ISSUE No 11
Spring 1990

LOG ON

THE MAGAZINE FOR MICRONET MEMBERS

MICRONET 1990 PLUS

SHADES THE ULTIMATE ADVENTURE MULTI-USER GAME...

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Shades

LOG ON

Issue No 11 Spring 1989

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MICRONET 1990

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THE MAGAZINE FOR MICRONET MEMBERS

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Telesoftware Gateway Improvement

As we announced in the Christmas edition of "Log On", Micronet have been looking at how we can make the improvements to the service that members have requested.

Top of the action list comes Telesoftware. For instance, quite a few 'Netters have experienced downloading problems - particularly with some of the older machines like the Sinclair Spectrum and Amstrad CPC.

As a short term measure to get around this problem, we have moved the telesoftware for these two machines from our Gateway system on to Prestel frames. This will mean that the time-out shouldn't occur, and owners of these machines will be able to download reliably.

Netters have also requested more software for them to download. In the past, we used to receive the majority of free software from Micronet members, but it would seem that fewer and fewer people are sending us programs they want to share.

So we've been looking for reliable suppliers of PD and Shareware software for all machines, so that we can upload more high-quality software for you to download. Progress has been good, and by the time you read this you should already be seeing more programs online.

In the longer term, we have started work on designing a new, faster and more adaptable telesoftware host machine. At this stage it is intended that the system will not be restricted to CET-based download protocols, but users will also have the choice of using transfer methods like Kermit and Modem7. We'll keep you in touch with developments.

Name change for the Network

From now on 'Dialcom House' will be known as 'Network House', which means the full address for any future correspondence will be Micronet, British Telecom, Network House, Brindley Way, Hemel Hempstead HP3 9RR.

The names 'Dialcom' and 'Dialcom UK' have been dropped as British Telecom has decided that they do not reflect the range of online service available, and probably confused customers.

So from now on, we're just going to be known as Micronet, one of the many services available from British Telecom. After all, when it comes down to it, that's who we are.

Christmas Competition Winner

The Christmas competition featured a highly desirable NTS PC-XT complete with hard disc, colour Tatung VGA monitor and Norton utilities package as the star prize.

Congratulations to Dave Watts of Chelmsford in Essex, who correctly answered all five questions and produced the winning tiebreak slogan. Dave's a 40-year-old Community Education officer, and he's been a Micronet member 'more or less ever since it started'. At present his home computer is a BBC Micro, though he uses PCs at work for desk-top publishing applications.

His slogan was 'Micronet is the ultimate peripheral because it makes my living room a node in the global village'. Powerful stuff there, Dave, so we're happy to hand over a powerful prize to you!

The complete list of answers is as follows: Dave Dorn, VGA Graphics, CET, The Sunday Times, and Support Information Database.

Immortals Hall of Fame

Heroic deeds and cunning tactics are the lifeblood of Shades, Micronet's fantasy multi-user game. Of all those who dare to play, the highest praise is reserved for those who achieve the rank of Witch or Wizard.

It's not easy! To score 200,000 points takes determination, skill, and at least a modicum of courage. Log On therefore congratulates the following players, who made it all the way since the last issue of Log On was published.

Felicitations therefore to:

Adidas
Circe
Dillan
Dragon
Striker
Zach
Zero

May your zappers never wither and your powers never wane!

Shades can be accessed on page 8118, or by typing the keyword *SHADES#

Midispot moves to Micronet . . .

A new database is arriving on Micronet, though many subscribers will know all about it already. Following the closure of Prestel's HobbySpot, the dedicated music magazine MidiSpot is moving home to Micronet.

Run by Jeff Horne, Gary and Paul Sedgewick, the magazine features information about all aspects of MIDI-music, with lists of equipment, reviews, problem pages, and helpful explanatory articles: everything, in fact, to do with making electronic music.

MidiSpot will incorporate Micronet's Music City area, the focal point for all Micronet information about computers and music.

Micronet Editor Paul Needs says "I've been a regular reader of MidiSpot since it began, purely for my own enjoyment, so I'm delighted that we're able to bring it into the Micronet area and give it a new home."

MidiSpot and Music City can by found on page 800989 or by using the keyword *MUSIC CITY# or *MIDISPOT#

Acorn Comp Winner

The winner of the Acorn 3000 competition in last Autumn's Log On was Ian Pennington, from Brighton. Ian's been a Micronetter for a year now, and works for the Trustee Savings Bank.

Ian correctly identified the ten words or phrases in our wordsquare to win the prize, and promptly disappeared on holiday to Australia before we could contact him, which is why this report failed to make the previous, Christmas issue of Log On!

Belated congratulations to Ian, anyway, who says he's looking forward to getting to grips with Acorn's RISC chips in the new A3000.

Entrants had to find ten words or phrases connected to Acorn or Prestel in the wordsquare. The correct solution was: Archimedes, Econet, Legal, Eagle, Music City, Newsday, Gallery, Acorn, RISC, and Dialtalk.

Chess star plays online exhibition

Chess grandmaster Jonathan Speelman was Prestel's guest in December for a simultaneous exhibition match in which all the moves were made online. Speelman played five games against opponents in different parts of the country, winning four and drawing the fifth.

The match was organised by ChessBox, the new chess club area on Prestel, which has already gained nearly 200 members in the short time since its launch. Moves were displayed using special dynamic frames, enabling other Prestel subscribers to watch the games unfold 'live'.

Before the match Speelman answered questions about chess from Prestel members, and said later that he found it fun and unusual to play against people he couldn't see.

"When I discovered that one of my opponents suffered from cerebal palsy" he said, "it really brought home to me how ChessBox can help to improve the quality of life for the disabled."

ChessBox can be found on page 380 of Prestel, or by using the keyword *CHESSBOX#

Have Z88, will travel

Ian Burley, Micronet's News Editor throws light on the life of the roving newshound . . .

The Net has been getting where the action is, first hand, for nearly two years to bring the best coverage of the most prestigious events like Comdex, the Consumer Electronics Show in the States and CeBIT, the enormous European computer and office technology show in Germany.

It's nice to buckle into an airline seat, one's trusty Z88 portable (with pocket modem of course) within reassuring reach, and think ahead to the next few days away from the hustle and bustle of Net Towers, but anyone who thinks the life of a jet-setting news hack is an all expenses paid holiday might be in for a shock.

Take my two recent trips to Las Vegas, Nevada. Last November I spent a week in Vegas to cover Comdex Fall'89. Getting to Vegas involves standing at the economy class check-in counter waiting for the airline to fix its computer and then being cooped up in planes for 12 hours, taking off and landing three times - precisely the kind of preparation you need for the ensuing confrontation with 1,100 exhibiting companies and over 100,000 visitors at the show.

Arrival time in Vegas was 11pm. Ignoring (just) the rows of one-armed bandits tempting the weak-willed waiting for their baggage to appear in the airport arrival area and surviving the fright inflicted by a hotel clerk who tries to convince me my reserved room has been given to somebody else, I finally get to bed at 1am - well, 9am GMT.

At last 'morning' (4pm GMT) greeted me with brilliant Nevada desert sunshine, defeating the low-lying Vegas smog haze. The next problem was that my hotel room turned out to be of early vintage, with no Bell phone jack for a modem.

In my diary reports you may have thought I was joking, but if you've been to Vegas you will know that my hotel, the Circus Circus, really does have an authentic circus inside it!

A generously equipped press working room solved the modem connection problem. Despite Cambridge Computer's presence in the US market for over a year, very few of the gathered press had seen a Z88 before and they were very impressed by its size, or lack of.

Compaq had provided a couple of dozen 386SX PCs in a network, all of which were equipped with internal modems. At first I connected up my pocket modem by disconnecting one of the Compaqs. This didn't impress a Compaq rep who was looking after the press room operation.

