1 Question Upon Question

If for some reason you had to sum up the entire hacker culture in one single word, that word would simply have to be "questions." It's what we live for, what drives us, what always gets us into so much trouble. And it's one of the things *2600*, as a hacker magazine, gets the most of from readers. So it's only appropriate that we begin this collection with a sampling of some of the many we've received over the years.

They take on a number of forms, and you'll see common themes in the hacker world that have survived to this day, along with technical issues that might have been the norm at one time but which seem utterly bizarre and outdated today. Still, the desire to learn is what ultimately matters, and if our magazine somehow managed to date back another century, I think we'd recognize those components in whatever questions the readers might have asked back then.

So what sorts of things have people been curious about throughout our history? Well, there were those questions that we must have gotten asked a thousand times: What does "*2600*" mean? How do I become a hacker? Is it illegal to read this magazine? Can you show me how to hack into Hotmail?

The idea for us was to give people answers to the things they were interested in while teaching them ways they could figure it out on their own. Of course, there are always those questions that have nothing to do with anything we're about, and that's where you might see an instance of a sarcastic reply. Sometimes there was just no other way.

Looking back, it's amusing to see how people were so concerned about ways to make simple phone calls without going broke. In those early days, even local calls were expensive, so anyone who was able to figure out "alternative methods" of communicating was looked upon with great interest and even reverence. The computer bulletin board system (BBS) was growing in popularity as a means of meeting people, sharing ideas, and building the hacker culture. It also was the precursor to those first tentative steps onto the Internet. So many of the questions back then were merely about access, ways to get themselves connected so that they could begin the learning process, meeting that first challenge that gained them access into the marvels of the hacker life.

Of course, it wasn't just hackers who took an interest in all of this. The mass media, members of corporate America, law enforcement people, and even parents all wanted to know just what we were getting up to. And then there was the inevitable criminal element who saw opportunities through hacking to benefit themselves. We got questions from *all* of these groups, and we did our best to give as succinct and direct a response as we could, regardless of the source or the intent of the questioner. Because that's what the hacker world is always all about.

The one thing we never wanted to do was discourage someone from asking and, thus, learning. We were all too familiar with the ridicule new people often encountered when asking what some saw as naive or uninformed questions. Obviously, everyone had to start somewhere, and you could either guide them along to a place where they understood what was going on or drive them away and guarantee that they would look negatively upon the hacker community in whatever path they wound up going down. It was only when it was clear that a reader had no interest in actually being a hacker and instead simply wanted shortcuts and profits that we felt compelled to give them a dressing down. And sometimes that's exactly what they needed.

If there has been a significant change in the kinds of questions people have asked over the years, I think it's more along the lines of the specifics of the technology in use, and not so much having to do with the philosophy of hacking. This is why in the early years you see more questions about the phone network and beepers and stuff that we simply take for granted these days—or have completely forgotten about. In this day and age when *everyone* seems to be connected and making a free phone call is the norm rather than a crime, we still see the same sense of wonder in the questions we're asked, along with a hint of the rebellion and creative thinking that makes the hacker world tick.

1985

Dear *2600*:

> *If I want to go trashing, am I forced to just attack my Central Office?*
>
> Anonymous

There are lots of good places to trash besides phone companies. Look in the phone book under software companies, phone equipment, computer equipment, electronic equipment, or look at Radio Shacks, or GTE, MCI, or your local cable company. You will find loads of things, like free telephones, floppies, etc.

1986

Dear *2600*:

I have call waiting and a modem, so many of my calls are disconnected by the little tone that is sent that tells you someone is waiting on the line.

What can I do?

Dissenting Opinion

We would like to sympathize, but we don't get nice services like call waiting here. There are a few ways around it.

- You can disable the call waiting, if you have "selective call waiting." You dial *70, then get a tone, and from this make your call. Then the call will not be interrupted.

- If you can set the amount of time that the modem can be interrupted for it to disconnect, this may help if you have a smart modem, but the modem at the other end of your phone may hang up anyway.

- If you also have call forwarding, you can forward your calls to another line. If you have two lines, you can send the call to your non-data line. If you don't, you can forward your calls to a local test number. Use one that gives you an eternal busy signal.

- If you are being constantly annoyed by someone who knows he is interrupting, then forward it to a test number that gives silence, a sweep tone, or a payphone somewhere. One way to solve the problem of being annoyed by a persistent interrupter is to call forward to the same number in a different area code where your number would not be valid and it would elicit a disconnect recording. The caller will hear "The number you have reached, XXX-XXXX, has been disconnected." It's also effective to turn the tables and call forward to another line in the harasser's house, or perhaps one of his relatives. He then winds up harassing himself.

Dear *2600*:

> How can I be like Captain Midnight? How about an AM carrier-current pirate radio station?

> PV

We can't tell you what to do exactly, but we can say that it involves ingenuity, sneakiness, intelligence, persistence, and a youthful spirit. Mix those together and you should come up with something worthwhile.

There are many AM carrier-current pirate radio stations in existence. Too many of them try to sound like regular AM stations and few people notice anything different.

