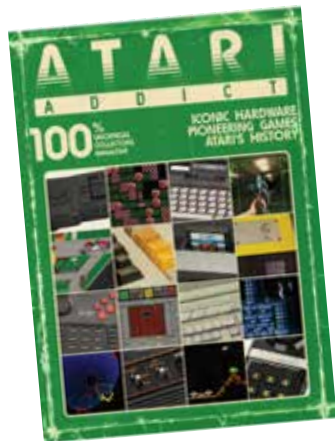


ADAM PETERS

JOURNALISM PORTFOLIO

A SELECTION (1995-2025)



1 ATARI ST-ARS

ATARI ADDICT ● DECEMBER 2024

As a 'legend' of 1990s games journalism (so I'm told), I've been actively sought out in recent years to contribute main/cover features to various retro magazines. Many of these (such as this one) focus on celebrities and culture.

2 THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

PLAYSTATION PLUS ● SEPTEMBER 1996

Mixing pop culture and gaming has long been a speciality as this ancient piece demonstrates.



3 A-Z OF AMSTRAD ACTION

AMSTRAD ADDICT ● DECEMBER 2023

Bite-sized chunks prove popular. This 'memoir' piece hides its self-indulgence behind humour.

4 GOING DUTCH

PC REVIEW ● DECEMBER 1995

"The internet is dead." My gonzo-style series of PC 'travelogue' pieces wasn't always this wrong.



5 6 7 JUST SEVENTEEN ● 11TH OCT 1995

JUST SEVENTEEN ● 15TH NOV 1995

SKY ● MAY 1997

Lifestyle pieces include 'true life' interviews, vox popping and ghost-written sex confessionals.

MORE INFO: HELLO@ADAMPETERS.COM

ATARI ST-ARS

1

With inbuilt MIDI ports, it's no surprise Atari machines attracted the attention of celebrity musicians. Adam Peters talks us through a sequence(r) of them.

Why is my top so wet? And what's that *stuff* on it? Is it ectoplasm? Have I sneezed? It smells like flu. And what's that thumping, those rat-a-tats, beeps and what sounds like yodelling? I rub my eyes. People. Lots of people, gesticulating madly. Flashing lights everywhere. Am I in the middle of a *major incident*? And what's that intermittent tingling... is it a fire alarm?

No, it's the Bat-Phone rousing me from another fever dream. (Like most dedicated retro computerists, I use an early cellphone the size and shape of a cricket bat.) *Atari Addict* editor Dave is calling to ask if I'll pen an article about ST-using musicians.

Time to make a confession, readers. Despite dirtying the pages of myriad Amstrad, Amiga, Sega, Nintendo, PC and PlayStation mags during the 1990s, I've never written about the Atari. Not once.

Then it hits me. That dream was a flashback to my raving days. Cavernous venues full of people, visuals and music. The visuals came from fractal generators on a PC or Amiga (or perhaps a shellsuited guy stood by the loos) but what about the music?

Despite rarely originating a sound internally, these events were sonically conducted, like a great orchestra, by the humble Atari ST. Been there, done that, got the VapoRub-smear (ah, *that's*



Pre-Fatboy, Norman Cook talks ST music with Zero magazine May 1990.

what it was) T-shirt. I accept the commission and send nanny out for more Alka-Seltzers.

The Riot Stuff

Editor Dave wants an interview with a musician in the article. He doesn't specify which musician, so I message Earwig (not his real name) who used *Cubase* on

the ST to create things for me to shout over back in the day. There's no reply. Even Earwig's brother hasn't heard from him in a decade. There's a rumour he now lives in a hut in Nepal, passing the time catching mongeese with his teeth.

Plan B is finding celebrities known to have used the ST. First stop (alphabetically and logically) is Atari Teenage Riot. "Yes, we do almost everything on the Atari as a sequencer, but then everybody does," intones frontman Alec Empire to *Music Technology* in 1993. "Acts like The Prodigy are named after synthesisers, but for us Atari is a stronger symbol... of Japan, of

This Computer Was

Made For Music

Introducing the computer you've needed for years. The Atari ST. The only computer that can do everything you need it to do. The only computer that can do everything you need it to do. The only computer that can do everything you need it to do.

When it comes to music, the Atari ST is the only computer that can do everything you need it to do. The only computer that can do everything you need it to do. The only computer that can do everything you need it to do.

ATARI ST

This 1990 ad shows how hard Atari pushed using the ST for music.



ATR compilation cover.

TEN CLASSIC ATARI-CREATED RECORDS

**MADONNA: RAY OF LIGHT (1988)**

Whilst Macs (even then) generally dominate mainstream American computer music production, quirky English producer William Orbit helps Madge's first electronica album on the ST. The title track in particular sees her ride a new musical pathway astride said Atari.

**MIKE OLDFIELD: EARTH MOVING (1989)**

Madonna never admits to using the Atari, but prog rock noodler Oldfield gives the 1040ST (and C-Lab Notator) an actual credit on this album's sleeve notes. Then totally spoils it by publicly ditching 'computerised music' for all future releases.

**SKINNY PUPPY: TOO DARK PARK (1990)**

Canada's industrial noiseniks vomited up a string of ST-sequenced LPs, this likely being the best. Newcomers should be warned that the CIA later use it to torture Guantanamo Bay inmates.

**JEAN-MICHEL JARRE: EN ATTENDANT COUSTEAU (1990)**

French fanzines claim this track was quite literally "created" by an Atari Mega ST. Seemingly Monsieur Jarre programmed in the first 16 notes and the computer extrapolated those into this 22 (or 47 on CD) minute epic. Who says generative AI is a new thing?

**DEPECHE MODE: SONGS OF FAITH AND DEVOTION (1993)**

Well-known computer fans DM only use Cubase on the 1040ST for two of their 15 studio albums (this and *Ultra*). Those are also their only UK #1 albums, which is surely not a coincidence?

**UTAH SAINTS: UTAH SAINTS (1993)**

Much 1990s UK dance music involves an Atari ST chatting to an Akai sampler. Using vocal clips as garnish rather than (like most rivals) a track's foundation, this pioneering debut boasts three enduring hit singles.

**ATARI TEENAGE RIOT: DELETE YOURSELF (1995)**

From the homeland of Commodore, these Berlin digital hardcore warriors are (as you can guess) Atari fanatics. How fast is their music? This writer genuinely lost 35kg in 20 lockdown weeks of exercise biking to it. The likes of *Speed* and *Start The Riot* will provide maximum burn.

**WHITE TOWN: YOUR WOMAN (1997)**

Possibly the ultimate example of the DIY music-making power of the Atari. An undiscovered bedroom musician with an ST and free software records a song. A month later it's number one in the UK and top ten in half the world. Wow!

**DARIO G: SUNCHYME (1997)**

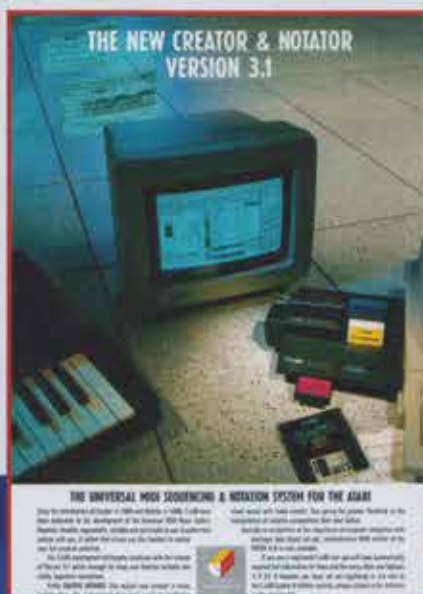
With even the Falcon long discontinued, most see the ST range as defunct by 1997. Musicians and record buyers disagree. This uplifting STe-created single is only kept at #2 by the biggest selling record in UK history (Elton John/Princess Diana).

**FATBOY SLIM: YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY (1998)**

Likely boasting longer devotion to the Atari than any other big name, there are decades of Norman Cook releases to choose from. With bangers such as *Rockafella Skank* and UK #1 *Praise You* onboard, this album takes the collective plaudits.

computer games, of everything."

