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On-Line Graffiti

COMPUTER SEX

And How to Get It

BY P. GREGORY SPRINGER

QUOTES FROM COMPUSERVE'S CITIZEN BAND SIMULATOR, BAND A, CHANNEL 33

(A33,fun boy) Anyone wanna talk?
(A33,Leather) Hi, all!
(A33,BLUE EYES!) Hi, Leather
(A33,Coastie) I live on coast guard base
... and where do you live?
(A33,DAVIDBEAR) BLUE EYES:
YOU WIN THE PRIZE... ME!!
(A33,ORAL FIXATION) Why won't
anyone talk with me tonight?
(A33,BLUE EYES!) Yes, wylbur?
(A33,--- BRONCO) Hey, fun boy,
let's talk. It's too crowded here.
(A33,MANIMAL) LEATHER!!!! Hiya,
guys!

The thought of sex by computer sounds like the worst of science-fiction pulp, but it happens every day. Hundreds of

people use computers for sexual experimentation, dialogue and one-to-one encounters. The largest single contingent may be sexually frisky teenagers, although reliable statistics have yet to be compiled. All that's required is some computer equipment and a phone. The inexperienced—virgins, if you will—have a private, relatively secret outlet for their expressions, questions and experiments.

Some call it "compusex." Compusex allows a user to speak his or her mind, find partners, test attitudes, experiment with sexual feelings and responses—all the while remaining safely within the confines of home.

The immediate problems with the approach are obvious. For one thing, the computer sexual encounter is a variation of masturbation, since one usually does it alone and in private. For teens coming out on computer, compusex rivals the closets of the '50s, a parallel to hiding muscle magazines under the bed. It goes beyond that, however. It's another cul-de-sac in the quest to find safe sex. Compusex

might also be construed as politically conservative, individualistic, isolationist. If so, it may be one of the most counter-revolutionary homosexual activities to emerge in the '80s.

And it is going to be very, very popular.

MATCHMAKER MENU

Name and ID: Bill 767.
Sex: Male
Age: 18
Sexual Preference: Not Sure
Computer: Commodore 64.
Comments: I'm looking for some fun times.

You don't have to be into phone sex. That could even hinder your success on-line. It's the computer screen, not the human voice, that supplies the turn-on.

Computers, when linked through the phone lines, can access information databases, check out books from the library, transmit mail and send articles, and offer opportunities for banking, shopping and work. In other words, any formerly valid excuse for getting out of the house now has stiff competition. Letting your fingers do the walking becomes the rallying cry of computer hermits.

Inevitably, sex reared its ugly head into the growing world of telecommunications. It began with the dating services, the Dial-a-Date numbers and the Matchmaker systems. A computer owner can access one of the "Bulletin Board" systems (BBSs), log on, leave a file of personal information and predilections, and wait for a response from other users. Bulletin board systems—most of them free for the phone call—allow users to survey the credentials of others and then exchange messages.

Romances bloomed, even though most BBSs are one-at-a-time message units, not interactive dialogue. A BBS regular may check in daily, read all the messages left from the last few days, then write a few

new ones before signing off. It's a place to make contact with free on-line personal ads and lengthy messages. But not in "real time."