Crystal clear and, just as importantly, free telephone lines ensured problem-free connections to Telecom Gold in London for filing show reports. I managed to log into Micronet a couple of times, but at 2am GMT the chatlines were a touch quiet.

If there's one thing I'll remember about Vegas besides gaming tables and slot machines underneath a trapeze act, it's the incredibly huge selection of really cheap food - the lure to keep you in the hotel casino. A diet was a priority on arrival back home!

As I've mentioned at every opportunity on the Net Newsdesk pages, colour LCD screen laptop PCs were the stars of Comdex fall for me. No colour LCD screens had been shown in the UK though we'd all read about their development. Seeing is believing and the great strides that the Japanese have made in perfecting this display technology is quite awe inspiring.

Brit firm Psion has a big presence at the January show

It was also very encouraging to see Psion having a crack at the recalcitrant US computer market with its very innovative, if somewhat pricey, new laptop Mobile Computers.

Commodore turned out to be one of the disappointments of Comdex. The much rumoured 680303 Amiga based Unix graphics workstation failed to materialize and though a 68030 upgrade card was officially announced at the show the company couldn't even be bothered to display it on its embarrassingly small stand. Atari impressed much more. The new STE was on display, flanked by armies of Portfolio pocket PCs and the new 68030 based TT workstation.

CES at the beginning of January, a more leisure oriented show, meant a return to the now familiar lights of Las Vegas. This is a show where Nintendo reigns supreme, the games console giant commanding a $2 billion market in its consoles, compatible software and peripherals.

The trip was altogether more exhausting. Delayed departure from Heathrow meant a missed connection at New York and consequently virtually no sleep for the first 48 hours of my trip. My biological time piece never recovered and I was permanently jet-lagged for a whole week. OK, so I squeezed in a journey of a life time on a day off to visit the Grand Canyon and peek at the impressive Hoover Dam, but this reporter on location business is certainly no skive.

The Micro MUG Survey

Tell us what sort of games you want to play, and win a Sega games console into the bargain!

Over the past three years Micronet has been a leading light in the growing world of multi-user games. Our own game, Shades, has established itself as the biggest and most popular MUG in Europe, and it's soon to be joined by its stablemate, Trash.

MUGs are clearly going to play a big role in the development of online entertainment in the 1990s, and while we've got plenty of our own, we want to know what you think too.

So we've put together a questionnaire about multi-user games, which we hope as many 'netters as possible will fill in. Obviously we're very interested in the views of experienced Shades-players who already have firm ideas about what they want from a game. But we also hope that a large number of non-players will send us their views as well, because we'd like to produce games which are attractive to people who haven't yet caught the Shades bug, as well as those who have.

The more people who respond, the better able we'll be to judge what you, the subscribers, really want. The questions are printed below, but please respond online, on page 811862. And, if you complete the survey before May 14th, your name will go into the hat for the prize draw, and a chance to win a Sega games console. (See page 8 for standard rules).

Remember, we're asking about multi-user games, where you play with and against other subscribers, in real time, like Shades or Trash.

1 New Games

Which of the following game scenarios hold the greatest appeal for you? Score 5 (for most) to 1 (least) or 0 for none.

a) Fantasy, dungeons and dragons.
b) Science fiction
c) Contemporary life
d) A 'dogfight' MUG with animated graphics
e) Others (please specify and score)

2 Game Play

Rate the following features according to their importance to you. Score 5 for most, 1 for least.

a) Scope for role-playing
b) Good combat systems
c) Magic-type spells/powers
d) Atmospheric descriptions
e) Extra powers at high levels
f) Plenty of logical puzzles
g) Easy to get started
h) A sense of danger
i) Complex, challenging game design
j) Graphics
h) Others (please specify and score)

3 Pricing

Nobody likes paying bills, but if we didn't charge for MUGs, we couldn't run them at all! We would like to know how much you think you can afford to pay, for the right sort of game, though...

a) Assuming they are games you enjoy, how much money are you prepared to spend per quarter on MUGs, excluding phone charges?
b) If you already play one or more MUGs, how much do you spend a quarter, excluding phone charges?
c) What do you think is a reasonable charge, over and above standard network charges, for a good MUG?

4 Length

In some MUGs, it's easier to get to the top than in others. But without a challenge, there isn't so much satisfaction, either.

How long do you think it should take a reasonably good player to reach the 'top rank' in a MUG?

a) 1-12 weeks
b) 3-12 months
c) 1-3 years
d) There should always be another 'level' to strive for.

5 Control

Which of the following statements do you agree with when it comes to 'policing' a game? (NB An 'Arch-Wizard' is a player with special authority to 'punish' cheating and rule-breaking)

1) Players should be allowed to do any thing the game software lets them do.
2) Arch-Wizards are needed to keep the peace and interpret the rules.
3) Players should be allowed to vote on how rules are enforced.
4) Players should be allowed to choose the Arch-Wizards!

6 About you

These are just a few questions about you, which will help us work out if there are any particular 'group' tastes or not. All information will be confidential.

a) How old are you?
b) Are you male or female?
c) How long have you been a member of Micronet?
d) What sort of computer do you use?

The next set of questions are exclusively for people who have played MUGs before. If you haven't, don't bother answering them!

7 MUGS in general

a) Please list those MUGs you currently play.
b) Which do you play the most?
c) Which do you enjoy playing the most?

The final questions are for people who have played Shades. Please ignore them if you have never played!

8 Shades

a) How long have you been playing Shades?
b) How long after you joined Micronet did you start playing Shades?
c) How often do you play Shades?
d) Approximately what percentage of your time on Micronet and Prestel is spent playing Shades?
e) How easy did you find Shades to begin with. Score 1 (easy) to 5 (hard).
f) What single feature of Shades do you like best?
g) What, if anything, do you most disklike about Shades?
h) What's the highest level you ever got to on Shades?
i) If you no longer play, why did you stop?

9 Shades: styles

As a Shades player, how do you class yourself (tick any which apply)?

a) Killer
b) T-hunter
c) Pacifist
d) Social player (mainly chatting, etc)
e) Role-player

10 Support

What do you think of the coverage Shades gets outside of the game itself, through areas such as the Shades Database, and InShades?

a) There's too little
b) There's about enough
c) There's too much
d) What sort of coverage would you like to see, which isn't already there?

A lighter Shade of play . . .

Chris Bourne explains how to set up a gallery of entertaining characters for Micronet's multi-user game, Shades.

You've just logged into Shades for the first time. You've chosen a name and a password, and here you are. Bert the Novice, ready to do...what? You look around you. Sabbath is polishing his longsword. A small green Fwog hops up and down out of blade's reach. Suddenly there's a loud 'Whoop Whoop Whoop' and Ambushbug the Arch-Wizard appears with a blinding flash of light and recites a speech in praise of cabbages.

Perhaps Bert was not an entirely appropriate name to choose...

Shades is a game to be played on many different levels. Some treat it as a puzzle-game, a battle of wits with the computer, and pay little attention to other players. But the majority see it as a social game as well as an adventure, and of those, many have developed fabulous characters with great sagas to their name.

This short article is intended to help you build up a character of your own, to get the most out of the role-playing fun.

Firstly, form a visual and mental image of your character. Is it male or female? You don't have to play someone of your own real-life gender, though unless you're quick-witted, your disguise won't last long if you 'shimmer' (Shades slang for a guy playing a female). Are you big and tough, peaceful, fat, inoffensive, cowardly, handsome, ugly, pretty, mean, rich or what? Are you even human?

The Wizard Dillan getting into his role

Don't go overboard on this at first or you will invent too many details to remember! A simple character might be an impoverished knight in a rusty suit of armour with a permanent cough. This satisfies three basic role-playing needs: something to be (a noble knight who has to beg for his supper), something to describe (the rusty armour) and something to do when other people are talking (cough a lot).

