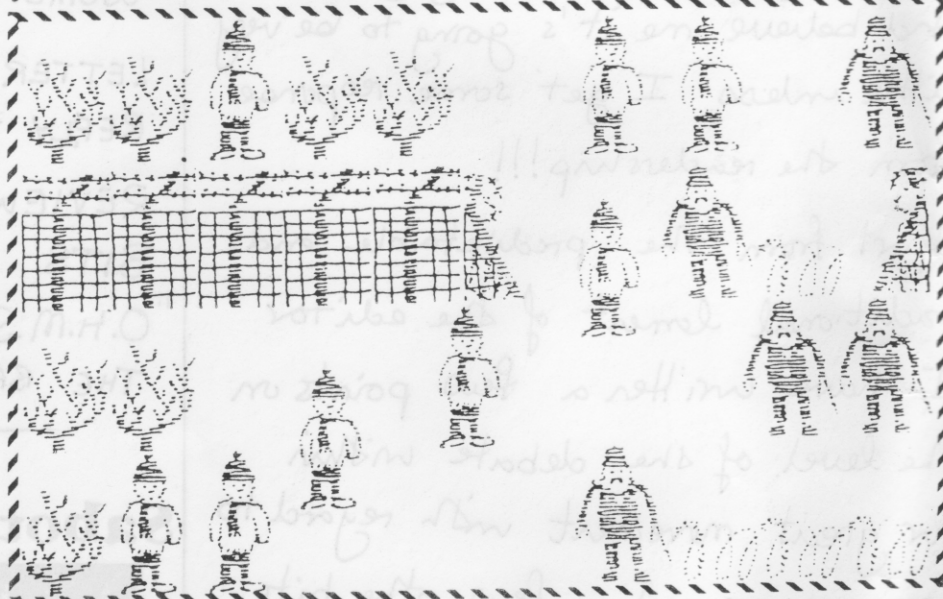
I don't know why I was surprised at this, since I had also left computing with alacrity. It brought to mind, too, another ex-computing friend who hasn't done any programming for five years. On the other hand, male computing colleagues from that time, certainly all those I have subsequently been in contact with, are all still computing away, in most cases

climbing steadily up their chosen career ladder.

Why women's lack of enthusiasm for computing? Is it simply an extension of women's lesser interest in machines? How many times have you walked past an old engine or car and lost the menfolk for a few minutes as they cluster around it, fascinated? Or is it a question of style, differences or the applications to which computers are put that turn women off?

Experience from a beginner's course on computing for women I gave recently suggested a bit of everything. Once the mystique surrounding computers was dispelled the women didn't exactly lose interest but they lumped them together with "other machines I have known".

When it came to practical sessions using games to familiarise themselves with



operating the things, most of the women were very bored and frustrated by the zap-and-splat adventure games. They did enjoy a programme which calculated their biorhythms, and those that could type quite liked the word processing programmes. As to differences in style, our discussions suggested that women may find it more difficult to organise their thoughts in the rigorous, single-tracked way which is a prerequisite for "good" programming.

We also discussed why it was that their sons rather than daughters made more use of the computers at school. We couldn't decide, though, whether it was the girls' choice to opt out, or whether the boys just pushed to the front, or whether the teacher gave the boys more attention, or whether it was a function of the applications which were chosen.

What did come as quite a surprise to the women on the course was the number of times things went wrong—the times they found errors in programmes; the frequency with which the computers themselves

got into a twist; the number of tape and disc faults. As they still tended to view the computer as some sort of super machine, it took a lot of persuasion before they accepted that it wasn't their fault.

Personally I have nothing against computers but I've got a lot against the applications to which they are put and the ethos that surrounds them. Computers only really come into their own when they are handling vast amounts of data because they can do it so quickly. Hence they have furthered the trend to large-scale technical applications involving thousands upon thousands of often very routine calculations, and large-scale filing jobs which would be too cumbersome to do manually.

## CLEVERNESS

While there are beneficial technical applications to which computer technology has been put, it does tend to encourage the big, prestige projects—the clever medical achievements at the expense of the real killers; the nuclear power plants at the expense of cheaper, safer and more lasting forms of energy; the space programme which concentrates resources away from the everyday things which ordinary folk need—and last but not least the clever new weapons of war. So now we are living on a knife-edge

controlled by over-critical, error-prone machinery.