1987

Dear *2600:*

> I am sort of a new kid on the block when it comes to hacking. So could you please indulge me if I am not of equal proportion to you. Could you tell me what steps I should take as a beginner in the field of hacking? First I would like to give you a background on myself if I may. I am 15 years of age. I am a known underachiever in my school. My teachers press me for answers but I refuse to comply with their methods. My hobbies are computers and basketball, mostly computers. My parents threaten to take away my computer which is an IBM PC if my grades don't improve and I tell them C's are average but they still want A's from me. The computer is half mine—I put in well over two thousand dollars. Well, back to hacking. First, what are some approaches that I can take in getting into another computer system to explore it for the wealth of information that I could use? Next, is there any device or gadget I can make to tell when my phone call is being traced? Third, I would like to know if you have some of the many phone phreaking devices known to us hackers? If so, I would be willing to purchase them for a reasonable fee. Also, do you have a program called a worm? I would like it for a BBS that sent a logic bomb in a program to me. This bomb wiped my TI's memory right out.

> JS

If you read 2600 *enough, you should get a good feel for what kind of systems are out there and the "wealth of information" they contain. We can't condone breaking into any of them, but we can say that if you're determined and skilled, you'll most likely get into something. Hot water, in all probability.*

We know of no such device that could alert you to your phone being traced. Perhaps some government phones could do that, but we don't think it's possible at this stage in the game. Besides, how could it tell you that you were being traced before you actually got traced? It wouldn't do much good.

The 2600 *Marketplace is your best bet for finding electronic devices. Ads are free to subscribers. We don't approve of logic bombs, but we do want to show you what they look like. If anyone has one, please send it in. (On paper, please.)*

1988

Dear *2600:*

> *After months of agonizing over 2600's financial plight, I've figured out a way to return to the monthly format and solve another great problem that plagues BBSes all over the nation. How many times have you logged onto your favorite BBS and seen some message like this: "It has come to my attention that someone else is using my name, 'The Grim Reaper,' on other BBSes. Well, whoever you are, I'm the real Grim Reaper. I was The Grim Reaper months before you came around. You better not use my name any more, or I'm gonna kick your $#&*@ ass!!! You better think of a new name dude!!!"*
>
> *Well, the obvious solution to this common dilemma is to have a sort of "name registration," where individuals can register their alias with an authority—kind of like your given name when you're born. And who else would be the most likely authorization but the hackers' and phreaks' choice—2600! Think about it! You could charge each registration a nominal fee, like $3. For that $3, you will give the person a registration certificate, saying that he is the only one authorized to use a particular alias within a given limit, say, an area code. The person could get some little certificate to hang on his wall, and maybe even a patch to sew on his jacket.*

So the next time the loser user logs onto the BBS, he can now proudly assert: "By the power of 2600, *I am the only Grim Reaper within the 212 area code. I am the only one certified and authorized to use that pseudonym. So be gone, you pagan!"*

So, whadaya say? 2600 *could be put into the black, and we would no longer have to put up with dueling 14-year-olds. We have a unique opportunity to help solve the hackers' two most serious problems.*

ANONYMOUS

No thanks. There must be a better way to raise funds than to play big brother to dueling 14-year-olds. Besides, how in the world would the user be able to prove that he/she was the one with the certificate hanging on their wall? Computers still offer a degree of anonymity. Let's all try to enjoy that while we can.

1989

Dear *2600:*

How many subscribers do you have anyway?

THE APPLE WORM

Next to "Whatever happened to TAP?" that's the question we get asked the most. It's harder to answer than it might seem because 2600 isn't like most other magazines. We have around 1,000 people who get the magazine sent directly to them. But don't be deceived by that rather small number. Many others (random polls indicate at least four times that number) get what is known as a "secondary" copy, that is, one that has been copied by a friend or even electronically transcribed. Naturally, we prefer it when people subscribe directly because it helps keep us going. The most important thing, though, is to get the information out. Close to 1,000 more copies go to various newsstands and bookstores around the world. And whatever else is left goes to all of the people that order back issues in the future. So, to answer your question, we don't really know. The numbers just don't tell the whole story in our case.

Dear *2600:*

I am writing to inquire as to whether any issue of your magazine has information regarding access to long distance telephone calling card codes using AT&T or Sprint services without a computer.

I used to have a calling card number that worked and billed to someone else, but it is no longer valid.

I don't have a computer, so I need some way of finding a valid card number that works. From what I've read in one of your books, that isn't easy to do at random because AT&T is difficult to hack without a computer. I've tried using my old card and changing the last four digits, but it won't go through.

If you have anything on this or know of a publication that does, please let me know.

MC
Van Nuys, CA

What you want to do really has nothing to do with hacking or phreaking. There are lots of ways to make telephone calls. You discover them through individual experimentation. Using someone else's calling card is not the way to go. You victimize an innocent person and you also run a tremendous risk of getting caught. If you want to explore and manipulate the system, there's never been a better time. If you simply want to steal, you'll have to wait in line.

Dear *2600:*

How is it possible to publish hacking and phreaking information without those in authority changing those systems you expose?

WAFB
Knob Noster, MO

Good question. Sometimes the systems are changed, sometimes some of them are changed, sometimes none of them are changed. But what we get out of it is the knowledge of how the systems operate and that's an invaluable tool which leads to our figuring out still more of them. In other words, knowledge and information are always advantageous and should never be stifled.

