Here's June!

CLOAD
MAGAZINE, inc.
BOX 1267
GOLETA, CA
93017
June 80

This month you level IIer's may notice (especially after being informed) that the last bit of tape is blank - we're not running low on programs, it's just that we decided to scratch a program at the last instant. Funny thing about the software publishing business - after pruning, polishing and debugging a program all the way to the master tape verification stage, it develops cancer and becomes totally unusable.

Level	Title	Turns Count CTR-41	Turns Count CTR-80
**********	Shield Cover	12 & 255	7 & 149
**	Magician	54 & 286	31 & 168
**	Illusions	128 & 343	75 & 202
**	Nerves	200 & 400	117 & 236
**********			
**********	Shield Cover	13 & 34	8 & 20
** **	Magician	53 & 90	31 & 53
** **	Illusions	125 & 161	74 & 95
** **	TicTacToe	196 & 258	115 & 152
** **	Amazing Chase	317 & 376	186 & 221
**********	(Deleted at last minute)	(Rest of the cassette)	

We will hopefully have The Mystery Program cured by next month.

The "Shield" cover is a little designature that draws a pattern in the center of the screen, then flanks it with two different designs. This one is good for hypnotizing goldfish.

"Magician" is a great deal like the old game of twenty questions, except that it deals with what might be called a "fixed universe", although "stacked deck" is probably more appropriate. You are asked to choose one of fifteen different patterns, and the computer will guess which one you chose by asking you questions about the patterns.

"Illusions" is a demonstration of six optical illusions, along with a description of why they work. My favorite illusion is the one where the program I just finished writing appears to work (golly - it SEEMED so real, I could have sworn...).

"TicTacToe" is an implementation of the old favorite pencil-and-paper game with an interesting programming structure. In this program, the author used a self-teaching type of algorithm - the computer starts out playing poorly, but remembers the results of past games and thus "learns" by its mistakes. This algorithm is the darling of the Artificial Intelligence gang. They feel that if a good self-educating, self-aware computer is left alone with another computer running a similar program,

by and by they would both get pretty smart. I don't know if I can swallow this concept. The two computers would eventually start cheating, then arguing, and possibly end up playing Tug-of-War with the interface cable between them.

This program can be set up to play against itself, which might seem to be a guarantee of the fastest possible "education". Is it? Do you think by playing against the computer that you might be a better instructor?

For an idea of what life would be like with an intelligent computer, read The Moon is a Harsh Mistress, by Robert Heinlein.

"Amazing Chase" pits the computer's two blips against your one. They chase you, and you run away (logical...). There are walls to run between and hide behind and all that, and if you outlast the statute of limitations, you get an extra turn.

"Nerves" is an eye-brain-finger exercise. The object is to move your blip through the maze in the minimum time, without running into the sidewalls or the rocks in the way. As in all exercises of this nature, it is considered poor form to put your fist through the screen (quintaplegics like myself have no trouble on this score).

A few months back, we put a questionnaire form in the magazine, and the results have now been sifted, sorted, fudged and tallied. I have a summary on my desk which says that fewer than 1% of our subscribers have any trouble loading our tapes, that our rating on a scale of ten is eleven, and that the favorite feature of the magazine is the nifty yellow label we put on each cassette.

So much for the summary of our expectations. The tally of the actual replies goes more like this:

The vast majority of computers that subscribe to CLOAD are Level II'ers. Roughly half of them are 16K, the remainder being 32K or 48K, usually with a disk or two. I'll talk a bit more on this topic later.

I expected that most subscribers would have purchased their computers for business purposes, as there is quite a bit of space in the various trade journals devoted to the subject. Not so - most of our subscribers fall into the fun/games and education crowd. There were few business replies, and few software development replies either.

In the spread-the-disease department, there seems to be about four people introduced to computing for each TRS-80 sold. This doesn't count the computers purchased by schools, who seem to introduce computing in increments of thirty people (move over, Typhoid Mary).

