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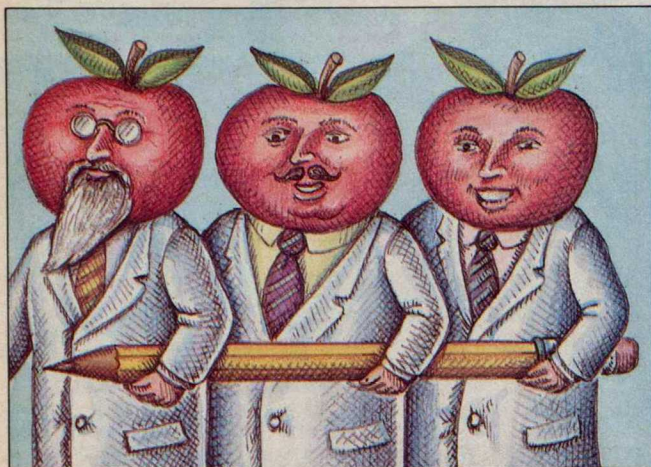
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Personal Computers, News, and Games

Illustrations by Charles Waller



Word Processor: Three Generations

After computer games and spread sheets, word processing probably is the third most popular use of the micro-computer. Several dozen text editors are available, from the bestselling *WordStar* to the *Bank Street Writer* from Broderbund. The word on *WordStar* has always been that it's the "writer's writing program," replete with all kinds of features, including on-screen page formatting which allows you to see what your printer will do before you print. The problem with *WordStar*, however, has always been that it takes you a long time—a few weeks or more—to become fluent with it. *Bank Street Writer*, on the other hand, takes only 10 minutes of practice before you can effectively use it.

But these are only two editors, and by no means the only effective ones. People tend to stay with the word processor they've begun with, and I've stubbornly hung onto one during the past few years. Why? I don't have the stamina or inclination to learn another just for the sake of a few more features that are not likely to

greatly improve my efficiency. So I've been using *Apple Writer* in three different incarnations; version II, IIe, and recently the newly released 2.0.

The first version ran on the Apple II and II+ computers—and compared to today's standards, it was woefully cumbersome and primitive. Those computers did not have arrow keys to manipulate the cursor, so anytime you wanted to jump around the text to make deletions or additions, you had to hit the escape key twice. Even then you had to use the "IJKM" and "ESDX" keys to successfully negotiate your way in and out of paragraphs. Worse, upper case took two keystrokes per letter, including searching for the escape key with your left pinky—particularly annoying since every sentence contains at least one capital letter. Still, once you were accustomed to the idiosyncracies of *Apple Writer*, it was a far cry better than an IBM Correcting Selectric typewriter. Yet compared to my colleagues singing the virtues of *WordStar* and other editors, it was a dog.

When *Apple Writer IIe* came along, it was an up-

grade of the first version, designed especially to accommodate the "enhanced" computer, which does have arrow keys. This souped-up program speeded up the writing process mostly because the keyboard was now always in the edit mode. And the shift key became active, allowing you to type capitals the same way you do on ordinary typewriters. With the enhanced *Apple Writer* I became a reasonably happy devotee, despite some drawbacks. While I couldn't get on-screen page breaks (like *WordStar*), I could still get an advance look at the text on screen before printing it. Thanks to a 1K buffer, paragraph manipulation—an absolute necessity for writers—was as good as on any word processor I'd seen, enabling me to move most medium-sized chunks of copy around with only three keystrokes.

Then came version 2.0, which purportedly would enhance even the enhanced program. I've been writing with it for about three weeks, including this review—but despite several enviable improvements the package is disappointing. It loads faster than any of its *Apple Writer* predecessors, but provides 5K less usable RAM. Then again, when using print-format commands, for the first time in the series you get a fairly good idea of what your document will look like in hard copy. It's not *WordStar* (because there are no page breaks), but it's adequate.