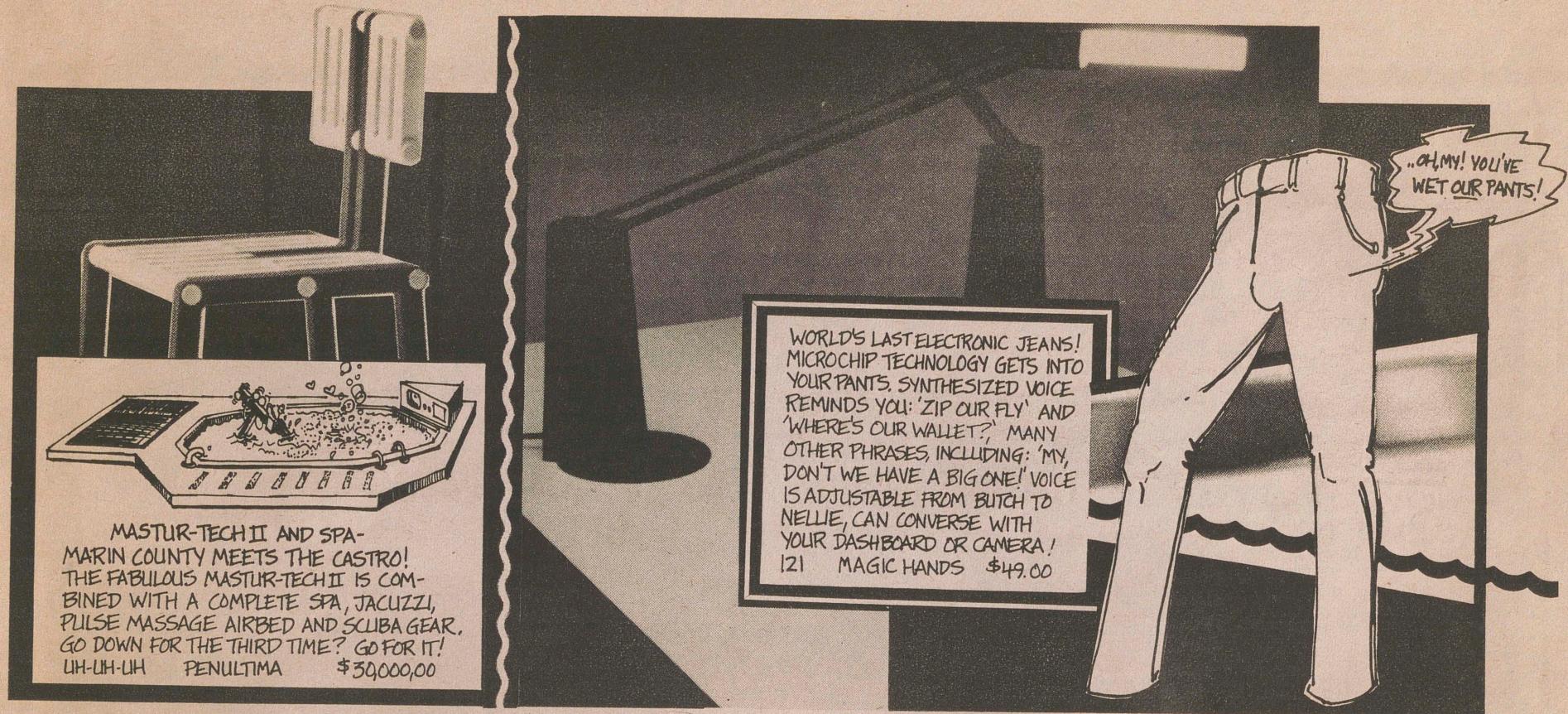
Systems soon became X-rated. Some have been gay-oriented from the start. On the non-gay systems, a surprising number of users describe themselves as "bi." Not Sure" when prompted with the question of their sexual identity.

Bulletin boards might be a throwback to the days of penpals, but with more immediate response, and a broader range of interests and possibilities. Handwriting put personality into the airmail age; telecomputing gives a more tactile experience, receiving messages typed by unseen friends. People reach out and touch, via keyboard.

THE SOURCE GAY "SWITCH-BOARD" ON-LINE DIRECTORY AAAAAA DIRECTORY LAST UP-

| | |
|--------|--|
| ABB108 | DATED 20-JUN-84 ED/CA/NEWPT/9-1-43 /MUSIC/RUN/WORK- OUT/BUSINESS/SIN- CERITY/CHAT |
| AAE458 | FREDDY/11-15-57/ KUWAIT/CHAT/ WORLD TRAVEL/ TELECOM/BEACH/ IBM |
| BBF682 | BRUCE/CO/DENVER /6-19-50/SKIING/SAIL- ING/BLONDS/LAW/ HOT CHATS/TRAVEL |
| BBF233 | CHIP/CA/HUNTING- TON BEACH/5-16-44/ ROMANCE/SEX/PEO- PLE IN GENERAL |
| BBF792 | LEX & BOBBIE/NY/ 2-7-51 & 12-25-53/ INT'L TRADE/TEASE |
| BBJ007 | CHAT/E-CRUISE RICKY/NYC/7-13-47/ BLOOMINGDALE'S/ BEARDS/DANCING/ CATS/IBM/HOT CHATS, ETC. |

While many BBSs have a means of



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"chat"—on-line exchange of typed dialogue in "real time"—they are often severely limited by the number of callers capable of accessing a BBS at a time, and by the cost of long-distance calls. On the other hand, commercial information services, such as CompuServe and The Source, have established international databases, accessible from almost anywhere with a local phone call.