To add insult to injury, this machinery makes it easier to keep a track on what we're up to, thanks to its ability to store enormous quantities of information.

## SOFTER APPLICATIONS

It does seem vital that women should take more control over computers and help steer them into "softer" applications. But it's difficult to know where to start as for many women computers are so alien. And for others, I would include myself in this, it is difficult to generate much enthusiasm for them. However, the fact that computers are now miniaturised, more home based and easier to adapt to social applications may help make this break-through.

It would be interesting to hear the views of some other readers on this buzzing topic of our times.

ANNIE LOCKWOOD

COMMENTS WELCOME !!!



## LETTER FROM STEVE

... I would be interested in starting a discussion on the social and political aspects of the subject. I am a mechanical engineer using and writing programs within industry. This, as you can imagine, is a very difficult area to be in from a moral point of view. I would like to get a discussion started in this area, to get my own ideas sorted out and to hear other people's point of view.

Computers can be used for good and bad and it is up to us as users and programmers, to decide which direction we should go in, not leave it to the politicians and paymasters. Computers and robots can remove difficult, boring, repetitive jobs which on the face of it, seems a good idea. This should give people time to do useful, self-satisfying things. Unfortunately all that happens in this society is that people have to depend on the state once they lose a job with very little opportunity to do things for themselves.

I believe that computers can be used to better people's lives. At the moment we, as programmers, have opportunities to work at something we enjoy by finding it stimulating and creative. However this is not so for other people.

There is hope though. I've read of a case recently where machinists, instead of losing their jobs, learnt how to control numerically controlled machines themselves. This made their jobs more meaningful in that they had more say in how components were made. It must be noted though that this was by no means a perfect situation as they were still working for a large company instead of themselves.

Expert software systems could be of great use to people. For example, there is a program in use which has a vast knowledge of human medical problems and is used to advise doctors and nurses who could not possibly hope to know all the data stored. Expert systems like this could help small groups set up their own work place so that they could work independently from other people without having to rely on experts who are generally owned by the authorities.

There are things we must be careful of. If we become dependent on computers, we become dependent on computer manufacturers or, more to the point, chip manufacturers. Microchips require large high technology set ups, which means, in today's society, big powerful companies. This is worrying,

## LETTER FROM STEVE [CONT'D]

... particularly when you bore in mind that one of the only main frame manufacturers which was not American, ICL, has just been merged with an American company, STC, which is itself controlled by ITT, the makers of Apple. If we are not careful we could be come controlled even more by the USA, making it more difficult for people to live their lives free from outside interference.

So, what should we do?

Should we scrap computers, just use them for games or do we work towards workers' co-operatives or similar set-ups where people decide for themselves whether to produce and use computers.

STEVE.

## A SHORT REPLY FROM RICHARD

Firstly I must emphasize that my response is not an attempt to close off discussion, merely to push along a bit further.

Secondly I think that most of us would agree that there is no simple answer to Steve's final question. Computers, of many different shapes and sizes exist

Some are presently used to hold information against us, by the state. Some are designed to replace, in conjunction with mechanisation, our labour power - both physical and mental. Some [many!!!] are used for home entertainment by those bored with T.V. + Videos, by those wanting to create their own images and animate their imaginations. Others are used for business purposes - for mailing lists, invoices etc - or indexing and statistical uses. The list of possible uses seems endless - especially for those with money!!!

One area Steve mentions is that of expert systems which involves notions of artificial intelligence. I must admit I find the prospect both exciting and frightening, as on the one hand the intellectual achievement of simulating (+ surpassing) human intelligence is awesome but the prospects of humans "controlled" by machines does not seem attractive to say the least.

Finally 2 books that might help people clarify their thoughts:

FEIGENBAUM, E.A + MCCORDUCK, P. "The Fifth Generation" Pan 1984 £2.95  
WEISENBAUM, J. "Computer Power and Human Reason" 1984



# REVIEWS

## PRIVATEERS

Author: John Darwin  
Publisher: Socialist Software,  
14 GRANGE CRESCENT, SHEFFIELD S11 8AY  
Machine: Spectrum 48K. no price.