Even the band's most recent album (2014's *Reset*) is ST-sequenced. "Something not enough people talk about is the Atari's fast MIDI attack," *Empire* later notes.



C-Lab made less spendy music software.

"Some of the music we made was only possible because of the amount of MIDI information the Atari can process."

Unfortunately, the anti-capitalist agitator now resides on the dark web and seemingly only wants to be interviewed about his latest venture, selling expensive NFT artworks. With our article deadline fast approaching, we widen the interviewee search. Let's go back to the beginning...

Fleetwood Atari

When the Atari 520ST launches in 1985, its Yamaha YM2149 sound chip is nothing to fax home about, being barely better than the ZX Spectrum's onboard sound. What does raise eyebrows is inbuilt MIDI In and Out/Thru ports. Its (already spendier) Amiga rival has MIDI as a £50+ add-on. It's not just the more frugal



Those all important MIDI ports and cartridge slot.

musicians and producers who gravitate towards the ST.

German electro proggers Tangerine Dream are early adopters, whilst French ambient maestro Jean-Michel Jarre features banks of Ataris in his epic stage shows. Big name producers use the ST on best-selling albums by the likes of Fleetwood Mac, The Pointer Sisters, BB King and Madonna, although (for various reasons) none of these acts are up for an interview with *Atari Addict*. ▶



Sequencer One coverdisk as used by Jyoti Mishra.

SPREADING THE WORD

Of course Atari doesn't just exist behind the scenes in songs. It also features in lyrics. Given the self-referencing nature of techno, it shouldn't surprise you it features a lot in Atari Teenage Riot tracks. They namecheck themselves six times in (yes) *Atari Teenage Riot* and in at least ten other tracks. Ironically, the tune that namechecks ATR most isn't even by them.

Welsh feminist disco punks Helen Love coined the phrase "girl power" years before the Spice Girls, and their signature song *Does Your Heart Go Boom* features a boy with "Atari Teenage Riot on his music centre". Said band (and thus Atari) is mentioned 18 times in just over two minutes. Only *Atari* by pretty much unknown Deetrio features more Atari's at 30.

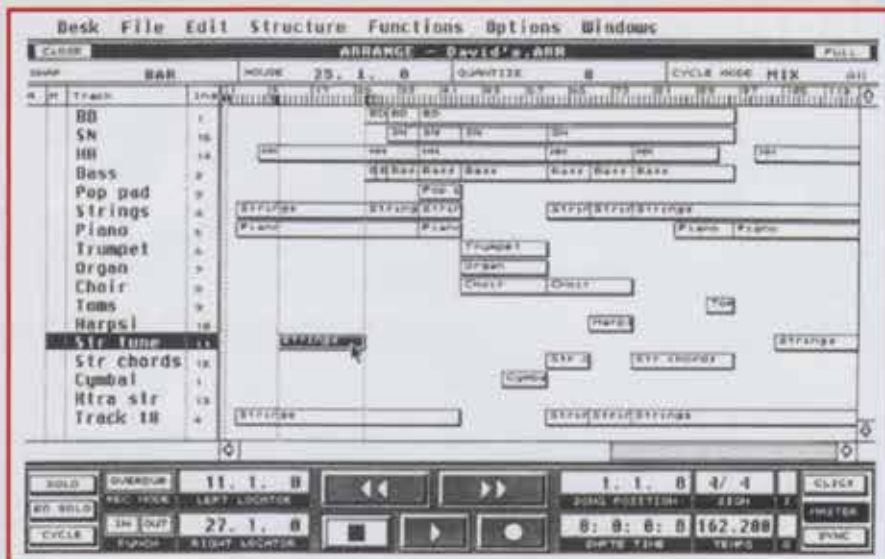
The only time someone ever tried to talk me out of buying music was at Wrexham Our Price in 1986. The till dude pleaded with me to swerve (much maligned synth poseurs) Sigue Sigue Sputnik's debut album, even offering a discount on "absolutely anything else". Despite track two's 17 mentions and "Atari Baby / I don't mean maybe" chorus, I wish I'd listened.



Record store staff really hated this album.

Most references to Atari (and words in general) come from lyric-heavy genres like rap and hip hop. On *Lil Ass Gee Ice Cube* gets a bit unnecessary: "Drinking that 'gac like it's no tomor / Westside hustler, f*** Atari." Jay-Z is similarly potty-mouthed on *Never Change*, albeit more positively: "Wasn't educated properly / Well f*** y'all, I needed money for Atari."

"I can smell the weak out like a safari / Play you out like Atari" offers Fugees' Lauryn Hill on *Ooh La La*, with Lil' Kim suggesting similar on *Lady Marmalade*. Overall, Atari's feature in 1000+ lyrics. Given the general flexing re fast cars in rap, it's no surprise that many acts (eg Lil Wayne and Memphis Bleek) are looking for something cooler than Campari to rhyme with Ferrari. F*** yeah!



Cubase ST tutorial from Sound On Sound magazine, 1992.

Perhaps we'll have better luck in that key era for Atari music, the early to mid 1990s, when sample-based rave music from the UK reigns supreme? All hail the likes of The KLF, Utah Saints, Orbital ("we used *C-Lab* as we couldn't afford *Cubase*") and Jesus Jones (whose 1993 *Perverse* is reportedly the first album recorded entirely on a computer). We ping messages out to a few.

On The Beat

The affordability and relative simplicity of the ST inspires bedroom composers like Jyoti Mishra, whose 1997 #1 hit *Features* an Atari 1040STFM running *Sequencer One* (an *ST Format* coverdisk freebie). "I couldn't afford a 'proper' sequencer," Mishra tells *Wired*. "Art needs limits. One of the things wrong with contemporary recording is that it's too generic, too sterile. I took me two full days to get the beats slightly out of time on *Your Woman*. Getting them in time took two seconds."

Perhaps the global king of Atari bedroom musicians is one Norman Cook aka Fatboy Slim. "I thought 'why am I paying for hours of studio time when all I'm doing is using the computer'," he tells *Zero* in 1990, "so I just went out and bought exactly what they had in the studio, an ST and *C-Lab Creator*."

From those early days as Beats International, the Atari remains central to Norman's music until 2012 when he

reluctantly upgrades. "I was perfectly happy working with the Atari and Akai samplers," he tells *Future Music*, "but everybody around me kept saying 'Norm, you can't carry on like this.' I suppose I was bullied into it [*Ableton* and *Serato* on Macbook] by my management."

Look For Cook

Deadline day arrives. It's time for drastic action. Living a mile down the coast from Fatboy and having been a semi-regular at the scout hut (Big Beat Boutique) where he honed his DJing, I go looking for him. Staff at a Harvester restaurant now occupying said site can't provide Norman's number, but do tell me all about their free salad bar.

My mate Dean used to share a flat with the boss of Skint Records (Fatboy's label) and often blagged me hospitality seats behind Norman at Brighton football matches. Sadly Dean has moved to Japan and seemingly lost his contact book. Instead, I head for Big Beach Cafe (owned by Fatboy and yards from his house) hoping that he'll pop in for egg and chips.

Five hours later, fatter but still interviewless, I drop to my knees on the beach outside and wait at the waves. The Bat-Phone rings. I fish it from the suitcase I carry it around in, preparing myself for one of editor Dave's infamous verbal beatings.

"Hi, this is Jez from Utah Saints," says a dulcet Northern voice. "I hear you're looking for an interviewee."



Fatboy Slim shows Dutch TV how he created *Rockafella Skank* on the ST.



Steinberg's Cubase: disks, dangle, manual.

SAINTS UTAH SAINTS JEZ WILLIS

Hi Jez. Did you use anything for music before Atari?

Yes, Yamaha's CX5 from 1987-ish. A laborious machine with awful sounds. I had to save onto one cassette deck and play back from another to save and load. There was menu after menu; one to assign the sound, one to assign the track, etc. You had to keep this all in your head. I was still gutted when Yamaha discontinued it, and switched to Atari around 1990.

What did you enjoy most about the ST?

The MIDI ports were so important in terms of timing and holding things together. It was exciting to move from the Yamaha's inbuilt software to *Steinberg 12* then *Cubase* on Atari. The latter had 24 tracks and (unlike modern versions) was purely MIDI without internal sounds. The ST only had 16 MIDI channels though, which quickly fill up once you add samples and keyboard sounds.