1990

Dear *2600:*

> Being a new subscriber, I was wondering what the 2600 *represents in the title of your magazine?*
>
> <div align="right">Snoopy</div>

2600 *hertz at one time was a liberating cry used by phone phreaks. By sending a* 2600 *hertz tone down the line when connected to a long distance number, the number would disconnect and you would have total control over the long distance trunk. Not only that but billing was bypassed. This was commonly known as blue boxing. These days that method rarely works, but of course there are many others.*

1991

Dear *2600:*

> I just received your Winter 1990 issue and was very impressed by the in-depth quality I read. I am writing mainly to find out what back issue of 2600 *I should purchase for beginning hacking (phones and computers). I was taking a television/radio class in college a couple of months ago. In this class the teacher mentioned that anyone could pick up cordless phone calls on a scanner, and that it was legal. I knew this but nobody, I mean nobody else in the class of 50 knew this. Now I know what is meant when people like Agent Steal say, "Thank you to all the stupid people." I own a scanner and am just learning about devices to enhance frequencies via CRB research catalogs. But your issue is much more comprehensive by way of information. CRB is equipment. All this terminology is new to me also, so where do I turn?* 2600 *has opened some doors that I did not know existed. I own a computer also (no modem yet), but it is still such a fascinating tool. I want to be able to understand it inside and out. Not to mention phones. This is even more intriguing to me.*

Just to let you know, I found out about 2600 *through* Sound Choice *magazine. They put you on their list of fantastic catalogs. I can't argue with this. I think what you are doing with your catalog is a great example for other catalogs and people as well. Utilizing your First Amendment rights the way very few people know how. I hope that you can suggest some valuable reading material on phone and computer hacking. Thank you and keep up the good work.*

<div align="right">

S.C.
California

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It's hard to point to a particular issue and say that is where you learn about hacking. It's probably better for you to read from issue to issue and glean whatever you can. If you find yourself wanting more info, try the previous year's back issues. If you like those, keep going.

———————— ⊙━⊙ ————————

Dear *2600:*

I've learned through the grapevine that there is a computer program that automatically dials via a modem in search of carrier tones of computers that can be accessed. Apparently the program, without repetition, dials telephone numbers within a designated area code, and/or with a designated prefix, and stores those telephone numbers which provided access to computer carrier tones. Do you guys know of anything like this? I would really like to get my hands on a program like that. It would save many fruitless, red-eyed hours at the screen.

<div align="right">

LH
San Diego

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Your grapevine must be rather old. But that's okay—old as the information may be, it is still valid. Wargames dialers have been around since modems were first used. Some of the programs are in Basic, some in assembler, others in C. It's different for every machine. What you have to do is find someone with a program that will work on your machine. Ask on bulletin boards or check out our classified section. By the way, it's still open to debate as to whether or not scanning is illegal. Some phone companies will take action against scanners. We feel there's no harm in scanning,

since you are not harassing any one person over and over but merely going one by one through a series of numbers in much the same way the phone companies do when they want to sell one of their overpriced services.

———————— ⊙┬⊙ ————————

Dear *2600:*

> *I feel your publication serves a valuable purpose in today's technology-oriented society. Two questions, however. Isn't what you're doing somehow illegal? If so, have the cops pressured you for information about hacking/phreaking activities?*

> RA
> Virginia
> (I'm not a cop.)

Congratulations. In answer to your first question, we publish a magazine about hacking. As long as the First Amendment exists, we're completely within the law. A magazine called TEL in California was shut down by the phone company in the seventies for printing similar information. We believe this action was illegal and in direct contradiction of freedom of the press. Since nobody has challenged it, their action stands as if it were legal. Fortunately, we haven't yet gone down that road in New York. In answer to your second question, no.

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1992 ———————————————————

Dear *2600*:

> *First of all, let me start by saying thank you for what you are doing. It is a service without quantifiable value. I have spent years in the shadows searching and scraping for information on the hacking field, generally only coming up with the occasional* Phrack *or* Phun *newsletter. Six months ago I was walking around the immortal East Village and I happened upon a little store called Hudson News. Inside, after an hour of hunting and browsing, I came upon a marvelous little document with a toilet on the cover. My computing life has not been the same since.*

I make no claims toward greatness in the pursuit of the hack, only that I understand the force that drives it, and that it is driving me. Unfortunately, your magazine is the only source of outside information I have been able to acquire on the subject (aside from that mentioned above).

I would be infinitely appreciative of your assistance in pointing me in the right direction, and giving a good shove. If there is anything I can do in return, though I could not imagine what, I would be happy to help.

Secondly, help! *I need to get Internet access that extends beyond CompuServe's meager mail facility (which I just found out about today). And I don't know where to begin to look. To the best of my knowledge, there are no colleges in Westchester County, NY, that are connected to the Internet and provide public access accounts, though I pray I am mistaken. Again, your assistance in this matter would be greatly appreciated.*

<div align="right">

The Information Junkie

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We printed a hacker reading list in our Winter 1990-91 edition. Most of what is in there is still obtainable. Additions to this list will be printed in future issues.