This is an attempt at political software. The attempt, however, fails totally. It is, quite simply, a memory game - you are given five topics and have to then say which was first etc. Each topic has a short description of its effects, e.g. what de-nationalisation means. As a game it is both unremarkable and unplayable, unless one uses the BREAK key, which then guarantees one 100%. BRILLIANT!!! Its educational value is on a par with its playability.

## RATECAPPER

Author: John Darwin  
Publisher + other details as above.

This "game" is a third-rate scrolling "dodge-the-blobs" piece of software. The political content is less than minimal, i.e. you mustn't move your blob too far to the left or the government will abolish the council. Really I can't imagine anyone wasting either time or money on "playing" this game. Its educational value is nil.

Richard.

## BASE INVADERS

Author: Alan Dordoy.  
Publisher: Imagination Software,  
47 Clifton Road, Elswick, Newcastle upon Tyne. NE4 6XH  
Machine: Spectrum 48K + 16K £3.50

Written a year ago this is a game that wouldn't have been out-of-place on the ZX81 two-three years ago. It is a single screen dodge the blobs + hedges games with you as the heroine, on her way to cutting the fence at the top of the screen. The more fence you cut, the more police there are, thus increasing the difficulty.

The game has no political analysis apart from the fact that only women can cut fences, and if you do cut fences you'll get nicked!!! This is more playable than the other two games reviewed on this page and may appeal to less experienced computer users. It went down well with some members of the local Women for Peace group, but lacks any "on-screen" political input.

The only good point about this game is that any profits that are made will go to support the Greenham Women, oh and the instructions are very good too!!!

Richard.

# BITS

## SMALL AD

Spectrum Software for Sale:

Zaxxon (Starzone) £1.50

Paras (Lothlorien) £1.50

Halls of the Things (Crystal) £3.00

Black Crystal (Carnel) £3.00

Prices include postage. Cheques to

Richard Alexander 55 Dupont Rd London SW20 8EH

Processed World is collecting in-house xeroxed and/or mimeographed newsletters, cartoons, humor sheets, satirical memos, anonymous barbs, etc. for an article on horizontal communications on the job. Send us whatever you find around your office that fits this general description...

Processed World, 55 Sutter St. #829, San Francisco, CA 94104, USA

NO COMMENT !!!

## Code junkies

SOME PEOPLE are very concerned about the social and psychological changes that can occur when a person gets hooked on computing and becomes a code junkie. I am trying to discover if there really are any problems, and in what way they manifest themselves.

Code junkies can be of any age but seem invariably to be male. They usually have an above average intelligence with good logical, mathematical abilities.

Often the junkie is very happy with his life, but his family and friends seem to be the ones who suffer. They cannot understand the fascination that the computer holds, and may feel unable to compete with a machine for affection and attention.

I would like to hear from anyone who is, has been, or has experienced life with a computer junkie. Who are they, what type of person are they, how have they changed and how has this activity affected those around them?

All information will be treated confidentially.

M A Shotton,  
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## WORLD WAR III NOT GOOD FOR MICROS — OFFICIAL

SHOULD the Pentagoths and Kremloids ever get round to dropping The Big One, the drab post-war existence (for those of us who live through it) will not be lightened by the odd bout of Adventure or Arcade hacking.

Apart from the need for a wind generator or some other alternative energy source, there's EMP to contend with. Electromagnetic pulse, to give the monster its full name, is a huge electrical overload caused by a nuclear blast. The effect, even from a relatively low-yield weapon, would be felt up to 600 miles away. Microchips

just can't take it, and the whole lot would go down the tube.

The surprising thing, defence analysts revealed this week, is that military computers and radar circuits are not shielded from the effect. Since modern technowar depends heavily on computerised command and control, this could mean the ridiculous spectacle of NATO and the WP fighting each other very quickly to a standstill in the radioactive ruins. Nice to know you're in the same boat as a five-star general, eh?

[from BIG K magazine]

## NEXT ISSUE.

Well, assuming I get some feedback on this issue which indicates a desire for people to receive/write Black Chip you may find some of the following in the next issue:

- : Women + Computing: a reply [from Pea News]
- : Review of Rotobronics Wafadrive mini for the Spectrum
- : Reviews of new political software
- : Whatever other bits + pieces come my way
- : and most importantly

YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS



# OHMS

(UNITS OF ELECTRICAL RESISTANCE !)