There still seems to be some trouble loading our cassettes, about 40 per cent replying at least some difficulty in the last six months. At this point, it seems safe to say that very few people are unable to load any of our tapes. As always, if both copies of any given program are unloadable, feel free to send it back for replacement - our only request is that you send it back within a month or so of receiving it. Philosophically speaking, the Philips cassette (that's the real name of the "audio cassette" - named after the N. V. Philips Gloeilampenfabrieken of Eindhoven that designed it) was never intended for storing digital data in any form. For that matter, the Radio Shack series of recorders are in the same category. Both cassette and recorder were designed for

audio recording only, and even with the Radio Shack pulse format (which is the best one for this equipment), reliable data storage and retrieval requires a fair degree of operator skill. As the volume of computer sales increases, manufacturers will be able to shift to different machine configurations, like swapping disks for cassettes. In extremely high volume, a disk is cheaper than a cassette (four parts counting label instead of 27 parts not counting labels), and a disk drive has fewer parts than a cassette recorder as well.

However, our cassette machine will be getting an overhaul between the June and July issues (which will probably make the July issue late, sigh).

The Postal Service has apparently been doing a good job. Very few cassettes have been lost or crunched, which confirms what we have felt at this end. The Postal Service is a monsterous, antiquated institution, but they seem to have the formula for delivering first class mail pretty well worked out. It seems unfair that they should be delivering mail to small inexpensive computers, because small, inexpensive computers will eventually replace the mail system as we know it (the concept of transmitting information by writing it on a piece of paper, and then physically transporting that piece of paper is absurd with today's technology).

As for our 1 to 9 scale of rating us, we were more interested in how we compared with the "other best" software than any absolute value. Turns out that we're both around 8, which pleases us. Assuming that the people who responded to the questionnaire are statistically biased in our favor, this rating should be adjusted downwards, but we're pleased that there seems to be a lot of room to do so and still not be rated as bad. Dave (Our Illustrious Editor) informs me that the submissions are getting better all the time, so look for improvement.

There has been essentially no trouble with any of our advertisers. We really didn't know what to expect here. We're happy to draw a zero.

For a combination of reasons, mainly the preponderance of level II machines and the lack of level I submissions, we will be shifting over to all level II programs starting with our October 1980 issue. Those of you who have level I machines have several options open, listed below in decreasing order of palatability:

1) Upgrade to a level II 16K machine. The extra computing power per extra dollar is why so many have already switched. This is difficult if you happen to be in school (and are therefore penniless), or if you happen to be a school (and are penniless, bureaucratized, and sitting on a dozen level I 4K's).

2) Order back issues. For example, if you have three more issues coming after your September issue, order three back issues (your choice) from the period October 78 to September 80. Ask for our information sheet for data.

3) Ask for your money back. The prorated amount of your undelivered subscription will be immediately refunded.

4) Write us to demand that we continue level I. Write NOW, scream HARD and LOUD. If we get enough hate mail, we might change our minds, although this is not too likely.

CLOAD magazine has recently been re-organized. Here's the new lineup:

Robin Sager, formerly the President, Chief Executive Officer and General Business Manager, retains all her previous job functions, and adds the new function of Corrector of Dave's Spelling.

Dave Lagerquist, formerly the Editor and Peanut Butter Critic, retains all his previous job functions, and adds the new function of Chief Wordsmith.

Tom Marazita, formerly Cassette Stuffer and Principal Goof-Off, retains all his previous functions.

Ralph McElroy, formerly Chief Liar, Subordinate Goof-Off and All Around Great Guy, has been stripped of all his job functions, and is being sent home with a note to his Mother.

This re-organization might sound more like a coup, but no blood has been shed and there are no bullet holes in the equipment, so everything should continue as normal. (As normal as it ever is.) Seriously, I wasn't fired - I have just completed a correspondence course in bank robbery and am anxious to go out and start plying my new trade. Dave will be taking over the yellow journalism department, with Robin doing the translation into English.