Incidentally, it's better to choose a few 'faults' as characteristics than to make yourself appear superhuman in all respects! Most players enjoy some entertaining defects, but somebody who claims to be the strongest, handsomest, toughest guy on the block will just sound boastful.

Now choose a name for your character which suits it. Your knight might be Griswold, or Lancelot. He's unlikely to be called Bert though, or Slim, or Samcoupe.

Now you can log in and immediately have a good idea of who YOU are, even if you haven't a clue what is going on in the game. And if other players can see you have an entertaining and well-thought-out character, they will warm to you quickly and you will soon be involved in all the gossipy goings-on which form the background to the game itself.

The social life of Shades is varied and rich, and spills over from the game to real life: it really is a superb way to make friends. There is usually a meet every month or so in London, with others all round the country every so often. It's fun turning up and discovering how different some people are from their Shades characters...much more likely to buy you a drink than bash you with the longsword!

You may even find, as some do, that developing your character and chatting in character to your friends is just as much fun as playing the game itself. Many players aren't really bothered with collecting treasure or fighting each other, and maintain just enough points to prove they can if they need to. The rest of the time it's all chatting and make-believe: but make-believe of a high order indeed! Some of the sagas have lasted for years...ask Centurion the Wizard for the full history of his breastplate next time you see him!

EIGHT TIPS FOR GOOD ROLE-PLAYING

1) Keep your character simple at first, with a few characteristics which are easy to describe. Let your adventures in Shades provide ideas for new characteristics as they develop.

2) Be polite to people you meet, even if your character is nasty by nature! Many people won't realise you are 'only' role-playing and by the time you tell them, it's too late because they are already angry.

3) Use lower-case letters, not capital letters. A SENTENCE FULL OF CAPITAL LETTERS ALWAYS LOOKS LIKE SHOUTING!

4) Do not impose your style of play on other people, but find ways in which it fits in with what they are doing. Then you will inspire each other instead of frustrate each other.

5) Never assume that people are who they say they are! Always remember, it's only a game!

6) Choose a name that will last...joke names are funny once or twice, but you will soon get tired of them, so only use them if you don't mind dumping the character and starting a new one after a while.

7) Be consistent. Once a killer always a killer! On the other hand, if you do want to change your character's style, you can always find a good reason for the change...eg, after months of pacifism, you realised that fighting was the only way to succeed! You can role-play these changes of heart out in front of everybody, as well, for general entertainment.

8) Invent a few 'props' for your character for when inspiration is low. Sappho has a bag of peanuts, Qadile has his hat, and even Ambushbug has been known to wave a bottle of Grolsch around from time to time! They are simple ways of making your character distinctive, and other players will look out for you and be more friendly if they remember your character well.

WIN a brand new SAM coupe!

It's quite a while since a home computer caused as much of a stir as the SAM Coupe. The brainchild of Miles Gordon Technology, the Coupe is a Spectrum-compatible machine aimed fair and square at the home market. MGT launched it for Christmas last year, and we're delighted to be able to offer one as our prize in this edition of *Log On*.

The specifications are certainly impressive. Some might go so far as to say the Coupe isn't just a Spectrum-compatible, but the machine the Spectrum should have been to start with. Of course, production techniques have changed dramatically since the heady days of 1982, but there's no doubt the Coupe packs a powerful punch for an 8-bit micro.

For a start, there's a massive 256K built-in RAM, expandable to 512K. Graphics are no problem at all — you've a choice of 128 colours, with up to 16 at a time per line, if you really want to cream your eyeballs. Sound is excellent too, with MIDI in, out and through ports to let you hook up to real MIDI instruments and compose music just like the professionals do — and there's even a stereo headphone port to get the most out of the sound on your software!

Talking of the software, most 48K Spectrum software will work on the Coupe. The machine has a special mode to do this, which actually slows down the operation of the chip. Micronet's Spectrum micromagazine will keep you up to date with what's compatible and what isn't, and give you all the support you need to make the most of the Coupe's software facilities.

Let's see, what else is there? Well, there's an On/Off switch — old-style Spectrum owners will know how welcome that is!— cassette interface, SCART socket for RGB monitors, joystick and mouse ports, as well as a 64-pin expansion slot for add-ons like printers and modems.

You can add up to two 3.5" disk drives, which slot neatly into the stylish casing, and SAM BASIC, a fully structured programming language with some very nifty graphics commands! And when you save your programs to tape, you'll find there's a whole range of speeds available for ease of use.

Oh yes, and every single key on the keyboard is fully programmable, so you can switch them around to suit your fingers and even make them generate strings of text at a single touch!

MGT has done everything possible to make the Coupe as accessible and easy to use for home programmer or joystick junkie alike. Now all you have to do enter the competition! Here's what you have to do . . .

How to enter

To win a fabulous SAM Coupe, just put the following Coupe features in order of preference. The entry which, in the opinion of the judges, most closely matches our own decision will win. In the event of one or more winners, the tiebreak answers will be taken into account.

When you've done that, log on to Micronet, and key 81186 (keyword *LOGON COMPETITION#) and fill out the special entry form. Only entries received in this way will be valid!

A MIDI music facilities
B Spectrum compatibility
C Comprehensive BASIC
D Original looks and style
E Expandable system

Tiebreak: How could MGT make the SAM Coupe even better?

Standard Competition Rules

1 The competition is open to all Micronet subscribers except employees and contractors of British Telecommunications plc and Miles Gordon Technology plc and their immediate families.

2 Entries are limited to one per Micronet account and all entrants must be fully paid-up Micronet subscribers at the time of the draw.

3 All entries must be received by 12am on Monday 16th April 1990. In the event of more than one person correctly solving the competition, the judges will award the prize to the entrant whom they consider to have provided the best tiebreak answer.

4 The judges' decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into.

5 All entries become the property of British Telecommunications plc, and none will be returned.

6 It is a condition of entry that competitors agree to be bound by the rules.

7 All winners will be notified by mailbox, and the results will be published in the following issue of *Log On*, subsequent to notification.

The Great Escape

Micronet isn't just for the kids. Successful businessman Eric Lomax tells Chris Bourne why he loves the 'Net so much . .

"So what do you want to know?" asks this quiet, confident voice from the MD's office at Amphoterics International. There are surprising contradictions about Eric Lomax, enfant terrible of the Micronet chatlines. In real life he's a slight, unassuming figure who specialises in manufacturing chemicals for use in shampoos and detergents. He's got 47 patents for 'surfactents' - surface active agents, which control what happens when the detergent is mixed with water. Not the sort of person you'd expect to find whooping it up on Micronet with all the gusto of a teenage delinquent.

Eric joined Micronet in March 1985, under the soubriquet 'Electronic Virgin'. "I called myself that just because I was a virgin when it came to electronics" he says, "But of course everybody took it differently!"

"I was intrigued by the chatlines in particular. In the old days it was quite a thrill to see your message go up - and a surprise too, there were so many problems and delays. Not like the wonderful form they're in today!"

Eric soon established himself as one of the foremost 'personalities' of Micronet. "I made quite a few friends" he says, mentioning the name John Nuttall in particular. John was better known as BJZOS, and the dreadful duo became famous for their lively conversation and playful practical jokes around the system.

"Let me tell you about my blind date in Hong Kong" says Eric, warming to his theme. "There was a travel agent on chatline called Wendy. We exchanged a few mailboxes, and because I travel a lot I would give her some business."

Then one day Eric got the following message: "I'm going on holiday to Hong Kong. Will you come and carry my cases?" Eric dived in head first, and the holiday was booked before they even met.

The Eric-Wendy romance was another of those legendary Micronet sagas which is remembered by far more people than ever knew who the protagonists were!

"The relationship lasted four years" says Eric, with obvious affection. "We even went to Albania together! I think she's in Africa with a sleeping bag at the moment..."

Eric Lomax: the Electronic Virgin!

