

prevent my program from finding out what it did. In effect I told them how to wipe me out, The Midnight Skulker. It was a very clever program. I started leaving clues about myself. I wanted them to try and use it and then try to come up with something to get around that and reappear again. But they wouldn't play. I wanted to get caught. I mean I didn't want to get caught personally, but I wanted them to notice me and admit that they noticed me. I wanted them to attempt to respond, maybe in some interesting way." Finally the computer managers became concerned enough about the threat of information-stealing to respond. However, instead of using The Midnight Skulker's own elegant self-destruct program, they called in their security personnel, interrogated everyone, found an informer to identify Bernay as The Midnight Skulker, and fired him.

"At first the security people advised the company to hire me full-time to search out other flaws and discover other computer freaks. I might have liked that. But I probably would have turned into a double double agent rather than the double agent they wanted. I might have resurrected The Midnight Skulker and tried to catch myself. Who knows? Anyway, the higher-ups turned the whole idea down."

You Can Tap the F.B.I.'s Crime Control Computer in the Comfort of Your Own Home, Perhaps.

Computer freaking may be the wave of the future. It suits the phone-phreak sensibility perfectly. Gilbertson, the blue-box inventor and a lifelong phone phreak, has also gone on from phone-phreaking to computer-freaking. Before he got into the blue-box business Gilbertson, who is a highly skilled programmer, devised programs for international currency arbitrage.

But he began playing with computers in earnest when he learned he could use his blue box in tandem with the computer terminal installed in his apartment by the instrumentation firm he worked for. The print-out terminal and keyboard was equipped with acoustical coupling, so that by coupling his little ivory Princess phone to the terminal and then coupling his blue box on that, he could M-F his way into other computers with complete anonymity, and without charge; program and re-program them at will; feed them false or misleading information; tap and steal from them. He explained to me that he taps computers by busying out all the lines, then going into a verification trunk, listening into the passwords and instructions one of the time sharers uses, and then M-F-ing in and imitating them. He believes it would not be impossible to creep into the F.B.I.'s crime control computer through a local police computer terminal and phreak around with the F.B.I.'s memory banks. He claims he has succeeded in re-programming a certain huge institutional computer in such a way that it has cordoned off an entire section of its circuitry for his personal use, and at the same time conceals that arrangement from anyone else's notice. I have been unable to verify this claim.

Like Captain Crunch, like Alexander Graham Bell (pseudonym of a disgruntled-looking East Coast engineer who claims to have invented the black box and now sells black and blue boxes to gamblers and radical heavies), like most phone phreaks, Gilbertson began his career trying to rip off pay phones as a teenager. Figure them out, then rip them off. Getting his dime back from the pay phone is the phone phreak's first thrilling rite of passage. After learning the usual eighteen different ways of getting his dime back, Gilbertson learned how to make master keys to coin-phone cash boxes, and get everyone else's dimes back. He stole some phone-company equipment and put together his own home switchboard with it. He learned to make a simple "bread-box" device, of the kind used by bookies in the Thirties (bookie gives a number to his betting clients; the phone with that number is installed in some widow lady's apartment, but is rigged to ring in the bookie's shop across town, cops trace big betting number and find nothing but the widow).

Not long after that afternoon in 1968 when, deep in the stacks of an engineering library, he came across a technical journal with the phone tone frequencies and rushed off to make his first blue box, not long after that Gilbertson abandoned a very promising career in physical chemistry and began selling blue boxes for \$1,500 apiece.

"I had to leave physical chemistry. I just ran out of interesting things to learn," he told me one evening. We had been talking in the apartment of the man who served as the link between Gilbertson and the syndicate in arranging the big \$300,000 blue-box deal which fell through because of legal trouble. There has been some smoking.

"No more interesting things to learn," he continues. "Physical chemistry turns out to be a sick subject when you take it to its highest level. I don't know. I don't think I could explain to you how it's sick. You have to be there. But you get, I don't know, a false feeling of omnipotence. I suppose it's like phone-phreaking that way. This huge thing is there. This whole system. And there are holes in it and you slip into them like Alice and you're pretending you're doing something you're actually not, or at least it's no longer you that's doing what you thought you were doing. It's all Lewis Carroll. Physical chemistry and phone-phreaking. That's why you have these phone-phreak pseudonyms like The Cheshire Cat, the Red King, and The Snark. But there's something about phone-phreaking that you don't find in physical chemistry." He looks up at me:

"Did you ever steal anything?"

"Well yes, I..."

"Then you know! You know the rush you get. It's not just knowledge, like physical chemistry. It's forbidden knowledge. You know. You can learn about anything under the sun and be bored to death with it. But the idea that it's illegal. Look: you can be small and mobile and smart and you're ripping off somebody large and powerful and very dangerous."

People like Gilbertson and Alexander Graham Bell are always talking about ripping off the phone company and screwing Ma Bell. But if they were shown a single button and told that by pushing it they could turn the entire circuitry of A.T.&T. into molten puddles, they probably wouldn't push it. The disgruntled-inventor phone phreak needs the phone system the way the lapsed Catholic needs the Church, the way Satan needs a God, the way The Midnight Skulker needed, more than anything else, response.