The downside of 2.0, however, is in file management, and here is where the new editor is extremely disagreeable. Apple has become infatuated with a new disk operating system called *ProDOS*, and 2.0 uses it. While

Apple disk drives still run both *ProDOS* and the old *DOS 3.0*, any formatted 3.0 disk will not run with 2.0. This is something like getting a new LaserVision player that doesn't run any of your collection of discs.

Worst of all, *ProDOS* insists that you give your disks volume names in addition to a subtitle for each file, using slashes. This means unnecessary delays when saving text to disk. In short, the new *Apple Writer* demands that you do more fingerwork when transferring words from screen to disk and vice versa. If you've missed the first two versions of this program and begin word processing with 2.0 on an Apple IIc, chances are you won't be bothered by these petty annoyances. But if you're looking to upgrade, you will. I'll take *Apple Writer IIe* any day.

—Doug Garr



Worms?

Electronic Arts/Atari, C-64/
Disk

You have to be suspicious of any program in which the first instruction is to not read the instruction manual. Perhaps Electronic Arts was hoping that users of this purported "game" won't realize that the rules and the program have about as much in common as sushi and a knish.

According to the rules, *Worms*? is about training new, wild, auto, and untrained worms to capture territories on a dotted grid. If a worm moves into a trail already laid by another creature, it dies. The worm that captures all six territories attached to a dot—or else the last worm left alive—is the winner.

What the program really does is another story. For one, the user's worms are trained before the start of the game, meaning that players sit and move their joysticks in all directions not having the slightest idea of how this might affect the worm. When the program is activated, simple colored lines (these must be the worms, right?) squiggle all over the screen, knocking each other off until one color is declared the victor. A normal response would be, "OK, now what?" Well, that's it.

One supposes users are expected to sit and train worms all day, eventually learning how the joystick affects the worms' later movements on the screen. But there is no incentive to continue once you've used this "game" more than once. Avoid this one.

—Tracie Forman

PictureIt On the VideoShow

Although software manufacturers have been exploiting the field of presentation graphics recently, most of their programs are limited in that they can display only up to 16 colors in any given picture. To the average user that may seem a lot—until he sees a graph produced by

PictureIt and displayed through VideoShow. *PictureIt* enables you to design a variety of graphs with up to 1000 colors each, which can then be displayed through the 16-pound portable VideoShow.

The technology that makes this possible addresses microdots rather than pixels, thus providing over three times the resolution of other graphic systems.

You create the graphs and charts with *PictureIt* and a compatible PC by coding in the various color information and saving the resulting slides to disk. The VideoShow—which has its own 8086 processor, 16K of ROM, and 256K of RAM—decodes the information and provides the actual colors. The slides can then be displayed on any TV, color monitor, or video projector; they can even be saved to videotape with voiceover if you choose. The show can be run automatically or using a remote-control keypad device.

Both software and hardware are easy to use and the documentation, though thin, is more than adequate. The manufacturer, General Parametrics, intends to release additional software (such as a drawing program) soon. *PictureIt* costs \$595 and the VideoShow runs \$3499.

—Vincent Puglia

Hackers: Heroes Of the Computer Revolution

By Steven Levy (*Anchor Press/Doubleday*, \$17.95)

This fairly exhaustive account of those technological adventurers affectionately called "hackers" provides a

BEST SELLERS/ HOME

1. **Dollars & Sense.** TIP, MAC, APc, IBM, AP. Monogram.
2. **Print Shop.** AP. Broderbund.
3. **Bank Street Writer.** AP, IBM, C64, AT, APc. Broderbund.
4. **Mac the Knife.** MAC. Miles Computing.
5. **Your Pers. Net Worth.** AP, C64, AT, IBM, PCjr. Scarborough.
6. **Managing Your Money.** IBM. Micro Education (MECA).
7. **Home Acct.** APc, TIP, EPS, AT, C64, IBM, TRS, AP. Arrays/Cont.
8. **Homeword.** C64, AP, AT, IBM, TIP. Sierra On-Line.
9. **ClickArt.** MAC. T/Maker.
10. **Micro Cookbook.** APc, IBM, AP, APc. Virtual Combinatics.