Was there a way round that?

Steinberg had a cartridge port dangle



One of the Ataris used in Utah Saints' studio.



Utah Saints at a recent gig...

(MIDEX+) offering four sets of 16 channels. That was a game changer. Suddenly we could do more complicated music. We also moved from a 520 to 1040STe, so double the processing power. That's what we used for most Utah Saints stuff. With more money coming in, we also added an internal hard drive.

Any downsides to creating music on Atari?

The slowness. You'd switch it on and make a cup of tea. Come back and maybe it's booted up. Find the program you want to load and make more tea. Then look for the song amidst loads of floppy disks with different versions of stuff. That kind of tech's pretty limiting, especially if you forget to save something. To preserve space on floppies we'd go ages between saves, sometimes accidentally copying over something we'd intended to keep.

When did you 'upgrade' to the Mac?

Around 2001 and with some trepidation. We delayed as long as we could. Both albums (we've only had two in a 33-year career!) were done on Atari. Timing was an issue on Macs as there wasn't direct MIDI like the ST. Any slight timing differences when making electronic music can really mess with your head. With the Atari it felt more like communicating directly with the machine.

How many Ataris did/do you have?

We've accumulated six in total and still set them up when revisiting tracks. The big issue is floppy disks. Obviously we



...and at a huge festival performance.

had no idea that they would degrade, but they do. The Ataris still fire up fine, although I don't think we've ever cleaned them - which I'm not proud of!

You had one on stage on *Top Of The Pops* in 1992, right?

There was pressure to have someone miming the vocals, which we didn't want. Instead we set the ST up to show it was running stuff. A risky strategy when many looked down on 'computer music', but singles we'd made on Atari in a bedroom in Leeds had sold 175,000 physical copies each in the UK (which is crazy) and we wanted to acknowledge that tech. We briefly tried using the ST at live gigs, but its sensitivity to heat/moisture (plus *Cubase* only storing one track at a time) quickly scuppered that!

Any tips for readers wanting to create music on Atari today?

Have patience and choose your outboard stuff carefully. I'd say still go for an Akai sampler. That 1991-2 house sound remains popular. This is shaping up to be our busiest gigging year for a decade. The ST literally changed my life. I love that *Atari Addict* is giving the machine the attention it still deserves.

Utah Saints had 2008's most requested song on Radio 1. Their Atari-created debut album has been reissued with new material to follow. See www.utahsaints.com to check for upcoming gigs near you.



Utah Saints with Dexter Fletcher on *GamesMaster* TV show, 1993.



Utah Saints press pic (Jez on the left, bandmate Tim on the right).

the licensed games that we want to see...

The Magnificent Seven

You can stuff your Schwarzenegger, bin your Batman and do something beginning with F to your FIFA. It's 1996, kitsch is king. Lad culture is here. Beer, boobs and, er, Bibles. Over the next three pages we focus on the seven products that *PlayStation Plus* believes, however wrongly, could be the smash hit game licences of 1997 and beyond. Why do we think that? What sort of game do we want to see? Is the licence holder ready to do business? Will our panel of four industry experts be reaching for their cheque-books? And would Lord Sony ban the game? These are the questions, and those (over on the right) are the answers.

2



Trainspotting



A couple of years ago, you could film yourself on a camcorder doing the weekly shopping, and before you'd loaded the fridge, someone like Acclaim would have thrust a contract in front of you. Today, the biggest British film in years has yet to show any sign of making it onto a video game. Okay, so the plot of the movie is a little dicey; bloke takes heroin, bloke gives up heroin, bloke tries to sell a shitload of heroin to the man who wrote England's 1994 World Cup song. But unlike the Scottish football team, you could still make a game of it, couldn't you?

LICENCE TO SELL

Annie Garwood, Reed Books: "Obviously we'd look at any proposals we received and discuss them with the author, looking at what was being offered. Having said that, it seems unlikely at first thought that something like *Trainspotting* would come out on a medium like video games."

LICENCE TO BUY

Simon Smith-Wright, Acclaim: "I haven't seen the film, but I understand it's quite bleak with a strong message. We'd need to do the game in an original way, we wouldn't want to do it just as a hip thing without incorporating the film's message. That's a difficult one."

Richard Eddy, Codemasters: "I'd love to do a *Trainspotting* game. We could approach a game the same way they approached the film, taking the most enjoyable sections of the book as small scenarios. There would be a lot of work involved and everyone would have a problem with the drugs element, but it shows both the good and bad aspects."

Steven Hey, Ocean: "We'd have to do a shoot-em-up."

Simon Jeffrey, Virgin: "We'd love to do it, as long as we could go all the way. It would need to be incredibly fast, an arcade game rather than an adventure. Adventure games require thinking and *Trainspotting* doesn't."

LICENCE TO KILL

Alan Wellsman, Sony: "*Trainspotting* focuses on dangerous issues, but the film was aimed at the same market as the PlayStation, so I don't see why someone couldn't do a game. As long as it wasn't just about trying to score heroin, though it's difficult to imagine what else it could be. The film and book were brilliant, but as a game it would probably be complete crap."

Eurotrash



A leather clad grandmother beats a whip against a wall, an old sailor is painting a picture with his own crap, while a couple of German blokes run around in their underpants. It's either a party at the features editor's house or it's the latest episode of *Eurotrash*, a thirty-minute weekly burst of filth on Channel 4. We want a game featuring the Romeo Cleaners (ugly near-naked Germans) travelling the continent in pursuit of the sex-mad and the clinically insane. And we want it now.

LICENCE TO SELL

Graham Moore, Rapido TV: "There are convoluted contractual agreements between us and Channel 4. We both have rights in the show, but we're more keen on the promotion aspect so any approach should be made through us. Perhaps the game could be a *Eurotrash* tour? It would certainly be very different to the other games out there. We're very keen on being approached. If it's going to make us money, we're well up for it."

LICENCE TO BUY

Simon Smith-Wright, Acclaim: "I haven't really watched it, but it sounds brilliant. Very workable. Lots of media interest, lots of PR potential."

Richard Eddy, Codemasters: "I'd love to be involved in a *Eurotrash* title. It would be a very funny experience to play once. It could be quite hilarious and I worry that the hilarity would overtake the gameplay. Rather than a whole game, *Eurotrash* gives you ideas of things to put in other games. The secret character in *Sampras Extreme Tennis*, a rubber-clad Miss Whiplash type, owes a lot to *Eurotrash*."

Steven Hey, Ocean: "Richard would have a field day with *Eurotrash*. It's cool, there are two great characters there. We'd have the licence tomorrow, just use lots of FMV of Ocean France's offices."

Simon Jeffrey, Virgin: "An interesting one. Less of a game, more a multimedia nonsense with lots of buttons, hot areas, and things to do. Plenty of full motion video. The problem is that outside the UK, no-one would want to buy it."

LICENCE TO KILL

Alan Wellsman, Sony: "*Eurotrash* on the PlayStation makes total sense. I don't know about the actual game content, but we wouldn't have a problem with the idea of a *Eurotrash* game."



Guinness

There were Chupa Chups lollies plastered all over Zool, Penguin biscuits galore in *James Pond* and even a whole game based on 7-Up (*Cool Spot*). That was in the old days, when games systems were marketed at kids. Now, on the altogether more adult PlayStation, how about a game based on Ireland's finest export? You could even combine the brewery and publishing sides of Guinness within the same game. Firstly your character would drink several pints of the black nectar and then he'd attempt to become the world's tallest man.

LICENCE TO SELL

Carl Lyons, Guinness: "Guinness is always interested in new opportunities for promoting its brands. Computer games are an opportunity we have considered. The traditional difficulty is the danger of appealing to under-18s, which we clearly would never do. However, with the continued growth of adults using home computers and games, this is arguably less of a problem now."

