TatungBytes

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A FIRST HAND ACCOUNT

Every Byte Was Sacred

A message arrived through the site: author of Pete's Utilities here, plus ex staff at Tatung UK, just saying hello. What followed is the first account of life inside the Einstein team we have ever been able to publish.

Hello again,

Most of what this site knows about the Einstein has been worked out backwards, from discs, inlays and old magazines. Once in a while somebody who was actually there writes to us instead. That happened a fortnight ago, and it is the reason this issue leads where it does.

There is a great deal else: a hidden challenge that appears to have gone unanswered for forty years, twenty new guides, fourteen discs of programs typed in from Einstein User, and a stack of original discs that turned out to be hiding more than we expected.

THE INTERVIEW

Pete Morris Remembers Tatung

Pete gave up a job for life at British Telecom to go and work on home computers at Telford, talked into it by a friend and by Dr Roy Clarke, whom he first met over the air as a fellow radio amateur. He helped debug XtalDOS and MOS, wrote extensions to both BASICs, and wrote Pete's Utilities at home in his radio shack over a few evenings. He remembers the house rule as a Monty Python joke: every byte was sacred, and if a byte was wasted, Roy got quite irate.

Then he mentioned, in passing, that he thought the engineers' names were hidden somewhere on every original system disc. They are. The very last sector of the disc, owned by no file, holds five of them. A reader got there first and wrote in to the magazine in 1987, for which he received a four word reply from Dr Roy, and there is now a guide to reading the names off your own disc on the machine itself, in about two minutes. The piece also covers clean room BIOS work on Tatung's PC clones, faxes to Taiwan, and the name Pete was given by the engineers he worked alongside.

READ THE INTERVIEW →

UNANSWERED SINCE THE 1980S

A Hacker's Challenge Hidden in Dragon's Lair

Dragon's Lair will not list its own directory. Reading the disc properly explains why, and turns up a message written into the sector numbers themselves, addressed to whoever got that far, setting three questions about Tolkien with the answers hidden elsewhere on the disc behind a cipher. Nobody appears to have answered it at the time. We have, and the same loader has since turned up on an original disc of Elite, carrying the same message word for word and the same signature, in a game with no connection to Tolkien at all. So it was never a Dragon's Lair puzzle. It was the calling card of whoever wrote the protection.

There is also a companion guide, Reading the Hidden Message in Dragon's Lair, 1980s Style, which does the whole thing on the machine itself with nothing but the MOS monitor, the way you would have had to in 1986.

READ THE STORY →

GUIDES

Twenty New Guides, One for Each Program

A disc image on its own is not much use if you cannot remember which key saves the file. So the serious software in the library now has a guide each: the four word processors (Tasword, WDPro, Word Processor 40 and Genesis), both spreadsheets (The Cracker and Kuma's), the Dean Database, Taxprint for printing, Pete's Utilities, and Zen for assembly language.

The drawing packages are covered too, with Mouse Art, Superdraw and Eazidraw each getting their own walkthrough, and so are the games that are really simulations: how to fly Flight Simulator 2, and how to drive the Southern Belle without stalling it on the first gradient. There is also a guide to making the Einstein talk, and one on running the machine under Albert on Windows.

BROWSE THE GUIDES →

DO IT YOURSELF

Dumping Your Own Einstein Discs

Nearly every find in this issue came out of reading a real disc at the magnetic level rather than copying files off it. The hardware to do that costs about the price of a game did in 1985. This guide walks through the whole thing: the Creasewreak board, which old floppy drive to use, the cabling, and how to turn the result into something an emulator will boot.

If you have Einstein discs and no interest in the soldering, that is fine too. Get in touch and we will arrange it.

READ THE GUIDE →

NEW DISCS

Fourteen Discs of Programs From Einstein User

Einstein User printed program listings in every issue, on the assumption that readers would sit down and type them in. Forty years later, almost nobody is going to do that. So we did it instead, issue by issue, and there is now a bootable disc for each one from Volume 1 Number 1 through to Volume 4 Number 2.

They are typed as printed, including the typos, with a corrected copy alongside anything that will not run as published. Start with Volume 1 Number 1 and work forwards.

OPEN THE LIBRARY →

ALSO NEW

Early Builds, a Boxed Original and an Assembler

Four unfinished games from 1984 came off a hand labelled disc: early versions of Castle Quest, Quest, Quadrax and Pelmanism, none of them the same as the released games. Underneath an original Screensoft disc were builds F and G of Flight Simulator 2, so that disc was copied from the publisher's own working master. An original Solo Software disc of Helicopter UK had its 1984 development history still on it as deleted files.

Also added: the boxed Jet Set Willy plus Showjumper double, HiSoft's Devpac80 assembler with a companion disc, the Dean Database, WordStar 3.00 and Microsoft's MBASIC, and the 1984 builds of Hangman and the Keyboard Trainer recovered from a deleted disc. Thirty new entries in all.

OPEN THE LIBRARY →

UPDATED ENTRIES

What the Original Discs Turned Out to Be Hiding

Several entries you may already have downloaded have changed. Where we have since got hold of an original disc, the old copy has been replaced with a full magnetic dump of the real thing, and the entry now carries photographs of its labels and inlays. It is worth going back for, because some of those originals had more on them than we expected.

Konami's Four Game Arcade pack turned out to be copy protected: track 0 is an ordinary Einstein track and every track after it is not. Genesis names its own author when you run it, S. Demant. WDPro can now be pinned to version 2.60, from a second copy recovered as a deleted file off our ZEN disc. And Jet Set Willy is in the library twice over: the patched copy that asks nothing, and the game as Software Projects sold it, with the code sheet protection working.

Helicopter UK, MYRDDIN's Flight Simulation, Counter Blaster and Maths Tank, Bell Software's Football Predictor and Amscopy have all been revisited too.

SEE WHAT CHANGED →

COMING SOON



A Report on What Four Hundred Discs Are Hiding

Everything in this issue came out of imaging a few dozen discs. We are about to start on roughly four hundred, from one of the largest private Einstein collections we know of, and E5 is the booklet that will report what turns up: the numbers, the finds, and what it took to get them off failing forty year old floppies.

It is a one off report, not a subscription, and we are deliberately not promising a date. The name is the byte an Einstein writes over a file when you delete it, and the byte a freshly formatted disc is full of. If you have Einstein discs in a loft, now is the moment to say so, because the ones we are told about are the ones that make it in.

OFFER A DISC →

ALSO WORTH READING

Three More From the News

Wait, What? The Einstein Had a Mouse?: it did, and there was art software to go with it. Almost nobody seems to remember either.

The Author Who Found His Games: we put two games in the library and the man who wrote them turned up to tell us about them.

1984 Builds of Two System Master Games Recovered: Hangman and the Keyboard Trainer, a year older than the versions everybody has, pulled back off a disc where they had been deleted.

READ THE NEWS →

This issue exists because somebody who was there decided to say hello. If you worked at Tatung, or wrote for the magazines, or still have the discs, please do the same. Reply to this email or get in touch on the site.

GET IN TOUCH