A recent copy of Black Flag had a short letter/article from the Southend A's about the possibilities of A hackers being actively involved in the next Stop the City protest. In particular we are being encouraged to break into databases etc to cause untold disruption!

Whilst I can fully sympathise with the ideas being put forward, from what I know about the equipment held by A computer users none of us has any of the necessary equipment (i.e. modems) or experience (i.e. finding + breaking security codes) to actually put this into practice. In many ways I feel this is symptomatic of the mythology which surrounds "computers". It seems that people think that if you own any computer you can do all sorts of amazing things with it. Well you can, if it's a big expensive one linked up to all manner of other equipment, but us poor Spectrum + ZX-81

owners are not in the same league as the more publicized hackers.

At best one can investigate Prince Philip's private mail (YAWN!) or change the information shown on PRESTEL but none of that can compare with what INSIDERS can do!!!

For many reasons the most successful sabotage never gets reported but it certainly is easy for bank clerks to divert tiny amounts from large numbers of accounts into spurious bank accounts. Similarly programmers can write programs with "time-bombs" in them so that after a month, year or whatever - when they're safely out-of-reach - the computer can wipe out data it is processing.

On a more spectacular level one can see that computers are a focus of resistance attacks, e.g. French attacks on a Nuke processing plant. Even here however the hardware can be replaced + data should always be kept in two or more secure locations. I would be most interested in hearing other people's views on this

Riccarda

# THE BACK PAGE

## Editorial standards

MUCH of the current plethora of computer magazines are of dubious value. Especially worrying is the influence that particular magazine can have on the sales potential of a product through a good or bad review.

I regularly purchase *Practical Computing* and also the U.S. magazine *Byte*. The April 1984 issue of *Byte* contained an editorial statement from Phil Lemmons entitled "A Call for Ethical Standards for Personal Computer Magazines". I am sure you have access to this issue.

In brief the eight subheadings were:

1. No "editorial" discounts for *Byte* staff members.
2. No expense-paid trips.
3. No fat speakers' fees.
4. Disqualification from stories because of stock ownership.

5. An author's connections must be clear.

6. No favouritism to advertisers in editorial coverage.

7. Editors determine the editorial themes.

8. No privileged relationships with companies in the field.

Will you as editor of a leading U.K. computer publication make a similar series of declarations in your magazine? If you were able to do so, I believe you would earn still further respect in what is becoming a rat-race market.

N.H. Day  
Nottingham

### The Editor Replies:

1. No-one connected with this journal receives "editorial" discounts, but only because they're not offered.
2. Chance would be a fine thing.
3. Is this size-ist? Do thin speakers get paid?
4. No-one on this magazine has any stocks (or ducking-stools!)
5. We agree that contextualization of articles is most important, but we don't make it obligatory.
6. Rubbish! All advertisers will get glowing reviews of their products (or else!)
7. We are even more democratic - the writers determine the editorial coverage.
8. We agree, we are open to bribery from all companies equally.

### CREDITS TO:

STEVE for the letter  
PEACE NEWS for the article  
CAPTAIN COCK-UP AND THE  
BODGE BROTHERS for the lay-out,  
writings, stickings, cuttings etc.

You for reading this and hopefully  
for writing something for the next issue.

If you can produce legible typing  
then anything on A4 can be copied.  
Graphics (line drawings in particular)  
are most welcome. Otherwise hand-  
written submissions are welcome.

If anyone reading this has access to  
a printer (or can give me £250!)  
then the next issue <sup>may</sup> be even be readable.  
Otherwise I suspect typed issues will  
start round about June next year.

### ADVERTS

As far as I'm concerned all personal  
adverts are welcome and can be put  
in free of charge. Commercial ones  
will be free to ideologically sound  
Comrades, although donations will  
be appreciated!!! As for any  
others ..... we'll see!!!

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

I'm quite to co-ordinate the  
production of this journal and  
am happy to send this copy out  
free. However future issues will  
cost 50p (inc. p.p.), Subscriptions are  
£2.00 and issues will be quarterly.  
All contributions welcome. Please send  
to 55, Dupont Rd. London. SW20 8GH