Eric also fell in love with Shades, Micronet's first online multi-user game. At one time he was rarely off the game for more than a few hours. "I also found Xtra! vastly amusing...and of course InShades, and always the chatlines! I don't play Shades much now, it doesn't fit well with my new relationship."

You'd think with all these whirlwind Net activities there wouldn't be much time for business. But Eric still found time to 'go public' with his company, Amphoterics International, in 1985. In 1986 the Swedish firm Nobel, which dishes out the famous prizes, bought a 37.5% stake, and indeed work continues apace. Eric's latest patent is for "an ultra-green surfactent. It's vegetable derived, and will never be tested on animals. We're heavily involved in work on tests to measure eye irritation without actually irritating any eyes."

Fifty years old, Eric's lived through most of the major events in the computing world. He bought one of the first TRS80 micros in the country, after picking it up in Canada from Radio Shack in 1978.

"I originally bought it to do computerised horoscopes" he says, and continues to discuss his passion for astrology, getting deeply sidetracked into a state-of-the-art discourse on combining Western and Chinese horoscopes. "But...there's not much you can do with only 4K of memory and a cassette deck!"

Two Spectrums later, by way of an Apricot XL, Eric uses an Atari 1040ST for his Micronetting. Those who remember the saga of the Juki printer (a great piece of kit in its day) will be glad to know it still resides somewhere in his office, 'ready for printing'.

Whatever he does in the future, it's hard to imagine Micronet without Eric, and one imagines Eric finds it hard to imagine being without Micronet. "I'm extremely young at heart" he giggles, "As anybody can see from some of my juvenile pranks! Micronet is a wonderful escape."

As we all move onwards into the new decade, Micronet Editor

Micronet

As I mentioned in the Christmas issue of Log On (page 3), we've been looking hard at the ways in which we can improve the Micronet service.

We contacted hundreds of Micronet members and asked their opinions on all aspects of Micronet, and our conclusions are that we have to work even harder to provide value for the money you spend on the 'Net.

However, it's not just a matter of generally working harder, but of concentrating our efforts on the areas which you consider need improvements.

In the background, we have also been thinking about the new features which we would like to add to Micronet. These have been slotted in with other enhancements. More of these later!

Telesoftware

Perhaps the major concern that people have is with our telesoftware service. Common requests are that we provide more software, and of better quality. Others have found it difficult to download programs at all, especially for machines like the Sinclair Spectrum and Amstrad CPC.

We've decided on a two-tiered approach to solving the problems. Firstly, we intend to make improvements to the current telesoftware service.

Given the problems some members have been experiencing, we've decided that telesoftware is to be moved from the Gateway host to a Prestel database.

The problems have been that some downloads were being aborted, and this is caused by the terminal software reaching a 'time-out' situation, where it has been kept waiting for the next frame in a sequence.

By moving the programs to Prestel, we expect that this particular situation will vanish, and should solve the problem for users of all machines.

STs and Amigas.

Owners of Amigas and Atari STs are concerned that they must buy one particular comms package in order to download anything at all.

Software for these machines are not stored as standard CET encoded frames, but use a proprietary (and copyright) algorithm which compresses the data to reduce download times.

At the time we envisaged the current telesoftware system, there was very little viewdata software around. Since then, a variety of programs have become available, but because of the copyright issue, none are able to download Amiga or ST telesoftware from Micronet.

We've been looking at some of the new programs for the two machines, and are hoping to make them available for download by RubyView/Comm users. Also, we would like to include them with 'starter-packs' for new subscribers when they join Micronet.

As this is so important, we want to be absolutely sure we choose the right programs, and that they will do the job properly!

When we have made the right choice, we will stop providing software in the old format, and upload it in standard CET format which most viewdata packages can download. This also could mean that people with more than one kind of machine could download software for, say, an Amiga on their ST.

Another familiar request is that we should introduce other file transfer protocols which are quicker and more convenient to use than CET, such as X, Y and Z Modem, or Kermit.

In order to implement such a development, we are developing a new telesoftware host system, and are currently drawing up comprehensive specifications for the telesoftware aspects of its operation.

Because Prestel uses a data-word of seven data-bits, even parity and one stop bit (7-E-1), ordinary file-transfer protocols such as X, Y and Z Modem will not work. However, Kermit IS a seven bit protocol, and there is also one called Modem 7 (which is a forerunner of Xmodem). We aim to include both of these as well as CET, and if the rumoured 7-bit Z modem DOES happen, we'll look closely at that as well.

Although the completion of this project is some way off yet, we believe that it's the right way to go to meet your requests, and still provide a service which can easily be used by newcomers to communications and Micronet.

Finally on telesoftware, you told us that you wanted more programs.

Micronet is currently in discussion with the organisations which run some of the best libraries of Public Domain and Shareware programs, for all the machines we cover. As soon as agreements are reached, we'll start providing the programs for you to download as quickly as we can.

Interaction

It's become quite obvious to us that Micronet's Chatlines are not all that they were. Many former users have drifted off to Shades and Dialtalk, and those that prefer the (cheaper) options of using a Chatline are left with fewer people to talk to, and too many "C'lines" to choose from. Some of these receive hardly any messages at all.

I think, frankly, that the unused Chatlines are wasteful of valuable frames. Further, some of them look extremely old and archaic! By the time you read this, you may find that some of the underused Chatlines have either shrunk in size, or vanished altogether. The remainder have been re-designed to display more quickly, and to give you more space in which to write your messages.

One Chatline which used to be popular, and which has sunk into disuse is "Daisy Chat Channel 1". We intend to replace this with a new type

Paul Needs looks into his crystal ball and forecasts the future of . . .

— 1990+

of chatline, which is similar to a combination of all the other types of Chatline - Turbo, Quickchat as well as Daisy Chat. There is a carousel of old messages that can be keyed through both forward and backwards, but the main display frame is automatically changed when a new message is sent - saving you the hassle of keying 92 for the latest message.

This is pretty much experimental, so your feedback on whether you like it or not is important. Please do try it and let us know. If you approve, we may introduce more of this kind of Chatline, and if not — it could disappear!

Quite a few people have written and told us that they find the kinds of 'chat media' we provide lead to trivial discussions. While many people, including myself, quite enjoy rabbiting about trivial matters, there are those who prefer a more serious debate or discussion.

We've looked at the possibility of launching a new conferencing system, which will archive messages for a long time (months if not longer), and allow both real-time and long-term discussions in a variety of forums. These could be set up on just about anything, from a particular use of the 6502 processor to American Football!

Replies would be linked to the earlier message they referred to, and the chain of messages on a particular topic could be followed from beginning to end. The system could possibly be accessible via two or more gateways, so that you could use either Viewdata or Scrolling software.

As I've said, this is pretty much a 'maybe' at this stage, so if you think you would be interested in such a service, please write and let us know!

Magazines and Things

Finally, let's move on to publishing on Micronet. From the discussions we had with Micronet members, and also the letters on the Micro-Magazines, it seems that the majority are not so interested in leisure software — i.e. games. Also, many people told us that they would like to see more general non-machine-specific computing coverage on Micronet.

We were pretty pleased to hear that, as for some months most of our magazines have been moving to give more coverage to 'serious' applications — including programming, communications and operating systems, as well as reviewing the more serious programs which are on sale. Much of this has been published so that it applies to several machines on the Soft-Tech area of Micronet.

Ease of Use

Some people, particularly newcomers to comms and Micronet, still feel that the system is difficult to use, especially when trying to find a certain area in which they're interested.

This is a difficult one to sort out. While Prestel is a relatively easy system to use, we've had to scratch our heads to try to find a way to make it even easier to find all the bits and pieces within Micronet.

For many years, as Micronet's contents have grown, we've resisted the temptation to expand our What's New from one frame to two. But as we publish so many items, we cannot even include a short sentence to suggest what the article is about.

Further, we don't think that a route with, say, 'Key 3 - PC Base' does much to explain to the newcomer (or even some more 'experienced' members) what PC Base is, what is in it, and why they should 'Key 3'.