If you can't find a college that provides public access accounts, then it may be worthwhile to actually enroll as a part-time student and gain access that way. Or for $30 a month, you can get PC Pursuit, a service that allows you to access modems in other cities. From there you can dial into other services that allow Internet access. As public access Internet sites pop up, we will provide the access numbers.

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Dear *2600*:

Here are a few things I have been wondering about for a while, and I was hoping you could enlighten me. All of these observations are valid for the Atlanta, Georgia, area code (404).

1. *When I dial any number with certain prefixes, I always get a busy signal before I even hear a ring. It does not seem to matter which number I dial. Examples: 450-XXXX, 470-XXXX, 490-XXXX, and 670-XXXX.*

2. *One prefix always returns a fast busy signal (which I believe is the local reorder tone). This tone pops up after you dial the first three digits of the prefix (no additional digits necessary). Example: 430.*

3. *For some prefixes, you dial a full seven-digit number and then you get exactly one ring and then a series of three or so single frequency beeps. Examples: 570-XXXX and 690-XXXX. In some extremely rare cases you will get something like an answering machine service after the first ring. The announcements are made by real people, and vary from number to number.*

4. *Some prefixes require that you enter a number consisting of ten digits. After the second or third ring an announcement comes up and says something to the effect of: "Your call cannot be completed as dialed. Please read the instruction card and try again." Examples: 510-XXX-XXXX and 410-XXX-XXXX.*

Since I have not made any progress figuring out any of the above stuff, I decided to see if you could help me out. Any information you can provide will earn you my everlasting gratitude. And if you cannot help, that's OK—I will still keep reading 2600 Magazine *whenever I can lay my grubby hands on a new issue. I apologize in advance if any of this stuff has some simple explanation that has been common knowledge for years.*

FD
Atlanta

First off, never apologize for wanting to learn. It's far better to admit ignorance than to feign knowledge. And since 99 percent of the populace have no idea what we're talking about anyway, you're still coming out ahead.

We checked with the AT&T routing computer and all of the exchanges that you were getting busy signals on (450, 470, 490, 670) are not officially in use. They also cannot be accessed from outside the 404 area code. This could mean several things. These may be new exchanges that are still being tested. They may be special exchanges that the phone company uses for various things. We suggest exploring each of these exchanges every now and then to see if all of the numbers remain busy. Also, it can't hurt to have a local operator check the busy signal and tell you if the line actually exists.

Some exchanges (like your 430) are programmed not to accept any additional digits. It's more likely that this exchange is not being used at all in your area. To be sure, though, compare it to other exchanges that are not being used. Weird numbers like 311 are almost never used but so are a lot of other three digit combinations. Do they all react the same way? Keep a log and compare it every few months.

The 570 and 690 exchanges in your area are used for beeper services. When you get one ring followed by three or four beeps then silence, you have dialed some-one's beeper number and it is waiting for touch tone input from you. When you dial a sequence of numbers followed by the # key (optional), those numbers will show up on the beeper belonging to that number. If you get six or seven beeps that don't ever allow for touch tone input, you've reached what is known as a "tone only" number. The beeper will simply say that someone beeped but won't give any additional infor-mation. This is seldom used these days and is good only for people who get beeped by the same number exclusively (i.e., doctors who get beeped by their service). When you hear a voice message, you're reaching a service that is attached to someone's beeper. When you leave a voice message of your own, their beeper will go off telling them they have a voice message in their mailbox. Some of these numbers allow for either tone or voice messages to be left.

Since 510 and 410 are now area codes, this would explain why your switch waited for seven more digits.

On all of these numbers, we suggest you try prefixing with 1 or 0 or a carrier access code to check for variations. And we encourage people in different area codes to experiment in the same way and report their findings here.

Dear *2600*:

> *I have recently purchased your magazine and I like what I see. I don't have a computer yet, but I am interested in obtaining programs on disk that can copy application programs from a hard disk drive and/or flop-py disks such as WordPerfect 5.1, PageMaker, and CorelDRAW, even if they are under someone's homemade menu screen, under Windows, or both. Also, I would like information on telephone codes to make free long-distance calls (and any other phone tricks), a program to find the source code for any IBM compatible computer, and some type of beginner's guide on hacking that isn't technical. I was wondering*

could you tell me which back issues of 2600 *deal with these subjects and could you give me a list of other sources—magazines, books, or people (addresses and phone numbers) that would have what I am looking for. I would greatly appreciate it. Keep up the good work.*

<div align="right">

Birdman
Tennessee

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Learning is a lot more fun and beneficial than making free phone calls and copying software. While the things we teach may enable people to accomplish these tasks, we believe they will at least understand what it is they are doing. You seem to want to bypass this part of it and that's something we cannot help you with. If, though, you're interested in more than just the end results, then you're in the right place.

———————————— ⊙⚬⚬⊙ ————————————

Dear *2600*:

First of all, you have a great magazine so don't change a thing! However, I just recently received a bunch of back issues, so pardon me if some of these questions are outdated or have been answered already.