LICENCE TO BUY

Simon Smith-Wright, Acclaim: "I don't think it's possible. I wouldn't make a game out of Guinness as its image changes with the whim of marketing people, from a man dancing round a pint to that Louis Armstrong track. You'd be hard pushed to find out what Guinness means and turn it into a game. If they pay us lots of money they can be on an advertising hoarding in one of our sports games." Richard Eddy, Codemasters: "With Guinness you're getting dangerously close to an interactive movie. You'd be wobbling in front of a pint of Guinness, wobbling from left to right trying to drink it. For most people Guinness just means those adverts of a man dancing round a pint. I think Guinness is best left to college bars, where it can gather dust."

Steven Hey, Ocean: "There might be ethical problems, but drink is no stranger to games. It can be done. It would be dark and mysterious, a brooding gothic affair. *Resident Evil* with a wry sense of humour."

Simon Jeffrey, Virgin: "I'd love to do a Guinness game. It would be an adult adventure game. There's a lot of Guinness fans here at Virgin, that's for sure."

LICENCE TO KILL

Alan Wellsman, Sony: "An alcohol-related game would definitely have to be an 18 certificate."



Church of England

It's the biggest club in the land, with 40% of the population claiming membership, though far less go to the weekly meetings. Games publishers could focus on the Church itself, its political squabbles and in-fighting, or base their game on the many action scenes in the Bible. You start off controlling Three Wise Men, racing your opponent's shepherds across the desert in pursuit of a star. Later levels feature tricky puzzles like trying to feed a hill full of people with only a French stick and a tin of sardines.

LICENCE TO SELL

Steve Jenkins, Church House: "It's possible that the right game could attract a nod from someone at the C of E, though the Church as a body tends not to endorse things. Would it be blasphemous to feature Jesus in a video game? It depends how he's featured. Jesus has been portrayed in various ways in the past, from the Sistine Chapel to *Spitting Image*. There's nothing inherent in video games that says Jesus couldn't be featured."

LICENCE TO BUY

Simon Smith-Wright, Acclaim: "Fantastic. I like that one. I'd do a C of E game but it wouldn't be very nice, political with lots of nasty elements from the past, like the Spanish Inquisition. An Edgar Allen Poe style game where you throw people into Medieval Hell and call the game *The Church of England*. I wouldn't do a serious C of E licence. Who do you market it towards; mums, dads and vicars?"

Richard Eddy, Codemasters: "It would be very linear. You get up on Sunday morning, go to church, read the Order of Service. The same thing every week."

Steven Hey, Ocean: "No-one has ever done a Bible licence. You could do a series of RPGs, there's loads of stuff in there."

You'd have to start with the New Testament. There are loads of special effects in the Old Testament (parting seas, etc) that would really push the PlayStation to the limit." Simon Jeffrey, Virgin: "No way. Absolutely not. Frankly there are a lot more fans of Guinness here at Virgin than of the Bible."

LICENCE TO KILL

Alan Wellsman, Sony: "We have a company edict that religion is one of the things we don't touch ourselves, but if a software house wanted to release a C of E game we wouldn't have a problem with it."



Loaded

The biggest publishing success story of recent times. *Loaded* magazine has tapped into a vein, found traces of blood in the alcohol, and kept on tapping. The combination of gung-ho attitude and extreme drunken lechery makes for a perfect PlayStation title. Playing a *Loaded* reporter, you travel the globe, completing dangerous tasks of survivalism, scoring bonus points for drinking beer and photographing women's cleavages.

LICENCE TO SELL

Piers Townley, *Loaded*: "I think we probably would be interested, depending on the rough sum of money being offered. Possibly a very visual role-playing shoot-em-up, not involving shooting but just going on rampages round the *Loaded* offices. A race against production schedules, being chased by designers, mad marketing people and James, the mad controller. It would have to be an 18 certificate, but perhaps we could do a cartoony version for kids."

LICENCE TO BUY

Simon Smith-Wright, Acclaim: "We would not use a *Loaded* licence. The magazine covers every aspect of lad culture, but if we were going to go for a game based on lad culture we'd probably look at a *Men Behaving Badly* licence."

Richard Eddy, Codemasters: "What could you do? Drink beer and shag birds? Better in real life I think."

Steven Hay, Ocean: "There would be definite ethical questions, it would probably be some sort of bikini orientated porn thing with Pamela Anderson in it. A point-and-perv adventure. *Loaded* is just a UK product though, and to do a licence it has to be known at least across Europe." Simon Jeffrey, Virgin: "The possibility has been spoilt now that Gremlin have brought out a game with the same name. *Loaded* magazine is the sort of licence that every publisher will say they'd like to do, but few would have the balls."

LICENCE TO KILL

Alan Wellsman, Sony: "*Loaded* is our natural home and our natural partner. We all advertise there and do our PR there, so we wouldn't have a problem with it as a game licence at all."



Pogs

Those multi-coloured crisps might not taste very nice, but they are the biggest kids' craze for years. If the video games industry is serious about attracting younger people to the PlayStation, a game licensed from the cardboard circle cult would be perfect. Now that UK distributors Waddingtons have stopped stocking Pogs, a video game is just the boost the phenomenon needs. You wouldn't even need to program a game, just bung ten blank PlayStation discs in a box and let people play with them. Giant black Pogs. Cool!

LICENCE TO SELL

Dex McFadden, World Pog Federation: "We'd be very interested. I don't know what sort of game it would be, I'm not a video games producer, but I know it'd be really neat."

LICENCE TO BUY

Simon Smith-Wright, Acclaim: "You'd have to make the game as addictive as Pogs themselves. If you could capture that addictive nature, it would be very profitable, although the PlayStation market is too old at the moment."

Richard Eddy, Codemasters: "I have no idea what one does with a Pog. I know you get them in crisp packets, but we tend to just throw them across the room. Perhaps we could release a *Pogs Take Your Eye Out* simulator. Two characters stand at opposite sides of the screen and try to gouge someone's eye out throwing Pogs. It would have to be a £2.99 budget Spectrum game."

Steven Hey, Ocean: "To develop something really original would take 18 months, by which time Pogs will have gone the way of the Rubik's cube. Had we had Mystic Meg vision two years ago and realised these little cardboard discs would infiltrate kid's minds so heavily, we'd have thought about a game. Now it's out of the question."

Simon Jeffrey, Virgin: "No, I think by their very nature Pogs are a short term craze. They will be in newagents for years to come, but their mass market appeal will be very short-lived."

LICENCE TO KILL

Alan Wellsman, Sony: "Possibly in '97, after the Christmas purchases. At the moment the PlayStation isn't really selling to that age group. A Pogs game might make the machine look a bit naff."

Topless Darts

It's the hottest new sport to have hit our screens since televised Subbuteo. *Topless Darts* is the flagship program of cable station Live TV. For those who haven't seen it, two sexy ladies with no tops on throw darts at a dartboard on a beach somewhere. They tend to miss the board, but that's okay because they've got no tops on! Phwoar! This would make for top quality video games entertainment, though it's important to make sure all the joystick controls can be enacted using only one hand.

LICENCE TO SELL

Peter Scott, Live TV: "Yes we would contemplate licensing a game. The game would involve taking your top off and playing darts. Or perhaps the game could involve travel. We film *Topless Darts* everywhere; Australia, Spain, California... Top comedian Jimmy Frinton does the commentary and he could provide some for the game. News Bunny could make a guest appearance, though obviously he wouldn't be topless. It's wholesome entertainment in the style of the *Carry On...* films. Good clean fun, not like the gory violence you see in some Sony games, which frankly disgusts me."

LICENCE TO BUY

Simon Smith-Wright, Acclaim: "I'm not sure it would make much money, there's a very small consumer base. It might have potential as an adult game."

Richard Eddy, Codemasters: "Could we include *Lunchbox Volleyball* in a multi-sports compilation? Those shows on Live TV last about ninety seconds and people's enjoyment of the game would last just about as long."

Steven Hey, Ocean: "We'd draw the line at *Topless Darts*. Maybe we could do a sports compilation with *Misshapen Frisbee Throwing* and *Championship Caravaning*. Winney Willis would introduce it and it would be called *Very Bizarre Sports*."

Simon Jeffrey, Virgin: "Darts and titillation are a fatal combination in this industry. Games that have gone for boobs (eg *Strip Poker*) have been disastrous, and has there ever been a successful darts game? We'll give it a miss."