At the same time, we think that we should be publishing a good, general mixture, rather than concentrating on one particular micro each day. We're now planning just how we do this, so that whether you have a PC or an Amiga, whenever you log on there is something new for that machine, or computing items of general interest.

Archiving is another area in which the rigid structure of the Prestel system lends a challenge. Great care must be taken if the database is not to become unwieldy and difficult to use and maintain.

We know that many of you like to use the Micro Magazine or News archives as a reference library. Also, it seems to be an enormous waste for good articles to disappear forever when we have to re-use the frames they occupy, or rationalise our frame usage to prevent the database becoming over-complex.

There could be a few solutions to this problem, but we're looking at one which would be (in theory) both easy to maintain at our end, and provide a convenient method of accessing our archived articles.

Again, were we to adopt the idea and develop it, the system would be accessed via a gateway from Micronet, and would be a vast database with each single article we publish. Selection would be via keyword search (which could be a subject, date, title, etc).

The system would, having presented you with listed results of your search, ask if you wish to re-specify, and if not, offer the choice of reading the articles or having them put into a file and transferred to you via a telesoftware protocol so that you could read the articles off-line. It would also tell you the file size so that you can work out how long it would take to read or download!

Those are the developments and improvements we have in mind for the beginning of the 1990s.

We think we have it right, but would really like to hear your opinions on this, before we go any further. Do log on and key *ED# and let me know what YOU think.

Secrets of the Talisman

Talisman is Prestel's online adventure game and quiz area, with games and quizzes on all manner of subjects, especially geared to the tastes of Micronet members! The selection ranges from fantasy quests to science fiction, music and computing.

Run by quiz king Graeme Devonport, famous (or notorious!) for his Aardvark area on Prestel, Talisman not only sets out to entertain, but also offers prizes to successful players. Recent prizes range from hand-held computer games to a genuine gold half-sovereign!

But nobody can match Graeme's own purple prose when it comes to enthusing about the fun side of Talisman. So we'll stand aside and let 'Oleron the prize-giver' guide you through the delights of Talisman for himself:

"Begin your journey through the largest selection of adventure games on the system. Battle with the forces of good and evil — the very elements of light and darkness among the **Wizards of Kaar** (*81841#). Your quest amongst the wizards is not one of empty promises. For it is written that along the way there is real treasure to be found. All those who possess skill enough to complete their mission are to be rewarded with the magical ability to enter the Wizard's treasure palace, where they could win a golden Talisman .

Shadow Land

"Journeying on through the ages you enter **Shadow Land** (*81891#) — the magical mysteries of a mediaeval age. Confront the forces of darkness as your quest takes you into a confrontation with the headless horseman. Dare you continue . . .?

Skull Castle

"Castles in the air? A chance to win some REAL treasure! Hidden within the scaly walls of the **Skull Castle** (*81892#) are several locations with magical response pages. For each different one you find, the keeper of the Talisman will send YOU a super Talisman of your own . . .

"First though, you must reach the castle itself, and that's not as easy as it sounds, either! Once there, you have still to brave the perils that lie within. At some locations within the **Skull Castle,** time is of the essence — should you proceed with caution, or dive straight into the fray? The answer could be the difference between life and death!

Palace of Gold

"A valley of death conceals the hidden **Palace of Gold** (*81893#) . . . The timeless words you find inscribed on a stone tablet. You have but one mission, and one mission alone, to somehow stagger on through the endless heat, until you near your journey's end and the foothills at the base of the mountain of doom.

"Beware, keen traveller . . . many a young life has been taken by the treacherous paths and gullies which twist and turn throughout the mountain range.

Spy-Tec

"Tracker Ball is back in his latest Hi-tech adventure. (*81894#) Your day starts like any other, checking your electronic mail. What you need is a little excitement . . . and the mail from Talisman looks as if it may provide it, as you race across the world tracking down a stolen computer disk. Videotex adventure like you have never experienced.

"Continuing on and jumping through the ages you're thrust into the future and head first into a disaster situation aboard **Third Sun Of Rhialderon** (*81844#) The situation is critical; and only you can do anything about it. Reach the planet's core, or you too are doomed!

"If after all your exploits and adventures, you feel up to a more mentally stimulating exercise, perhaps you should test your sleuthsome skills and work through our **Murder and Mystery quiz** (*81813#).

"Suddenly you grasp your keyboard!!

"Fantastic colours adorn your screen, disks shoot from your drives, the clatter heralds the **Computing Quiz** (*81815#) Turning to the rear of your machine you cunningly notice a small cable, loosely attached to the **Comms Quiz** (*81816#) in which the lucky monthly winner can wave goodbye to his or her Prestel bill for three months! (Well, the subscription part, anyway!)

"Now over to you the user ... we have done our best at Talisman to give you a good selection of games and quizzes at an affordable price while still offering worthwhile prizes. If you have any ideas for the new games you would like to see featured then let us know. Design a game or quiz and you can earn extra cash! So come on! Get that grey matter working and with your help Talisman will be even better!"

Not Just a Load of Old Rubbish. . .

Question: What has a deaf leopard, the mystic hammer of Thor, and a can of fetid dingo's kidneys got in common?
Answer: They're all to be found in Trash, Micronet's new multi-user game for the discerning interdimensional dustman...!

Two years in the making, ten in the dreaming, and several million bytes in the building, Trash is finally here on Micronet. It's hilarious, frustrating, mind-bogglingly weird, and full of surprises. It's like nothing you've ever seen before.

Throwing most established game concepts end over end, Trash is all about having fun. No grimly fought battles, no intense fantasy role-playing, no elves and no zombies. Even the castles are plastic. It's so much easier to wipe the stains off...

Trash even has weather. Strange weather, but then, it's a strange world. It's for everybody who never wanted to play a MUG, or ever played a MUG and wished they never had, or played a MUG and thought 'This is great! But why can't I set fire to the Kitchen?' In Trash, you can. We think!

Created by Matthew Ward, aka The Arch-Wizard Ambushbug, Trash casts you in the role of a dustman. It's your job to collect rubbish and destroy it. So unforgiving are the laws of entropy, that failure to keep the planet clean will inevitably result in everything falling apart. Well, that's the theory.

Earth, however, has not fallen apart. Earth is not our problem in Trash, and you're no ordinary bin-humper. Instead, you have to patrol the eight worlds of the multiverse, and the sort of rubbish you're looking for can be very weird indeed.

The worlds are connected by stepping-disks, and your character can move more or less freely between them, effectively providing eight different games in one. Well, eight is all the programmers will admit to...but there may well be cosmic secrets yet to be revealed!

Unlike normal MUGs, where you gather treasure to score points, Trash pioneers a dual system of advancement. Credits (money) are paid for various objects found, while Promotional Prospects increase as you solve puzzles.

Every piece of rubbish trashed in the atomic furnace is paid for in credits, which you can spend in a number of ways: by buying new objects from the game (because somebody trashed something you wanted) or by refreshing your psionic powers.

These powers are the equivalent of conventional MUG spells, but in Trash they provide a firm basis for role-playing and developing a unique character. As your promotional prospects increase, you rise in level, and at each level you are awarded a number of attribute points. These points in turn are spent on increasing your psionic abilities in a number of fields.

It sounds complex, but what it boils down to is the ability to decide which special powers you want your character to have, and concentrate on spending your points on acquiring them, thus creating your own unique character within the game.

If the game sounds wacky so far, it becomes even wackier when you start exploring the eight worlds of the multiverse.

First, there's Shades of a World, a viciously affectionate parody of Trash's sister game. Trash, incidentally, was written by Matthew on the Mugick development system devised by Neil Newell, creator of Shades.

Then there's the Heavy Citadel of Metal, playing homage to the loudest sounds in the universe...quite why so many gamers are addicted to heavy metal music is a puzzle, but then, there are lots of puzzles in the Citadel.