1. *How can I help 2600 grow (besides the obvious of sending you money)? I would like to do some sort of volunteer work for you guys, but that may pose a small problem since I live a few thousand miles from New York.*

2. *Is E.T. considered an honorary phone phreak?*

3. *What is the ANAC number for the 515 area code?*

4. *What can you tell me about your cover artist (Holly Kaufman Spruch)?*

5. *Please explain to me why it takes six weeks for you guys to process orders for back issues. It should only take about two weeks tops. And that's third class mail! If I decide to shell out maybe $75 for back issues, then I want the "invaluable" information (that I don't already know) as soon as possible, and don't want to wait a month and a half for it! This is very frustrating, and I would also like some other readers' opinions on this.*

6. *I sympathize with Kevin Mitnick in the Summer '91 issue. In plain English, he got shafted. I'm not saying that he's completely innocent, but the authors of the book Cyberpunk did write unfairly about him.*

7. *How about writing an article listing all of the known phreak boxes, what they can do, and if they can be used today. List all of the major ones like blue, red, green, and black boxes and then list the lesser known ones like the gold, cheese, diverti, aqua, etc.*

8. *Would it be possible to put together a big gathering of phreaks in some unknown exchange like the "2111" conference in the October 1971 Esquire article "Secrets of the Little Blue Box"? To me that is what phreaking is all about—helping other phreaks. By the way, I do know that you can't use a blue box to do this anymore, but you inventive folks should be able to come up with something that would work. If you did this, however, you would have to tell phreaks about it through word of mouth, as I'm sure many telco security personnel read your magazine.*

9. *I really enjoyed the "Hacker Reading List" in the Winter '90 issue. However, it was slightly incomplete—you forgot magazine articles. Below is a small list of hacker/phreak related articles that I have come across. A larger list is available at the back of the book Cyberpunk. Also, a very good book that Dr. Williams left out of the book list is called The Phone Book and the author is J. Edward Hyde. To find these, just go to your local library and see if they have the back issues. However, they might not have them as far back as '72, so you will have to use their microfiche. I personally found most of these at a college library.*

> ***Esquire,*** October 1971, "Secrets of the Little Blue Box."
> ***Esquire,*** December 1990, "Terminal Delinquents."
> ***Ramparts,*** June 1972, "Regulating the Phone Company in Your Home."
> ***Ramparts,*** July 1972, "How the Phone Company Interrupted Our Service."
> ***Radio Electronics,*** November 1987, "The Blue Box and Ma Bell."
> ***L.A. Weekly,*** July 18-24 1980, "The Phone Art of Phone Phreaking."
> ***Rolling Stone,*** September 19 1991, "Samurai Hackers."
> ***Playboy,*** October 1972, "Take That, You Soulless S.O.B."
> ***Oui,*** August 1973, "The Phone Phreaks' Last Stand."
> ***Time,*** March 6 1972, "Phoney Tunes."

<div align="right">

CLARK KENT
AMES, IA

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You don't have to be anywhere near us to help out. You can send us information, articles, and anything else that comes to mind. You can contribute to the discussion on our voice BBS and start other forums on hacking throughout the country. By letting people know there is a place for them to contribute, you'll be opening up a lot of minds that are just waiting to be liberated. It may not be quite that poetic but you get the idea. We don't talk about E.T., we will talk about the 515 ANAC when we find it, and we can't talk about Holly Kaufman Spruch. We agree that back issue orders take too long and we've taken some steps to alleviate the situation, including hiring people whose only concern in life is to speed the process. Keep in mind that it takes our bank up to three weeks to notify us if a check has bounced or is unacceptable for some other stupid reason. That's why we're not too keen on sending out back issues until we're sure we've actually gotten paid. We could send out cash orders quicker but then too many people would send cash in the mail, which is a pretty risky thing in itself. We're hoping for a maximum of three to four weeks from start to finish. Our authors and hopefully other readers have taken note of your other ideas. Thanks for the info.

Dear *2600*:

> I run a BBS for the disabled called DEN (Disabilities Electronic Network). Until recently we had an 800 number accessing an eight-line hunt group. It was a very lively national bulletin board. Our 800 number is in limited service indefinitely as a result of our loss of funding. This has been the cause of a search for long-distance services that our users would make use of to access DEN. I found PC Pursuit by Sprint. PC Pursuit is a non-prime time service that allows 90 hours per month for disabled people and 30 hours per month for non-disabled people for $30. The service enables one to access many electronic services during non-prime time hours and weekends while not changing your present long distance provider. Are you, or anyone at 2600, aware of other such low-cost services? I'm desperate to find low-cost access for our users. We're a free service and it would be a shame if our phone companies' greed affected our ability to deliver a service to the disabled community.

> TB
> NEW JERSEY

The call has gone out.