LICENCE TO KILL

Alan Wellsman, Sony: "If Sega can get away with *Sea Bass Fishing*, I don't see why we can get away with *Topless Darts*."



In conclusion...

So what have we learned? Rapido TV and Channel 4 both have a say in any *Eurotrash* licence. Waddingtons Games have stopped UK production of Pogs because "the market has reached saturation point"; in other words, people don't need to buy them when they get them free with chocolate and crisps. Irvine Welsh, author of *Trainspotting*, doesn't have an agent and he's disappeared off to India for a few months without leaving a contact number. Licensing a game from one of these products would take a bit of cross negotiation, a meeting with the fearsome World Pog Federation, or an expedition to Goa. But could these seven products really come out as licensed games? Not quite yet, says Alan at Sony: "If you're talking about 1998, with the size of installed user base we'll have then, the world is your oyster. Next year it will still be the core users, but by '98 any of those seven products could come out as games, and I'm sure some will."

So if it takes 18 months to develop a game, now's the time to start shopping. Which products have particularly caught our panel's eye? Come Easter '98, when you're have another crafty waggle on *Topless Darts* - the game, just remember whose idea it was in the first place. Find us and kill us.

FAVOURITES

Simon Smith-Wright, Acclaim: "Church of England. It just opens up so much potential to explore new areas. I don't really think of it as a licence, though."

Richard Eddy, Codemasters: "*Trainspotting* as the game of the film. I'd like to say interactive movie, but that would be an insult to the creativity of Irvine Welsh. *Eurotrash* for the ideas."

Steven Hey, Ocean: "I'd like to have a go at a Church of England one."

You could have real fun with that."

Simon Jeffrey, Virgin:

"*Trainspotting*. It's one of those cult movies that people will always remember, it will never lose its appeal."

Alan

Wellsman,

Sony: "It would be between *Loaded* and *Eurotrash* for me, but maybe that's partly down to my media bias."



Final Score

CHURCH OF ENGLAND...	2 VOTES
TRAINSPOTTING...	1.5 VOTES
EUROTRASH...	1 VOTE
LOADED...	0.5 VOTES
NO-ONE VOTED FOR GUINNESS, POGS OR TOPLESS DARTS. THE PHILISTINES.	

A-Z of Amstrad Action

The longest-running British CPC mag bestrode newsstands for 117 issues and, though Amstrad Action is long gone, some of its staff survive, hidden from view doing whatever godless stuff ex-games writers do. We hunted down Adam Peters for a window into the world of early 1990s Amstrad Action. Which he's done in alphabetic order for some stupid reason.

ADAMS were a prominent feature of AA in the late 80s and early 90s. There was the techie one (Waring) and the tacky one (Peters). Both had a pre-magazine background with the CPC; Waring having written games for it and Peters using his to create football fanzines and horrible music. Although still listed as Technical Editor, the former was freelancing when the latter joined full-time in the summer of 1991. Alongside editor Rod Lawton and the designer du jour, Peters formed AA's unholy trinity of permanent staff.

BATH is great. The household object, that is. Where else can one multitask so effectively, lying back to eat your dinner and read your favourite retro gaming mag whilst you get clean. Attempting those additional tasks in the shower doesn't end well at all – believe me, I've tried. Bath (the city in England's South West) was more of an acquired taste however, especially for someone fresh from the lawless ravepits of East London. With most of its two dozen magazines spread across the city centre, Future Publishing had a very visible presence amidst Bath's braying barons' beige buildings.



CPCTAR is (as of just now) the name for an innovative musical instrument formed by welding the neck of a guitar to the cartridge port of a 6128 Plus. For some reason Amstrad never got round to mass producing this item, so AA had to make one in the summer of 1992 in a photo studio in Bradford-on-Avon. We didn't have a welding torch so we had to use masking tape, Blu Tack and spittle. Of course, the cpctar doesn't actually work as an instrument but punk rock is all about image, innit? This particular gurning bare-chested image fronting A485 horrified readers so much (sales were 4,000 less than usual) that I was banned from ever appearing on the cover again.

FREELANCE was vital. My starting salary at AA (writing 50 to 70 percent of each issue) in 1991 was £8,500. After inflation that's a little under £18,000 today or a smidgeon below minimum wage. To make ends meet, Future's games journos would slave into the night writing reviews for other mags. I might be sitting in *Amiga Power*'s office playing a game to review for them, whilst their own writers were sitting in *Sega Power* doing the same. AA readers would often write in, annoyed at seeing my name treacherously appearing in other mags, but it really was the only way to get by in spendy Bath.

DIY CULTURE was a key feature of AA in the early 90s. We knew the CPC couldn't compete with consoles for gaming or 16-bit machines elsewhere (for example, music on the Atari ST or graphics apps on the Amiga) but, even in a race you can't win, you strive as best you can. So we showed readers what they could do, not what they couldn't. I remain a huge fan of the DIY ethic. Ten years ago I started following a local sports team. They didn't issue programmes for matches so I started my own; it's now the world's second longest running magazine about that sport. If something doesn't exist and you wish it did, make it yourself – especially if it's something CPC-related in this golden age of retro gaming.

EXERCISE is important. If your office is too small for any sensible sport, DIY culture says create your own. Once our respective editors had gone home for the evening, *Your Sinclair's* Jonathan Nash and I would often put CPC vs Speccy bragging rights on the line via the medium of chairball. This involved sitting on swivelling office chairs to race around a tiny shared office throwing a semi-inflated football towards a wheelie bin goal. Somehow we avoided serious injury to ourselves or others – although there was that time when a falling (paper-cutting) guillotine almost "French Revolutioned" YS designer Andy.

GAMES drove the magazine. The older business user sector of our readership didn't like this. Cartoony covers were particularly frowned upon which is why we'd often have a cheesy photo instead. For example, an issue with *Smash TV* as the main game review featured me (before I was banned from covers) putting a hammer through a CPC monitor. Magazines are a visual artform and there's only so much you can do with pictures of monochrome spreadsheet screens. Declining game releases risked sucking the colour (literally) out of AA, but we couldn't ignore the situation. Rod and I got a dressing down from our publisher after an article about it. "Don't tell your readers there are hardly any Amstrad games in WHSmith now," he wailed. The fact that our readers visited WHSmith for themselves seemed lost on him.



HOUSE ADS were hated. I fully understand Future fighting for the biggest slice of the latest 16-bit/console mag market but the rising tide of full page adverts for Sega, Amiga and Nintendo mags in AA upset our readers. They also risked cannibalising CPC ownership (and thus our circulation) and hogged valuable colour pages, all whilst gifting our budget a third of what we'd have got for an external ad.

INTERWEBS are great. I dearly wish there was something like *AP2* (an online homage to *Amiga Power*) for AA. I guess this article will have to fill that gap for now. Sorting the fact from the fiction is important as I discovered when loftily Googling myself 15-odd years ago. I stumbled upon a CPC forum discussion which suggested I was fired from AA due to my addiction to hallucinogenic squirrel venom. This is not true, dear reader.

JANE THE PUBLISHER was the secret string puller and overlord when I joined AA. To this day I don't really know what a magazine publisher (person not company) does; it seemed to mostly involve having three-hour 'lunches' in wine bars with other publishers. At least Jane understood what Rod and I were trying to do though, unlike a later publisher of WHSmith comment infamy.



KLAX and *Switchblade* are apparently the most reviewed games in AA history, each appearing four times across full-price/budget and standard/cartridge formats. The fact that the respective scores are so similar (74 to 90 percent for *Klax*, 88 to 94 percent for *Switchblade*) testifies to the precision of the many games reviewers the magazine used over the years. Either that or we all just copied each other.



MULTIFACES ruled. Although primarily aimed at people wanting to POKE in cheats, this fag packet-sized black dongle was a godsend on a machine with no 'Print Screen' key. I revelled in taking snapshots of every screen of a game level to piece together as a map. Levels were often bigger than anticipated with the resulting maps appearing so small in the mag as to be near useless, especially when they ended up on a non-colour page as (basically) a muddy grey skidmark. Oh well.