The Starship Wontarise, with its mission to travel to the edge of infinity, fall off, and never return, should infuriate Star Trek fans, while Caverns and Cabbages launches a full-frontal attack of the giggles on the most hidebound cliches of the fantasy gaming scene.

Add to these the Realm of the Weavers, a robotic theme park infested with giant spiders, and the Pyramid of Tutan Trashman, full of mummies...and daddies...and miles and miles of ancient bandages...and you might as well give up and stay in Herddfielsud Town, whose entire population is trapped in an endless circulatory system from which they can never escape.

As Log On goes to print, Trash is about to go online for free mass playtesting. But since it isn't quite there yet, we can't give you a page number to key...try the keyword *TRASH# instead, and keep your fingers crossed!

The Online Traveller

Prestel Travel has helped thousands of holiday-makers find the sun. We look at the services available.

Get away from it all with Prestel Travel

Doing the rounds of the travel agencies and staggering back home with aching feet and a huge mound of brochures is one of the great rituals of Spring. Then comes the time-consuming business of poring over the brochures trying to work out which holiday to choose, and, of course, the equally tedious job of phoning up all those travel agencies again to compare specific prices.

With Prestel, life can be a great deal easier. Much of the hard legwork can be done from your terminal; both in terms of ordering brochures and planning holidays. The front end for everything is page 747 (keyword *TRAVEL#) where you'll find a full index to the various databases dotted around the network.

Let's say you wanted to check on the availability of holidays in Greece on the 8th March. Prestel's BP Holiday-finder service allows you to key in departure, destination, and dates to see what's available at the last minute. Indeed, for late availability holidays this is just about the best way to find out!

As luck would have it, there's nothing leaving from Heathrow on that date. But the system will happily search the next day, and following days, as well: and behold, Mandeer Holidays are offering one and two week holidays in Athens starting on the 9th. A quick phone call — the telephone number is displayed on the frame — and there you are!

The same system applies equally well to ordinary flights, as opposed to complete holidays. Many travel agencies use the same system themselves to locate flights and holidays, and although some of their areas are CUGged (CUG stands for 'Closed User Group' in Prestel parlance) there's still lots of information which can help the ordinary punter choose a holiday.

One simple service offered by just about every travel agent and travel company on the network is a brochure ordering frame. No more traipsing around the high street — you can get the lot delivered to your doorstep instead!

Specialist holidays are also catered for. We keyed 'Adventure' and wound up drooling over the prospect of trekking for three weeks in the Andes, hopping from peak to peak around the ancient Inca cities.

Unfortunately the Log On budget doesn't extend as far as that, when it comes to sampling these delights. A weekend in Clacton — if publishing deadlines permitted — is more realistic. How to get there? Prestel has the answers again.

Starting from 747 you could follow the 'country' routes through to England, and then to Essex and finally to Clacton-On-Sea. Experienced users will however key *CLACTON# instead . . . but whichever way you do it, you'll find a brief description of place and routes to the coach and rail timetables.

The British Rail gateway service is a truly mammoth operation, containing as it does all the main intercity services, with regular reports of cancellations and other problems or additional services for the day in question. I confess to being hooked on the BR Gateway in much the same way that Victorians got hooked on Bradshaw's railway guide: I never bother trying to phone BR to check train times any more, but just print out the relevant frames from the BR service.

Separate frame provide information on fares and special saver tickets — the various convolutions are made just about as clear as they're ever going to be!

Most bookings services — especially for the big holidays — are restricted to members of ABTA, the Association of British Travel Agents. After all, the original point of Prestel Travel was to provide a communication network for the agencies to exchange information and access flight details themselves.

But ordinary customer can book quite a number of travel-oriented services directly. These include reservations for ferries, theatre tickets, and even rock concerts: usually paid by credit card, online, subject to a confirmatory reply from whoever it is you're booking with. So next time you're gearing up for your Summer holidays, and groaning at the thought of that long trek up and down the high street, why not get away from the hassle, and use Prestel Travel instead?

From Sinclair to Sam . . .

The Spectrum is one of the longest-running home computers on the market. The Spectrum Microbase is one of the oldest areas on Micronet. We look at the staying power of the legendary Speccy . . .

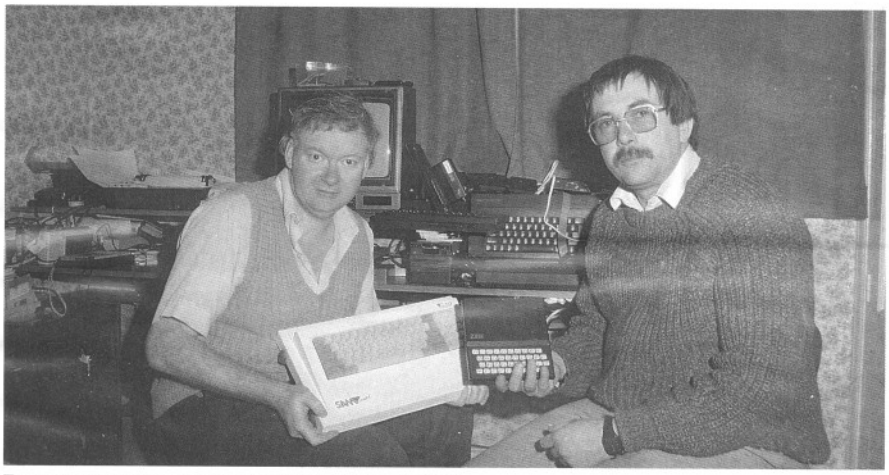
There was a time, not so many years ago, when Sinclair was virtually synonymous with home computing in the UK. Nowadays, with affordable 16-bit micros like the Atari ST and the Amiga 500 becoming increasingly popular, the venerable Spectrum sometimes seems in danger of being dismissed as a poor relation, an ageing misfit in a world of blitters and multi-tasking.

Although the arrival of the Speccy compatible Sam Coupe - GOTO page 8 for a chance to win one! - may breathe new life into the system, there's plenty of evidence on Micronet to show that Spectrum owners are very much alive and kicking!

From the days of the ZX-81, and the incredible Universal Modem Adaptor, Sinclair machines have had a strong presence, and indeed influence, on Micronet. For many years coverage was in the capably eccentric hands of Chris Lewis, whose letters pages demonstrated daily that Sinclair enthusiasts were interested in far more than lists of tweaks and PEEKs...

Nowadays, Micronet's Spectrum coverage is edited by Brian Gaff, with support from technical wizard Dr Mike Sun, and Bob Garbutt. Before he took over the Spectrum Micromag about a year ago, Brian was much in evidence on Spectacular, the Sub-IP enthusiasts area for Spectrum owners.

Brian's based in Chessington, and works from home, using a Spectrum +3 to do his updates: in fact, all of his team use Spectrums for editing, such is their faith in the old workhorse! Apart from the +3, Brian also owns a ZX-81, a 48K and 128K Spectrum, a Spectrum +2a, and a Sam Coupe. He reckons the Spectrum is still the cheapest route to comms available, with a surprisingly good range of software available for just that purpose.



From ZX81 to Sam Coupe with Brian and Bob!

There's a fair amount of terminal software available free as telesoftware, and some of the packages can 'lift' the basic VTX5000 modem facilities to a very respectable level of flexibility. That can't be said for many expensive commercial packages designed for much more 'professional' machines.

Indeed, with the launch of the Sam Coupe, Micronet has been comprehensively scooping the dedicated magazines with lists of non- compatible software, bug-hunting, and advice on how to set up the Coupe to emulate a 48K Spectrum so those non-compatible games will load after all.

That's in addition to all the usual features, programming tips, games reviews and letters. And to judge from those letters, Spectrum-based netters are a highly literate bunch when it comes to the innards of their machines.