Writing a final column before resigning is an interesting thing. The temptation to use the publication as a forum for throwing all the darts that one has been saving up is strong. If I had any, I'm sure I'd throw them. Instead, I'd like to chat at random on the subject of - you guessed it - computing.

Some time back, in the late '40s, IBM did a study on how many computers the U.S. could use and came up with a number around fifty. This was a good prediction based on the assumption that the tasks then envisioned for computers were all that would be implemented. Obviously the estimate of fifty was a tad low, there's something like ten thousand times that many floating around. The reason for their proliferation is twofold - the tasks envisioned for them have been increased substantially, and the prohibitive cost of the systems has come down even more substantially, due to the technology developed for the U.S. space program of the '60s.

In the early '60s computers started to come into contact with the general public, as department stores, service stations, airlines and other customer service companies came "on stream" with their systems that were to streamline their operation. The response was underwhelming. Remember all those stories of nasty letters demanding $0,000.00 ? The continual excuse "the computer can't do that" ? Or the all-time favorite "but the computer doesn't make any mistakes" ? Some companies actually sank with their systems.

The financial community, playing its ever-conservative role, resisted the use of computers in customer-related business until the late '60s. Not that they didn't use them at all. They did - heavily. It's just that they could see the potential harm and refused to implement a system until they were satisfied that the machine element and the human element (both customers and employees) were compatible. This meant a little change on the customer side, like the necessity of using pre-printed checks, and a lot of change on the computer side, like the necessity of

allowing a mere flesh-and-blood type to override a computer decision without bollixing up the frammistat.

In the final analysis, everybody won (that is, everyone who survived won). The department store types got their systems debugged, the banks got their systems implemented, and the customer got service that would not be possible under the old manual system. You stock market types out there probably remember the day that the New York Stock Exchange re-instituted Wednesday business.

The reason I'm relating all of this to you is that history has a nasty habit of repeating itself. Most people who are into this computing game either now are, or soon will be, involved in some business-related aspect of computing. If and when you are, keep in mind that a computer usually stands between a human and the desired data. If the computer system (that's hardware AND software) makes it difficult to get to the data, it is not doing its job. Lately the trend has been toward using "packaged", or "canned" software. This allows an affordable, relatively bug-free software package to be installed almost immediately. The catch is that you then have to either modify the business or the software, or some optimum mix of the two. Modifying the business is painful, and modifying the software introduces bugs. Beware.

In closing, I'll leave you with McElroy's Three Axioms of Computing, simple Truths to guide you in your computering.

If a 3 X 5 card file works, use it. It's faster and more reliable.

All problems are always in the software. All of them. Always. Always.

If you feel that you're in danger of being replaced by a computer, you are probably overestimating the ability of computers, and therefore your fears are probably groundless. Corollary: If you can be replaced by a computer, you should be.

HAVE FUN! Ralph

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KEYEDIT

by Phil Pilgrim from Discovery Bay

This machine language utility is for all users of either Level II or Disk BASIC. The functions give you auto-repeat on every key, screen-oriented editing, and debounce. In the editing mode, you just move the cursor to any position on the screen to instantly insert or delete. Plus, whole BASIC statements can be copied to other parts of the program.

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"Datestones of Ryn" $14.95

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A full fantasy & adventure where you create your character, choose from among 26 types of armor and 80 weapons, and search for fame and fortune. In each dungeon there are random events which occur, but skill most often determines the outcome. The program has many prompts and the twenty page, illustrated manual explains the game. Requires 32k and two disk drives. $34.95

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Also available "Galactic Empire" for $14.95

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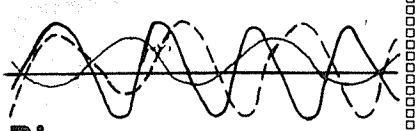

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