———————— ⚭ ————————

Dear *2600*:

> How come your voice BBS is only open after 11 p.m.? Also, why do
> you give out an expensive 0-700 number instead of a real phone
> number?
>
> <div align="right">Puzzled</div>

*First off, the 0-700 number costs 15 cents a minute. A regular phone number would
cost 13 cents a minute. While slightly more, this is not comparable to a 900 number
or anything of that nature. We give out that number because right now the system
doesn't have a set phone number; it sometimes shows up on different lines. It's
only available at night because it's currently a single-line system and opening the
BBS during the day would tie up the voicemail functions. Right now we're working
on expanding the system so that it shows up on our main number and so that the
BBS part is available around the clock with multiple lines. To do this, we need to
find some flexible multi-line voicemail software along with some cheap comput-
ers. If anyone has any suggestions, please send them our way. For now. the voice
BBS can be reached through AT&T at 0-700-751-2600. Most of our writers can be
reached through the voicemail section of that number, which is available 24 hours
a day. During business hours, the rate of the 0-700 number is 25 cents a minute.
(Don't worry, we're not making a penny off of this!)*

———————— ⚭ ————————

1993 ————————————————————

Dear *2600*:

> Ever since I've had a conscious knowledge of computers, I've wanted
> to hack. I haven't always known it was called hacking, but I've just
> had the mental inkling akin to hacking. The problem is basically I
> neither have the equipment nor the know-how needed. Right now
> I'm 15 years old and about to enter my junior year of high school and
> I feel that I'm almost past my prime for hacking (this may just be a

popular misconception). But, regardless of my age or scholastic rank-
ing, I feel I should start now. So I was wondering if you could steer
me in the right direction in terms of literature and an affordable, but
good, system.

<div align="right">

Darkhold Page
Pittsburgh

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We don't really recommend one system over another because everybody's needs
and tastes are different. What you need to do is play around on as many different
systems as you can in order to find out what you're comfortable with. We advise
using friends' systems or those in school or computer stores. Otherwise you run
the risk of getting something you don't want or can't use. Read some of the litera-
ture featured in 2600 *in order to become more familiar with the culture. Any good*
bookstore or library should provide you with much material. With regards to age,
you are hardly past your prime. Most hackers are young because young people
tend to be adaptable. As long as you remain adaptable, you can always be a
good hacker.

1994

Dear *2600*:

I am a new subscriber to 2600. *The back issues I requested came in a*
few days ago. I read every issue in a single sitting. The zine blew my
mind. 2600 *is phat! Since I am a new member to the hack/phreak com-*
munity, I find some concepts in your magazine hard to understand.
I've tried calling local boards, but the only users are kids addicted to
MUDs. Because I'm a 16-year-old kid living in a little Canadian hick
town called Medicine Hat (dumb name, eh?) with nobody to answer
my questions, I decided to use our messed up postal system to write
to you guys. Now, onto the questions:

What the hell is a PBX and how do I find an access number into one?
How do I find an authorization code for a PBX once I access one
and what do I do with it? I'd like to get onto some LD boards, but I
don't want to pay the high LD charges. I know you don't tell people to

commit toll fraud, but you do tell how to. How would someone like me get toll-free planet-wide calls? Your contributors write about how they get on computer systems. I live near an army base and I know they have a computer system. How do I access the computers? Do I just phone up the number in the phone book or what?

My telephone company is AGT but most of the equipment is made by Northern Telecom. My area code is 403 and an engineer at AGT told me that my province is the first completely digital telephone system in Canada. I'm wondering if you have any info on how I can have fun with my phone system?

DrP
Medicine Hat, Alberta

PBX stands for Private Branch eXchange and it's basically a phone system run by and for a company. Oftentimes, security lapses allow people on the outside to access dial tones, voicemail, computers, etc. On many occasions, these are reachable through 800 numbers. Methods of making free phone calls abound here and in many other places. But that doesn't mean it's a particularly smart thing to do. We understand how difficult it must be for you trapped in the middle of nowhere but you do have to be careful. Your "completely digital telephone system" could easily monitor your activities. Learning and exploration should be your primary goals, not just getting things for free. Unfortunately, it's sometimes unavoidable to commit crimes, however small, in the process. You need to weigh the risks and decide what your priorities are. We don't suggest messing with your local military computer, at least not for starters. If there is a college in your area, do everything you can to get on the net. If you succeed, you will have eliminated the long-distance charges and opened yourself up to an unlimited world of knowledge and contacts. We wish you luck. And don't give up on Medicine Hat—there are probably other hackers there, too.

Dear *2600*:

You have mentioned that "hacking is discovering." Something bothers me and I would appreciate your help in clearing up my mind. I am trying to distinguish the difference between hacking and graffiti. Hackers who insert viruses into systems can be compared to the guy

> with a can of spray paint discovering how much destruction he can
> accomplish and how original and creative it can appear. Please tell
> me what you consider to be the difference between both forms of evil
> senseless destruction for no personal benefit other than pride in their
> destruction.
>
> <div align="right">J V
New York</div>

There is no defense for evil senseless destruction and we don't defend any form
of it. Inserting viruses into systems is destructive; experimenting with their creation
on your own system is not. Graffiti is destructive if something is destroyed in its
creation and artistic if it improves what it replaces. Some of New York's old graffiti
trains were true works of art. Both hacking and graffiti can be used in destructive
ways but neither has to be.