Indeed, at a time when most Spectrum-specific magazines were busy turning themselves into comics for the sub-teenage market, Micronet decided to maintain a 'serious' outlook and treat all computer users with the respect they deserve. It's insulting to assume that Spectrum owners are, without exception, purely into the next zap game to be advertised by a semi-naked page three girl. Because Micronet has always had such close contact with its users and what they do, we've never fallen into that trap, and never will.

At the moment, there's a special offer available to Spectrum owners who haven't yet joined Micronet. For £23, they can get a quarter's subscription to Micronet plus a free VTX5000 modem. Normally, free modems are only available if you sign on for a full year in advance.

So if you've got a friend with a lonely Spectrum, why not tell them about the offer - it runs until March 31st, 1990 - and do yourself a favour by saving a few quid at the same time (see the back page of this issue of Log On for details!)

Use More, save more!

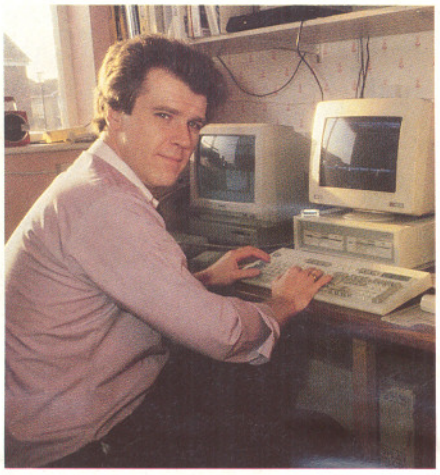
PC Editor Dave Dorn explains how PC users can get more out of Micronet . . . and save on their bills!

I'm not exactly noted for my pathological desire to throw money away — ask any one who's still waiting for me to buy a round — so extracting the best value for money from Viewdata systems is a subject pretty close to my heart. And given the sophistication of comms software these days, it's amazing just what you can do to minimise your online time, and, at the same time, see more of the system.

'How's that?' I hear you cry. Simple, by letting your software do the work, you can use less time online, but read more, and spend less. Let's first look at an extreme scenario what I call the 'Wander and Read' method of using the 'Net — or how to spend loadsa-dosh and miss out on the best bits.

1. Log on at 300/300, and keep your ID and Password on a bit of paper, in a drawer. You MUST be unable to remember it.
2. The modems have connected, and your ID is required. Hunt through the drawers for your bit of paper. find it (eventually) and type them in, one finger style.
3. Note that you have mail waiting, key '0' and read each one (you have 7). Reply to each one online — again one finger style.
4. Key in *80002#, (today's What's New).
5. Read it as it comes down — easy with 300bps. Spend a minute or so deciding what to read first.
6. Decision made, hit the appropriate digit (the first of two) and wait until the page is displayed. Hit the second digit and wait again. Begin reading.
7. Finish reading that bit, and return to the day's What's New by reverse-menuing (usually hitting '9' continuously).

Does it ring any bells? OK, maybe the 300/300 touch is a little unlikely these days, but the rest rings true for an awful lot of subscribers. There is another way, though. It's what I call the 'decide what you want to read first, and do it all offline' approach.



Hyper-efficient Dave prepares to capture a frame!

Now, this takes a little thought, but it will pay dividends. First step is this. forget 300/300 unless your jellybone lines are ludicrously dirty. You want 1200 and 2400 bps — nothing less. Next, make up your mind that you will read NOTHING online. Your sole purpose for accessing Micronet is to trough down those frames that you want to read, together with any mail that may be waiting for you. That's all. No reading allowed!

This is where up-to-date software will pay for itself. Some programs have SCRIPT languages with which you can totally automate a session. You know which areas you will normally read, so you write a script to key the correct page numbers or routes, and capture the frames you need onto disc. All of the PC packages have a capture to disc facility of some sort (at least all of the good ones have), so use it.

If your software doesn't have a script language, then steel yourself. You'll have to capture the frames yourself WITHOUT READING THEM ON THE WAY DOWN!

The same goes for Mailboxes. I use AXIS Professional, which is the only PC software I know of that makes full use of MBX facilities — although others can automate the process to a lesser degree. As I log on, if there's any mail waiting, a quick dab at the alt-key combination, and any new messages are automatically downloaded to be read later. If I've MBXes to send, I've already prepared them in a word processor. Once my mail is downloaded, another two keypresses, and they're on the way to ,their respective recipients, using continuation pages, forced acknowledgements, and all the other facilities that the new MBX system allows — including mailing lists.

Using Scripts in Mirror III (and II), or a number of other packages, I can log on after midnight, follow routes to areas I'm interested in, capture all of the day's letters and articles, and log off. It doesn't stop at an interesting letter or article, and it pulls the lot down PDQ. And I needn't interrupt it or read anything.

I think you'll have got the message. Most IBM PC software that supports Viewdata has got some sort of frame capture capability. In my opinion (having written the manual) AXIS has the best of the bunch — you can maintain a full copy of the whole of the 'Net on a hard disc if you so desire, complete with routes if you really want, and update frames as you go.

That said, whatever software you have will allow you to save money by doing all your reading and messaging preparation offline, and only going online to grab the stuff you want to read, and actually send messages. Of course there are times you need to be online for more than a short period; downloading, for example, or chatting to other users. Given a bit of care, you can even cut your Telecom Gold costs by accessing it through the many gateways, and having your software do the work.

The end result is a much smaller phone bill (and corresponding time charges), and being able to read a great deal more of the articles, letters, and features that the 'Net provides. But be careful not to miss any new additions to Micronet!

So, dust off that manual, read it, and do it all offline. You know it makes sense!

MICRONET DIRECTORY

*All Micronet areas can be accessed directly by page number, or by entering a keyword. This is a brief selection of important keywords. For a much fuller list, see page 80005, or *M KEYWORDS#.*

***M AZ# 800046666**
A – Z QUICK GUIDE: A fast-access index to all the main features of Micronet. With over 13,000 pages of information, you'll need it!

***ADVENTURE SPOT # 8105**
ADVENTURE SPOT: Help and advice for intrepid adventure gamers. The area includes InShades, the popular magazine for Shades players.

***CAGE# 800934**
AMSTER'S CAGE: Daily coverage of Amstrad CPC and PCW micros, with news, reviews, and comment. Also the home of the invaluable Cage Comms ROM!

***BEEBUG# 800909**
BEEBUG: Still the biggest and best BBC micro user group, the Beebug area offers news, reviews, and a variety of excellent software.

***CHATLINE# 811**
CHATLINES: Micronet's famous chatlines allow you to hold real-time online conversations with other members, swap gossip and make new friends!

***BAZAAR# 82899**
CLASSIFIED ADS: There's always a bargain to be had in our classifieds area. Computer systems, cameras, video gear, motorbikes . . . anything!

***CLUBSPOT# 810**
CLUBSPOT: Run by the Association of Computer Clubs, Clubspot hosts a wide range of mini-magazines run by enthusiasts for enthusiasts.

***M COMMS# 8008083**
COMMUNICATIONS INDEX: How to get in touch with other people through Micronet: Mailbox, Telex, Interlink, Chatlines . . . it's your choice!

***M COMPLAIN# 800406006**
COMPLAIN: We hope you don't have any complaints. But if you do, we want to hear them, so we can put things to rights as quickly as possible.

***M COMPLIMENT# 800406005**
COMPLIMENTS: Of course, we like to hear when you think we've got it right, too; and any ideas you have for improving the services we offer!

***M NEWS# 8001110**
COMPUTER NEWS: The fastest computer news service in the UK. Updated every day with the latest stories, this is one area you can't afford to miss.

***M CUG# 800652**
GAY CUG: A closed user group for gay members, The Cug offers daily news, letters, help and advice to gay men and women.

***DIALTALK# 81195**
TELECONFERENCING: DialTalk is a powerful facility which enables you to talk online, publicly or confidentially, to groups and individuals.