OUTSIDE OF WORK for Future staffers usually meant one place. If you wanted to bump into your favourite games scribe in early 90s Bath, you needed to swerve the arcades, record stores and Jane Austen museums and head for Queen Street. Located next to Future's original (by then, far outgrown) office you would find Hatchett's (now called The Raven), a narrow pub whose occupants most evenings would be 75 percent games journalists. If your favourite wasn't inside, you'd likely find them in the street out front, face down in that other Future tradition, a sicked-up Schwartz burger.

PC FORMAT was the enemy. This hefty mag launched around the same time I joined Future. AA and *Your Sinclair* were sharing one corner of the main office's mostly open plan top floor. The newly arrived *PC Format* seemed not to understand the concept of open plan as they moved their freestanding divider wall further into our territory on a daily basis. This added a Death Star trash compactor element to games of chairball as the 8-bit office shrank piece by piece. We complained and, in a clear act of carrot waving, PCF invited YS Jon and myself to have our headshots taken for future freelance work. I never got any. Then again I never stopped playing chairball or complaining.

QUARK XPRESS is what AA was put together on, back in the days before Adobe owned everything creative. In place of *Photoshop* we had a wealth of confusingly named packages called *studio/8*, *GraphArtX* and *PicLicker 91* (I might have made some of these up). When I started, I was expected to write my copy on a CPC then use various ASCII conversion tools to get it onto a Mac *Quark* page, hopefully in a form that didn't look like the inscriptions from an Indiana Jones temple. Since I owned a Mac of my own, I brought that into work as a stopgap. Nine months later they finally gave me an office one instead. It's safe to say AA wasn't the most heavily funded of magazines. Why else did they end up with me rather than Kate Moss on the cover? ➔



NIRVANA at Bristol Bierkeller was the highlight of my time at *Amstrad Action*. It would be way more appropriate to pick something magazine or CPC-related for this, but seeing such an iconic band in a small venue in November 1991 (one of only four UK gigs to promote *Teen Spirit/Nevermind*) is a memory I'll long cherish. I went to the gig with YS writer Linda; I had a ticket and she didn't but a kindly soul outside gave her the only spare going for face value. N is also for Nostalgia, which in many ways is why we're all here on this page right now.

ROD THE EDITOR was widely known for having a beard. In the current steampunk, hipster, craft beer era pretty much everyone has a beard, even babies, but back then it was quite the novelty. Indeed I'm pretty sure Mr Lawton, as well as being my first 'work dad', was also the first bearded person I had met outside of a circus. His wry cynicism and my pugnacious enthusiasm bounced off each other well and I feel that came across in the magazine. I haven't seen Rod in 30+ years and would love to track him down for a reunion article if any retro gaming mag has the dollar to make that happen.

TELEPHONES used to have wires and were stuck to walls. Crazy huh? As far as AA was concerned, calls from readers were filtered to an answerphone (we were busy making the mag) apart from one afternoon a week. The usual breakdown of a Reader Calls Afternoon in 1992 is as follows: 57 percent readers' siblings shouting "Amstrads suck"; 25 percent people who won a competition three years ago wondering where their

prize is (the software company lost it); 13 percent complicated techie questions even Amstrad wouldn't know the answer to; and five percent vicars complaining that we used the word 'shit' that one time. I'm scared of telephones to this day.



WORLEY'S WORLD was written by me. The photo used for said angry AA letter writer was my university flatmate. I wanted to provoke responses to liven up the letters page and it worked. You're probably not allowed to pull that sort of hoax any more, but the early 90s were a bandit era.

YOUR SINCLAIR were our mates. Sharing an office is partly to blame, but we also shared a publisher, advert seller, art assistant, techie dude (Mr Waring) and more. Of course both computers also shared a Z80 chip, hence the plethora of lazy Speccy ports making no use of the CPC's better colours. Amstrad of course bought Sinclair back in 1986 so we technically owned their asses. AA's writing style in the early 90s was partly inspired by the *Smash Hits* meets *Viz* playfulness of *YS*. Given an older skewing average readership age we could be even cheekier/ruder than them, although this annoyed the database brigade (oops). Yay us!

SEGA POWER wasn't the enemy but I wasn't about to get into bed with them. There were a couple of occasions when hints were dropped that there might be a full-time role for me on *SP*. I think they were surprised that I wanted to stay with AA. "8-bit mags are on the way out," they'd say, "they're only keeping AA going because it was Future's first mag so Chris the MD has a lot of affection for it." In fact our circulation had bucked the 8-bit trend and risen slightly. The idea of just writing about bloody Sonic all day didn't appeal either. My other abiding memories of *SP* are when their writer John Cantlie and myself would be the last two working late of an evening, having a quick contest on something Megadrivey in our breaks. The life of a games reviewer is an easy one compared to much other journalism. (John went in the opposite direction, becoming a war reporter. Tragically he was kidnapped by ISIS 10 years ago and is now presumed dead.)

UNNECESSARY SWEARING is only unnecessary if a game isn't actually shit after all.

VARIOUS RIVALS came and went over the years. When AA's final issue (dated June 1995) dropped it had outlasted them all, including the strait-laced official *Amstrad Computer User* (1984-1992), punky *Amtix* (1985-1987, but recently revived) and a brief AA-dissing interloper called *CPC Attack* (1992). I'd later work in TV with *ACU*'s final editor and got the impression he wrote it whilst sitting in his underpants in his attic in Cornwall. Fair play if so.

XMAS 1991 saw a peak bout of 8-bit bondage as the publisher in charge of AA, *YS* and *Commodore Format* took us all out for a meal in a fancy restaurant. This swiftly degenerated into a mass food fight covering half the venue to the horror of the regular jewellery-rattling customers. Somehow (after a quiet word) none of us were thrown out, banned or jailed. I guess that's what Jane the publisher did all day – saved us from ourselves.



ZZAPI64 is a Commodore 64 magazine published by NotFuture and thus has no business being in this article. You try finding another Z though.

Adam Peters first wrote for AA39 (Dec 1988) and continued to contribute to the magazine before taking on a full-time staff role there from AA73-AA88 (Oct 1991-Jan 1993). We have no idea what he's doing now. Probably hallucinogenic squirrel venom.





Going Dutch

Illustration by Richard Jenkins

In the second in a series of 'wired city' guides, Adam Peters travels to Amsterdam where he finds computer fairs, Virtual Reality machines and the scariest traffic system in the world.

Where PCs and furniture collide... ▼



The receptionist peers over her glasses, fixing me with the sort of stare that could melt raw iron. "Are you sure you're a doctor?" she asks. I pat the plastic toy stethoscope round my neck and look at her as if she's stupid. She gives me a form to fill in.

Ten minutes later my photographer is led out to the foyer. He looks remark-

ities." A thought crosses my mind. "Oh, but you're on the wagon now, though, aren't you?"

"How long until our train leaves?" asks the lensman.

"An hour," I reply.

"Time for a few pints then."

Bingo!

Our first destination is Holland's largest exhibition centre, the RAI, cur-

exhibitor's mailing list. Not that we want to get on any junk mail databases, we have worthier intentions. After sauntering round for a bit — checking out the Epson, Novell and Hewlett Packard stands, amongst others — we home in on the largest display space in the building, the one belonging to Microsoft.

Although there are separate display areas (complete with kindergarten style coloured pews) for products like MS Office, the majority of the company's massive square footage is given over to Windows 95. Giant boxes bearing the product's name hang from every available surface. In front of a giant screen and a fascinated throng are two besuited gents. These seem to be the Dutch equivalent of Laurel and Hardy. The fat one sits at the desk explaining the program's intricacies in expert detail (I think... he's talking in Dutch, so what do I know?). The thinner one points to the screen every now and then and says something in a silly voice that has the less discerning male audience members in hysterics. Possibly something along the lines of "I had a girl on my desktop once". The routine is, I am sure, hilarious.

I want an argument, though. "Hello," I

ably fresh, clean shaven and with a spring in his step and a sparkle in his eye that are ample recompense for the month he's spent here in one of London's top drying-out clinics.

"Hello... er... doctor," he says, winking at me.

Outside I fill him in with details of the assignment. "I've got PC Review to pay for us to go to Amsterdam. As long as you can get a photo of a computer, you can spend the rest of the day indulging in the city's more, um, recreational facil-

ity." A thought crosses my mind. "Oh, but you're on the wagon now, though, aren't you?"