———————— ❦ ————————

1995 ————————————————————————

Dear *2600*:

> Regarding someone's concerns over privacy of your subscriber list,
> section E211.4.2 of the Domestic Manual requires that publications
> sent by Second Class have a "known office of publication" open dur-
> ing "normal business hours where the publication's circulation re-
> cords are maintained or can be available for USPS examination."
> A Second Class permit also requires that you tell the world, as you
> did on page 2 of your Autumn 1994 issue, the number of subscribers
> and newsstand copies sold (which impressed the heck out of me—I
> didn't know you were that big). So Big Bro is allowed to look at your
> subscription lists!
>
> Have you considered mailing by bulk third class instead? The basic
> rate is 23.3 cents per piece (anywhere in the U.S.) which is probably
> not much more than you're paying now and there's no zone-based
> rate, no need to file a "Statement of Ownership, Management, and
> Circulation" or requirement to have a "known office of publication."
> Or how about offering the option (at a higher cost, obviously) of

getting 2600 *by first class mail in a plain unmarked envelope? (I still prefer to buy mine at the newsstand, though.)*

Speaking of the USPS and the NCOA database mentioned on page 6, the USPS' database is now also being used to identify CMRAs (Commercial Mail Receiving Agencies, or "mail drops") to commercial subscribers (such as credit card companies who are concerned about applicants who use a mail drop as their "residence address").

<div align="right">ANONYMOUS IN MD</div>

Protection of our mailing list always has been one of our highest priorities. While second class mailing allows the post office to look over your shoulder a bit, we don't believe we're giving them anything they don't already have. They don't have access to our subscriber lists. What happens is this: every three years or so a postal inspector comes by and picks ten names at random from our subscriber printout (they never get to keep or copy this rather large printout). We have to show that most of the ten people actually requested our magazine, usually by producing a subscription request. This doesn't concern us since the post office can get our subscribers' names and addresses by simply looking at the envelopes we send out. We don't believe they are using this rule to focus on hackers—a number of the ten names are usually large corporations. But it was admittedly odd that last time one of the names they picked at random was Kevin Mitnick. (We were unable to find his paperwork.) Even with this weirdness, we don't believe this is a threat since virtually every magazine in the country has to go through this. And, if it is a threat, we'll never know if we don't play along for a while. As for alternatives, first class mailing would nearly quadruple our mailing costs and third class would ensure that we're at the very bottom of the priority list.

Dear *2600*:

I personally feel that 2600 *should revisit its apparent "print it all" policy dealing with letters/ads. For example, there is a seven line help wanted ad from someone who wants someone to write/call him and explain to him what an ANSI bomb is. Another wants you to send $3 to get a copy of an ANSI bomb detection program. I think it's important that as a magazine you help to educate those new to the community, but at the same time keep us from wading through letters*

every month asking what a red box is, or why a certain person's red box doesn't work. I would at least suggest that right above the address to send letters, you put "RTFM." Just my couple of cents.

<div align="right">Lincoln</div>

We certainly can't pull an ad because we think the person placing it needs to learn more. As for letters, we can only print a small fraction of what we receive. And a fraction of those will be from beginners who need some basic answers, not a harsh rebuff. That comes later.

1996

Dear *2600*:

I moved from San Antonio, TX, to a small town in South Texas and everyone here who sees me reading your magazine keeps asking me where they can get your mag. I tell them to subscribe but they are afraid their moms, dads, or wives will see it and think they are doing something illegal. I tried to explain that the information is not illegal—it's the "illegal use of" that is illegal. And it's this reason why I ask, "Where is the nearest place to buy your magazine south of Corpus Christi, TX?" In case you're wondering, I get my cousin to buy it and send it to me from Houston, and it seems to me that she is getting tired of doing this so I may be subscribing soon.

<div align="right">s6killer</div>

Subscribing really isn't that bad an idea unless you live in the kind of place where your mail is opened before you get to it. All of our issues are sent in envelopes and the name of the magazine isn't printed on the envelope. As for where to find it, check any bookstore that carries a wide assortment of magazines. If you don't see it, ask. If possible, find out who their distributors are and tell us so we can contact them.

Dear *2600*:

> *OK, here is a* probably *stupid question. I have someone's IP address. I want to know if I can get more information on this person from the IP address. I grabbed this when I was using CU-SeeMe. I want to find out the person's email address and, hell, anything else I can get. I am new to hacking/phreaking/all that stuff. Sorry if I seem so stupid, but I guess you'll just have to deal with it. Thanks.*
>
> <div align="right">BEN</div>

*Actually, the only stupid thing about your question was assuming it was stupid. Everyone who knows the answer at some point had to ask the question. Not asking out of fear is dumb but not nearly as dumb as ridiculing someone for asking. Many times the people who do this don't know the answer themselves! Anyway, as far as your question goes, the IP address will get you the name of their site. That info by itself, though, won't get you the username and, last we checked, CU-SeeMe doesn't reveal an actual username. If you have the IP and access to a UNIX prompt, simply type **nslookup** followed by the IP address and you will see the translation. (This will work in reverse if you are looking for the IP number.) To get a list of all machines on a site, type **nslookup** and hit Return, then **server xxx.site** (where xxx.site is the site name), and finally **ls xxx.site**.*

Dear *2600*:

> *I was wondering if you could help me with something. I want to know how to find information about people through a computer. For example, is there a database with everybody's profile I could get into and read? I hope you can help. I would really appreciate it.*
>
> <div align="right">RAUL
HOUSTON</div>

Yeah. Everybody's profile. Everyone in the world. No problem. The most interesting thing about your question is that in a few years people probably won't understand why we're being sarcastic.