***EDUCATION# 165**
CAMPUS 2000: Prestel's comprehensive education area offers specialist services to teachers and students, as well as careers and computing advice.

***ENROL A FRIEND# 800020001**
ENROL A FRIEND: Save money on your subscription by enrolling your friends as Micronet members! After all, the more folk you know online, the more fun you'll have!

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CHESSBOX: For the chess enthusiast, ChessBox offers you the opportunity to play Chess online, BCF approved chess tournaments, and even against grandmasters!

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BUSINESS ADVICE: Interbusiness is a professional service to the small businessman, offering advice on tax, law, finance and employment.

***ED# 8001170**
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: Editor Paul Needs is always ready to speak his mind, and so are Micronetters! Why not join he debate yourself?

***MAILBOX# 7**
ELECTRONIC MAIL: The heart of the Prestel network is the Mailbox system. Recently overhauled, the new system makes it even easier to send your message.

***MICROMOUSE# 800951**
COMMS NEWS: Steve Gold, the UK's leading comms journalist, writes exclusively for Micronet every day in Smalltalk, about the world of communications.

***MONEY EXTRA# 80096**
PERSONAL FINANCE: Expert advice on personal finance, consumer rights, mortgages and tax, including the popular Legal Eagle online legal advice service.

*M MUSIC# 800989

MUSIC CITY: As computers become more and more a part of the music business, Micronet brings you all you need to know about the latest products and techniques.

*PC SUPPORT# 800936

Daily letters, reviews and news for users of IBM and Amstrad compatible PC's. The area includes a special public domain and shareware software service.

*1# 1

PRESTEL FRONT PAGE: The start for all your explorations of the vast Prestel database, including NewsDay, Games City, SportsEye, and Look!

*SHADES# 8118

SHADES: Micronet's addictive and absorbing Multi-User Fantasy Adventure. Play with and against real people as you struggle to reach the rank of Wizard!

*SOFTTECH# 8000201

SOFT-TECH FEATURES: General computing features for all machines, including comprehensive reviews of printers, modems, monitors and other peripherals.

*SPECTACULAR# 8009121

SPECTRUM: Daily updates about all things Spectrum, from the old rubber key models to the new Plus 3. Spectacular includes special comms advice for Speccy users.

*STARNET# 811211

STARNET: Compete against other Micronetters for control of the galaxy in this long-running strategy game. Full instructions and advice provided online.

*M TELESHOPPING# 811613

ELECTRONIC SHOPPING: Join the retail revolution and buy goods directly via our online shopping system. General goods as well as computer gear are available.

*TSW# 81160

TELESOFTWARE: Hundreds of FREE programs are available for all the major machines on the Micronet Telesoftware Gateway. Full instructions online.

*TELEX# 8

TELEX FACILITY: Send a Telex anywhere in the world via Micronet, at a fraction of the price it would cost you if you had to buy your own machine!

*TMMC# 00952

TMMC CLUB: The Midnight Micronetters' Club is open to all members; a social forum for meeting people on and offline, making friends, and having fun.

*M VIRGINS# 800953

NEW MEMBERS: The Virgin User area contains simple, clear advice and instructions for getting around the system, and making the best use of it.

*WAVEGUIDE# 800900

TV AND RADIO: All the news and gossip from the world of TV and Radio. Waveguide even brings you advance info on the plots of your favourite soaps!

*M NEW# 80002

WHAT'S NEW: With 13,000 pages there's something new to see every day on Micronet. The What's New index tells you about the very latest updates.

*XTRA# 40140100

ENTERTAINMENT: The original Xtra! magazine combines topical comment, music reviews, cookery and humour in one vibrant area.

*VOLTAGE# 401012

HI-FI NEWS: Voltage brings you up to date news and reviews of hi-fi, video, TV and other consumer electronic goodies.

*SIXTEEN# 800916

16/32 AMIGA & ST: For users of the Amiga and Atari ST computers, 16/32 offers daily letters, reviews, news and a second-hand bargain basement area.

Contact

There are many different ways to contact Micronet, depending on why you wish to do so! Here are some of the more important response frames and telephone numbers: using the appropriate one helps us help you much more efficiently.

Machine-specific queries:

Acorn machines	*8111888#
Amiga	*8111886#
Amstrad	*8111880#
Atari ST	*8111885#
Commodore 64	*8111886#
PC compatibles	*8111882#
Spectrum	*811188#
Z88	*8111884#

Micronet queries and problems:

To complain about Micronet:	*800406006#
To compliment Micronet:	*800406005#
Problems with Telesoftware:	*8116#
Problems with Interlink:	*811615#
Wrong routes?	*800406007#
Problems with Shades:	*8118#
Suggestions:	*800020002#
Letters to the Editor:	*81118#
Help for beginners:	*8009539#

General queries:

To change account details, or make a general query or complaint about Prestel: *33333#

If none of these areas seems to suit your problem, you can always mailbox us directly on 018221122 for general enquiries or 223681485 for technical enquiries.

ALSO: For all problems, queries and assistance phone 0442 237237.

TELESOFTWARE TOP FIVES

*All the software below is available FREE via Micronet's Telesoftware Gateway. For details of how to download the software, and many more titles, key page 811602 or keyword *TSW#*

BBC

Paul Vigay's Nightmare Park is a collection of miniature BBC games in one package. Play them as you wander around the spooky grounds, but watch out for those playful unicorns!

1 – Nightmare Park by Paul Vigay (601100106)
2 – Control Panel by A&B Computing (601100079)
3 – Prime3 by Fred (601100109)
4 – ROMPT8 by BBC Microbase (601100107)
5 – ROMPT9 by BBC Microbase (601100108)

SPECTRUM

Softmail is a suite of programs by Keith Beddoe, Brian Gaff and Ron Meldrum, which enables you to send your programs to people through the mailbox system. Both BASIC and machine code programs can be sent, and if the recipient also has Softmail, decoded at the other end to run on their machine.

1 – Softmail by Various (601200044)
2 – Spectrum Disassembler by D Gorski (601200063)
3 – Uploader V7 by Steve Marsh (601200068)
4 – CopyTape3 by Dr Mike Sun (601200069)
5 – Maze of Terror by G Hillyer (601200100)

AMIGA

Asm6502 is a powerful 6502 emulator for the Amiga. In plain language, it enables you to write files of 6502 machine code, as used by the BBC micro, on the more powerful Amiga, and compile it.

1 – Asm6502 (601600086)
2 – Watcher (601600088)
3 – Ping (601600070)
4 – CForth (601600083)
5 – Milestone (601600084)

ST

Flying Start is another comms program for the ST. However, unlike Access! which was featured in the last issue of Log On, Pete Connors' program also has a viewdata mode, making it suitable for Prestel as well as scrolling terminal systems.

1 – Flying Start by Pete Connors (601700062)
2 – PC Format (601700063)
3 – Bootmaker (601700061)
4 – Pools (601700059)
5 – Recover (601700064)

AMSTRAD

Tony Hoyle's Tape.bas program is essential for owners of the Amstrad 464, a tape-based machine. All Amstrad Telesoftware is designed to be run from disc drives, and Tape.bas converts such programs so that 464 owners with cassette decks can run them as well.

1 – Tape.bas by Tony Hoyle (601400074)
2 – Un-Crunch by Steve Greenberg (601400077)
3 – MXO8251C.HEX by David Gorski (601400071)
4 – Various by D Foster (601400042)
5 – Interest by C Willcocks (601400017)

PC

The GT series of programs forms a comprehensive suite of software to enable you to set up and run your own bulletin board. These include a full set of documents, host and terminal software, and everything else you need except for the phone line!

1 – GT Series (5005500)
2 – Tasword.arc (601500057)
3 – Fkeys by T Walters (601500060)
4 – 3D Tic Tac Toe (601500055)
5 – Armchair Quarterback (601500056)

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