BEST SELLERS/ RECREATION

1. **Flight Simulator II.** AT, C64, AP. Sublogic.
2. **Sargon III.** AP, C64, IBM, MAC. Hayden Software.
3. **Flight Simulator.** IBM. Microsoft.
4. **Zork I.** CP/M, AP, DEC, IBM, AT, MAC, TIP. Infocom.
5. **Ultima III.** AP, AT, IBM, C64. Origin Systems.
6. **Summer Games.** AP, C64, AT. Epyx.
7. **Millionaire.** MAC, AP, C64, IBM, AT. Bluechip Software.
8. **Trivia Fever.** C64, AP, IBM. Professional Software.
9. **Zork III.** IBM, TRS, MAC, AT, CP/M, TIP, C64. Infocom.
10. **Zork II.** TRS, DEC, IBM, AP, AT, CP/M, TIP, MAC. Infocom.

LEGEND: AP = Apple, APc = Apple IIc, APe = Apple IIe, AT = Atari, C64 = Commodore 64, COM = Commodore Pet/CBM, CP/M = 5¼" and 8" formats, DEC = DEC Rainbow, EPS = Epson QX-10, IBM = IBM-PC, MAC = Apple Macintosh, PCjr = IBM PCjr, RIP = Texas Instruments Professional, TRS = TRS-80, VIC = Commodore Vic-20, VTR = Victor 9000, WNG = Wang Personal Computer, ZEN = Zenith 100.

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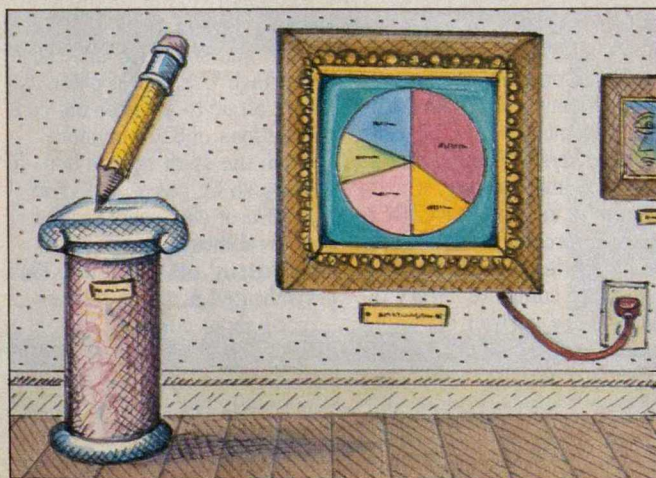
wonderful glimpse of the guys who stayed up all night to make computer software safe for the rest of the world. Author Levy is fascinated by man's mental swordplay with the microchip. He traces its history beginning with the MIT wizards who had affairs with mainframe computers in the '60s, takes us to Stanford and the next generation, and finally waltzes us through the modern era of game software design for micros.

The single thread woven through the narrative is the Hacker Ethic. For convenience, one could say it means exploring a system (even illegally, but always benevolently) to find out how it works, and making the information available to the public—*gratis*. This ethic was skewed, however, when it meant computer games. Money changes everything, and the Big Money in software sullied the ethic. (Even the infamous phone phreak Cap'n Crunch drives a Mercedes.)

In the last and best part of the book Levy uses Sierra On-Line, a software house, as a microcosm of the American Computer Dream and the price one pays to achieve it. Readers who are also computer buffs will find some familiar names among the portraits of characters: Bill Gates, Steve Wozniak, Richard Garriott. Levy has done a first-rate job illuminating the cast. Yes, they are interesting people, infinitely more so than the computers with which they spend so much time. Knowing the MIT crowd was into esoteric Chinese food helps explain a highly creative and unusual persona.

By far, *Hackers* is easily the most important work in its genre (though it's not a computer book) since Tracy Kidder's critically acclaimed *The Soul of a New Machine*. (I should add, too, that my enthusiasm for the book may be clouded or inflated by a close friendship with the author. But I hope it hasn't.)

—Doug Garr



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