Our first destination is Holland's largest exhibition centre, the RAI, currently playing host to "Efficiency Beurs 95", an exhibition that covers everything from computer hardware and software to office furniture and stationery. Imagine a cross between the Ideal Home Exhibition and a PC fair and you're just about there.



say to the woman on the information desk, "I'm from a magazine. I want to have a go at someone about some of the flaws in Windows 95." Her expression remains static as she informs me that their PR person is back at the office and I can't talk to anyone else. Time to go undercover and home in on anyone wearing a Microsoft badge.

"Hello, I'm an ordinary member of the public."

"Hello, are you English?"

"Yes. Tell me, Windows 95... is it any good then?"

"Certainly, yes. It is a great advancement on earlier editions, with many extra facilities, such as..."

"So it's not obviously flawed?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"You didn't just release it because it has been plugged for so long with '95 in the title that it was in danger of taking until 1996 to release? Why doesn't it work with some games that work with

▲ **Microsoft – pre-Adam. A nest of of English language denial and a short PC Review reporter who changes hair colour daily.**

Windows 3.1? Why does it slow down the loading of some applications? Why have we heard stories of users installing it on their machines for a couple of weeks, then having to replace it with an

earlier version? Why oh why?"

"I'm sorry, I don't speak English."

"Yes you do."

"No, I only know a few words."

"But you just..."

"Wat zegt u? Ik spreek geen Engels. U hebt geslachtsziekte. Er is iets mis met jouw neus. Het spijt mij. Tot ziens."

mij. Tot ziens."

As my interviewee shuffles off I see the woman from the information desk walking across, fixing me with a scary glare. She is carrying a sharpened clipboard. Time to leave, perhaps.

The Efficiency Beurs hasn't been a great success this year, with only 2,500 visitors on the first day (a very low number bearing in mind the size of the exhibition centre). People involved in the Dutch computer industry were said to be disappointed, and the majority now feel that large fairs of this type are no longer viable. The trade would prefer specialised exhibitions (just software, just hardware, just office supplies, etc) and ordinary consumers are only interested in fairs where they can 'try then buy'. They have a point. Another Efficiency Beurs at RAI is thought unlikely.

Myster or misses?

Our next destination is Myster 2000, Amsterdam's only Internet café. Set up six months ago by an owner who now seems to regret it (see Luc Sala inter-

◀ **A representative of Microsoft, post-Adam, proving that language isn't the best defence against a mad, stalking journalist.**

Luc Sala: "the Internet is dead!"

A well-known figure in the self-fulfilling 'zipple' movement (business-inclined hippies) and a former physicist, Luc has been publishing Dutch computer magazines — many focusing on the mind-elevating potential of technology — for the past 12 years. He has been concerned with the psychological implications of computers for the past 10 years, makes programmes for local cable TV, and co-wrote the first ever academic study of Virtual Reality (published in 1990, with contributions from luminaries such as Timothy Leary and William Gibson).

Six months ago Luc set up Myster 2000, Amsterdam's Internet café. The venture has not been the success he was expecting and Luc has become very disillusioned with the Net. He is an amiable, if shamelessly self-promoting, middle-aged hippie. Hardened Netsurfers

may find his views on the World Wide Web a little uncompromising...

"The Internet is a pyramid marketing scam. As an individual you have to find three or four new suckers to go on the Net to increase your own rank. You start off by getting e-mail and you think that makes you better than other people — you've made the first rank. Having your own home page is the second rank, an ISDN link is the third and so on. You become a cyberfascist, a telekomasar. It's part of this whole culture that believes 'I'm better than you because I know more'. That idea

is so dangerous because it doesn't serve human values.

"People are starting to find out that there's nothing you can do with the Internet. There are 600 million pages on the Net, but how many of them are of use to the average person? Any of them? When Myster opened individuals seemed to be interested in the Net for about two months, now you're lucky if it's two weeks.

"I used to have 'sala/eros/girls' as the address of my home page. There were no pictures of girls on there, but



plenty of people surfing the Net were attracted by the title. I got 300 calls a day just because of the name. It's depressing.

"The psychological profile of the Net user is someone whose T-shirt slogan is 'I know therefore I am'. That's the reason the Internet will die with this generation. The next generation have the slogan 'I see therefore I am'.

"The Internet shouldn't be going up in size, quality and digitisation; it should be taking a lead from cable TV. We don't need a digital highway, we need digital footpaths. Community services. A place to get information on your local football team or a wedding in your street... the RABO Bank (the Dutch farmers' bank) has recently decided it wants to use the Net to re-establish the function of the local banker as an information broker in small local communities. That's an important realisation. The future of the Internet lies in its application on a local rather than international basis."

Custom(s)phile

A successful assignment, then, largely because we were too busy working to get distracted by bars, dope houses or prostitutes, although the photographer did ruminate on what we could do with our remaining expenses money (the prospect of trying to claim back a receipt for a "Hugh Grant" seemed too troublesome). As we boarded the ferry for our stormy return crossing, I felt quite pleased that we'd come through unscathed.

Of course I'd forgotten about the difficulties my photographer's fondness for famous Oscar Wilde quotes was likely to incur at Harwich port customs. The last time I saw him he was being led into a small room by a man in rubber gloves who was muttering, "genius, eh?" If there are blank spaces in this feature where the photos should be, just draw your own. I'm going to bed...



Lots of fans give their idols gifts. Sam Saunders, 16, did exactly the opposite...

5

Let's get one thing straight. When I visited Robbie Williams' house in July last year, I didn't go with the intention of stealing his underwear. It just happened on the spur of the moment. Robbie wasn't around, although I'd spoken to his sister in the village earlier. I needed to get something from my visit, a memento, and that something came in the form of photos. I'd already taken loads of pictures of the outside of the house and I now wanted to get a snap of his kitchen through the back window.

knicker nickers

I was there with some mates, but I was the only one who volunteered to jump the fence, which was six feet high. I waited until Rob's sister left the house to take the dog for a walk, then shinned up a tree round the back. By balancing on the barbecue on the other side, I clambered over

and asked if there were any more pairs. So I jumped back over the wall and grabbed three more pairs off the line and handed them out.

robbie's pants drop

I kept the original pair, the ones that had hit me in the face. There were other things on the washing line, like bedsheets, but we were happy with the pants. One of my mates spotted Robbie's sister coming back down the road, so we all legged it with our underwear trophies.

The first night I got the undies I took them to bed. Embarrassing or what? I also tried them on – they seemed really big (size 32, which is average for a bloke, apparently). My mates and I had always talked about how if we got a pair of Robbie's pants

up off the tarmac. The pants have stayed in my bedroom ever since.

My parents know about the undies, but I think they've grown used to my antics by now and they're alright about it. Loads of my mates are jealous – they hate me for having a pair of Rob's pants as they all want a pair too.

I've never told any boyfriends about the pants, but it wouldn't embarrass me. I mean, it's not like

they're gonna issue an ultimatum: "Sam, it's me or the pants!"

The day Robbie quit the band was one year to the day since I nicked his undies. Spooky, huh? I think leaving the band was the best thing Robbie could have done – he should have done it ages ago. You could always tell he was going to rebel against

"The day Robbie quit the band was one year to the day since I did it."

"i stole robbie's pants"

the fence and into the backyard. Once on the other side, I legged it straight over to the kitchen window and took a picture (lots of wooden shelves full of spices, if you're interested). Then, as I turned to leave, something hit me in the face. It was a pair of Robbie's black Calvin Klein pants which were hanging

out to dry on the washing line. I didn't think, I just grabbed them and climbed over the wall again, shouting to my mates, "Look what I've got – Robbie's pants!"

My friends were really excited

we'd frame them and put them in a display case but, in reality, they went everywhere with me – until one day, I almost lost them! Getting out of the car at a petrol station, I forgot they were on my lap.