Mandering through the many menus on The Source, one discovers several forums of information related to gay politics and interest. A "gay switchboard" allows subscribers who have listed their names and interests to contact,

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and correspond with, others on the system.

"You may want to turn CHAT OFF before you start working on The Source," a frequent user suggested to me. "It's all too easy to let hours slip past in chat before you realize it."

At up to \$10 per hour, many think the cost is comparable to, or cheaper than, a night at the bars. And the conversation, it's inferred, is infinitely preferable.

With hundreds of users accessing a commercial system simultaneously, the shared, typed conversation with another user—from anywhere around the globe—can become habit-forming. And when private "chats," as they are called, get "hot"...that's compusex.

Recent tests of computer conferencing have been revealing. Minorities and

women, when inputting opinions during an on-line meeting, are not dismissed as they often are during regular board meetings in person. In the absence of visual and auditory clues, everyone's words are granted equal value.

Compusex, someone has said, is like having a fantasy book talk back to you. Imagination supplies details, with a human being responding only to the touch of your fingertips.

(A33,boy girl) Diving in here!! Look out below!!

(A33,LEATHER) I'm stripping down. Everything goes.

(A33,Lifeguard) ===== Stay off the ropes, guys! =====

(A33,KNIGHTRIDER) Hurrah! It's a

commercial database; Channel 33, its unofficial gay channel, throbs with nightly activity. How else can you make love with an Italian stranger, in his Rome apartment, without ever leaving home?

Sign on with a new "handle" and join the conversation. If someone in the group interests you, ask him to enter into private mode for more intimate discussion.

Should you lie about your age? Your attributes? Invariably, users ask each other about their physical dimensions, and there is no way of determining how much is real and how much is wishful typing.

After enticing another user into the private mode, getting put down can be just as great a risk as it was in the bars. One night, my brief attempts to create an atmosphere of sensuality met with instant rejection from GAY DADDY, MUSCLEMAN and CITIZEN KANE. One hung up and went to the open channel, without so much as a gooby. Another was purely interested in discussing his saxophone playing. The third was looking for someone closer to his own age.

But other nights it's a different story. People snuggle up together, saying the things they can't do in actuality.

"Rubbing my hands over your tummy, caressing your broad shoulders and kissing your neck. Do you like it?"

"Ooooh yes, keep on."

"Let me touch your feet awhile, I'll massage them."

"OK. I'll just rest awhile.. Should I take off more clothes?"

"Take off your socks."

When two (or more) CBers click, the possibilities are limitless.

*** Please /TALK with Job 253 (boy/girl)
Job 253 (boy girl) is now in contact
►hi.
►hi. What's up?
►tell me about yourself. i'm 6'1", 23 yrs., and from chicago.

►i'm 5'10", 28. I like weightlifting, and I'm looking for some action tonight. How's your libido tonight?

►i'm afraid to ask, what's that?

►libido is your sex drive.

►well, i'm interested. where do you live?

One older regular on the Compuserve CB spends most of his time on-line counseling young gays who are confused about their sexuality and what to do with it.

Another Source user confessed he stores his hottest dialogues in the memory buffer of his computer, recording them to diskette for later reading. "It's like a library of my own sexual adventures."

What are the sociological aspects—and the psychological dangers—of intimacy through machines? The systems have not been around long enough for any long-term analysis, but there have been warnings about observed addiction to computer programming. From the beginning, Joseph Weizenbaum, the oft-quoted computer science professor from MIT, has expressed concern about habituation to computer processes. His observations had to do with the fascination of computer programming itself, not applications and particularly not sexual stimulation over phone lines.

At the very least, compusex is a way of meeting people, true correspondence rather than interaction with games or preprogrammed software. A user may be typing on a machine, but through all the circuits and chips and wires and power lines, there is still a human being responding on the other end.

Commercial Computer Information Services:

Compuserve—(614) 457-8600
The Source—(800) 336-3366