Half an hour down the road, I realised the undies had fallen out. I panicked as I was driven back to the garage

and it was such a huge relief to see them still lying on the ground. I was so happy that I didn't even pay attention to the funny looks I was getting from a group of businessmen as I scooped them

"The first night after I got the undies, I took them to bed with me."

the band's goody-goody image. They shouldn't have let him go, though. You might think Mark is the favourite, but I reckon Robbie had the most followers.

panting shot

What's Robbie going to do now? I think it's really cool that he's hanging out with Oasis (they're one of my favourite bands) but

I don't think Oasis are the 'secret musicians' he's supposed to be currently recording with. It'll be an indie band, though, and my money is on The Prodigy, who are also good mates of Rob's. Whatever he does will be better than Take That. They treated him badly and he's better off out of it.

And if you're reading this, Rob, I'm sorry for all the sad things I've

a girl's **own** story



Advice

★ It's clear that Sam's actions resulted from admiration for her idol, but stealing people's property and breaking into their homes is illegal. Robbie can afford to buy some more, but how do you know the pants weren't a gift from another fan or a close friend?

★ Wanting to get close to your hero is OK, but there's a limit to how far you should go. *Just 17's* tip for anyone wanting to own a pair of Robbie's pants is: instead of stealing from him, why not just buy a pair of Calvin Klein pants and get Robbie to sign them. That way, Mr Plod won't come knocking on your door.

done to you over the years, but if the situation was reversed – if you were the fan and I was the star – and you had a chance to steal my knickers, I'm sure you'd do it. Any fan would. Oh, and another thing – you looked better when your hair was dyed blond. Put it back like that right now, or next time I might just go for the pants you're actually wearing!"

well then, boys

What do you do in the gents?

Welcome to the mysterious world of boys' loos. We asked a few likely lads what really goes on behind the door labelled 'Gentlemen'...

Adam, 16

"Boys' toilets can be hazardous places, as some boys prefer to use the floor. Yucky, I know. Do we wash our hands? It depends what colour the water is." (Pleasant!)



Adam, 15

"What do boys talk about in the loo? Birds, mainly. (Hmm, an ornithologist – Six gazillion girls.) No, we don't look down at each other. None of my mates do, anyway. I could tell you about some of the other stuff that goes on, but it's far too rude to print in *Just 17*."



Andrew, 16

"The top three topics of conversation in boys' loos are probably football, girls and sex – in that order."



Alan, 16

"Girls would probably be shocked by the graffiti in boys' loos, as most of it's about sex. (Tsk, shocking stuff – Three squillion girls.) You always stand as far away from other people as possible. If someone came and stood next to me when other places were free, I'd be worried."



"do we wash our hands? it depends on what colour the water is." **Adam**

olly, 15

"There's not much talking. If you meet a mate in there, you chat about the wall and what you're looking at. It tends to be the boys who are ashamed about what's between their legs that stand as far away from other people as possible. In our school loos, there's a sign that reads 'No weeing on the ceiling.'"



roger, 16

"Going to the toilet isn't really a gang activity: 'Yo, bros, let's go check out the loos together.'"

There's no community activities in there – no tennis or crochet. (Oh, rilly – Eight trillion girls.) You just go in, do your stuff and leave. Graffiti? There's lots of anti-teacher stuff at our school, plus some really long poems, which are often quite good. No, I don't write them."



6

when your lonely hearts ad attracts

pervverts

I woke up after four hours' sleep feeling sick, parched and dizzy. In short, dead. I was in that twilight zone between paralytic drunkenness and head-haemorrhaging hangover. Planet I'll-Never-Drink-Again (Or-Until-I-Get-Pissed-Again-Tomorrow-Night). But for once I had a companion in my alcoholic purgatory. Asleep next to me was Jill, a 27-year-old publishing PR – one of the 48 women who replied to my ad in the "Soulmates" column of the previous Saturday's *Guardian*.

Jill was the third would-be suitor I called back and the first one I met. OK, you got me. So I placed an advert in a lonely hearts column. But hear me out. There were mitigating circumstances, honest.

can't hide - broad
lonely, shy, but happy white F. Ldn
ZA70300
Studly, sensitive male writer, 27,
into drinking, sleep and pies. WLT
female aged 20-85 with GSOH for
f/ship and fellatio. Sheep-worriers,
coprophiliacs and amateur welders
need not apply. Box no. 666
Handsome hunk, tall, easy-going,
into music, cinema, chatting &
WLT M F n/s.

ed to the previous night's lottery balls. It was a rollover week, which was a good omen. Of these, I chose the three that seemed the sanest.

First up was Jill, the PR woman. Boxer-bustingly gorgeous, she replied to ads because "all the men I meet through work are either married or gay." Yeah, yeah, tell it to your Manhattan therapist.

Still, our date went well enough for Jill to end up in my bed. Things took a turn for the weird when she asked me to hit her (not playfully, but Trevor Jordache-style, violently) during sex. "What do you want me to hit you with – my rhythm stick?" I replied with a nervous laugh. She looked annoyed. I pretended to be asleep and spent most of the night

LONELY HEART LINGO

What those phrases in contact ads really mean

bubbly comes from Essex
cuddly fat
curvy fat
loving fat and clingy
must like children has four, wants fifth

fun-loving slapper
all letters answered
not expecting any replies
dreamer
permanently stoned

serious Christian
creative unemployed
sophisticated snooty
solvent prepared to pay for sex

expensive tastes
prostitute
independent
bitter
average looks
ugly
new to area
just out of prison

It was two years since I'd arrived in London from my native Newcastle. Initially I was too embroiled in my job to worry about relationships. I knew a lot of girls through work but since I was working in the press, this didn't help. The ones I seemed to meet were crazily career-minded and would only go out with you if it helped them get a better parking space. Then, of course, there was my Geordie accent, which immediately categorised me as a bit of rough. These girls were only interested in blokes called Ollie with Hampstead vowels and Groucho memberships.

I decided to put my months of heavy masturbation behind me and made it my New Year's resolution to find a nice, wholesome woman to share stuff with. Bodily fluids, for a start. Where better to find such a lady than the *Guardian*? OK, so most of the women who read it probably worry about East Timor and think mime's a valid art form, but what the hell? At least I wouldn't have to worry about having my testicles nailed to a plank by the High Priestess of some Satanic sex cult. Or so I thought.

Placing an ad's dead simple. Too simple for me to bottle out. From the sound of most of the messages, it's also something best attempted after two bottles of Thunderbird. You phone a premium-rate number, record your message, re-record it after hearing what a dork you sound, then sit back and wait for potential shags to leave their details.

Come Sunday night I'd received 48 messages. Wow! Forty-eight intelligent, broadsheet-reading, cryptic-crossword-cracking women wanted me. For love, for sex, for unlicensed scientific experiments. Frankly, I didn't care what their motives were. Four dozen dames saw my ad, heard my voice and still didn't run for the hills crying for their mum. Some ego boost.

I called my female friends for advice on whittling the 48 down to a more manageable selection. In the end, I resorted to numbering the replies in the order in which they were received, then picked the seven that correspond-

worrying about how to get her out of my house in the morning.

Next came Nina, a sculptor, very short but fairly fit. We arranged to meet at her house, which seemed an odd location for a first date. It didn't help that her living room was full of plaster penises. "Do you like my sculptures?" she asked, staring at me with serial killer intensity, before adding: "How big is your cock?" I quickly mentioned that I'd told lots of people where I was, talked my way out the door and sprinted down the street, glad to be alive and still in possession of my todger.

Finally, there was 22-year-old Sophie. I'd wanted to meet her first but she'd been busy. She was a total babe and we went on quite a few dates before we ended up kitless. At the back of my mind, I was half-expecting things to go pear-shaped at the sex stage and Sophie didn't disappoint. She wanted me to defecate on her.

By then it was too late to call any of the other 45 women, and I don't think I really wanted to anyway. Altogether it had cost me £80 in phone calls. At £40 a shag, some people would consider that quite a bargain. And specialised escort agencies would no doubt charge hundreds to provide penis-sculpting punch-bags with human-khazi skills. *Guardian* readers, eh? Maybe next time I'll advertise in *Ferish Weekly*. That's where all the normal women are. □

Peter Welsh now meets women the normal way – through wife-swapping clubs.

"He'll call my dad 'Sir' and shout 'Margaret!' at the point of orgasm."

LIFE SUCKS... WHEN YOUR BOYFRIEND'S A TORY BOY >>>