Dear *2600*:

> *I was browsing through Barnes and Noble and came across* 2600. *I've never seen more underground info in a mainstream bookstore before. Is your zine legal just because the FBI hasn't bothered to leaf through it or do you sneak copies on the shelf when nobody's looking or do you play the establishment against itself or what?*
>
> <div align="right">DFW</div>

What we do isn't illegal and no federal agency will be able to change that—at least, not without making a lot of other things illegal.

1997

Dear *2600*:

> *I just want to start out by saying I love your magazine! I am writing to express my concern about the attitudes of some hackers and wannabe hackers. It seems that it is getting harder and harder for newcomers to get pointed in the right direction and to have their questions answered. Some of my friends (who are newbies) have reported to me that even the slightest newbie-type question has quickly earned them the title of "lamer" and "wannabe." Come on, what is this crap? We were all beginners at some time. We were not born with these skills, people. All of us who know the answer at one time had to ask! It seems to me that the purpose of a hacker is to educate others and seek further knowledge for themselves. It now seems that more and more people are being shunned for asking a simple question. If we want to remain a powerful force we have to continue to spread knowledge, not shun others for asking for it. So I encourage newbies to keep asking and if someone treats you like crap and turns their back on you for asking them a question, they are the lamers, not you. In fact, they probably don't know the answer themselves.*
>
> <div align="right">ZeBoK</div>

Dear *2600*:

> I have an AT&T phone in my office. I've noticed at least once a day
> (normally between 12 p.m. and 4 p.m.) it will ring one time for about
> half a ring. Even when I get to it and pick up before it stops I get a dial
> tone. My main question is, is my phone being tapped or do you have
> any idea whatsoever as to what the problem is?
>
> <div align="right">GRIM</div>

Someone or something is calling you and hanging up. There could be thousands of reasons for this including a human error to a screwed up fax machine to a badly programmed phone system. It has nothing whatsoever to do with your phone being tapped.

Dear *2600*:

> I read your mag as often as I can find it and it's definitely dope. Now
> the reason for my letter. I find myself in a potentially lucrative position
> at the moment and I desperately need sound advice. I figured that you
> guys would know enough about this to provide some insight. I have
> recently come into possession of what I believe to be very valuable
> information from a large pharmaceutical company here in Michigan.
> The info consists of a complete 1997 employee roster, a 1995 company
> directory complete with the names of all employees statewide, along
> with their phone numbers, fax numbers, and email numbers. I have
> diagrams detailing their entire voicemail system, along with support-
> ing documentation on their voicemail, and I have access codes and
> passwords to at least one computer system along with some miscel-
> laneous info. With this information a competitor could literally have
> a field day intercepting faxes, reading email, and targeting susceptible
> employees for solicitation.
>
> I recognize that all this falls under the label of corporate espionage
> and I am aware of the risks. What I don't know is how to sell this info.
> How do I offer it to interested parties? How do I find out who is inter-
> ested? And most importantly, how do I approach them with my offer
> without scaring them away? What executive in a large corporation

would I want to seek out? The CEO? Who? This letter is meant to go from me to you and not necessarily be printed in an upcoming issue. If it is, your advice will come too late. I would appreciate if you could send me a personal reply ASAP. Any advice would be greatly appreciated and if I found any of it useful in any way, I would feel compelled to make a "donation" to you fellas to lay out as you see fit. I estimate this info is worth at least somewhere in the low five digits. If I'm wrong, please tell me.

<div align="right">

Mr. Swervon

</div>

You're wrong. But you're correct in saying that our advice will come too late. The only thing we have in common with you is that we are both, as you say, "dope" except you should have a capital D and write it on your mailbox. For those of you who are still within reach, please get it through your heads—we are not, never have been, and never will be into this criminal bull that idiots somehow equate with hacking! Corporate secrets bouncing around a computer system that's open to the world? Hey, that's fair game and they deserve the embarrassment of its discovery. But using this knowledge to line your pockets or, worse, using insider knowledge to get the information and then calling that "hacking" is an affront to any of us who hack for the sake of learning. These kind of people are remarkably similar to our biggest enemies in law enforcement: they refuse to see the difference between hackers and criminals, they twist reality to suit their well-defined purpose in life, they claim to be experts as to what kind of people we really are, and they're sleazy as hell. If only they would find each other.

<div align="center">

⌖⌖⌖

</div>

1998

Dear *2600*:

I'm a Latin American hacker-wannabe, and I would like to know where can I find the software to do some damage over here, cause the damn government here is abusing on mostly all aspects of daily living and they have a few websites and I would just like to show them how the people feel about all their crap....

<div align="right">

Sly

</div>

You sound more like a political prisoner-wannabe. You have to understand that this kind of thing could get you into a lot of hot water. Of course, if the cause is justified it may be a risk you're willing to take. But if you're just looking to play games, take a long hard look at how your government deals with such things before diving into it. If you're still interested, by all means search the web for security weaknesses, find mailing lists and newsgroups that deal with this kind of thing, and, assuming books are allowed in your country, learn as much as you can about how it all works. But please be smart—after all, the beauty of the net is that such political statements can be delivered from anywhere....

Dear *2600*:

> *I have seen your magazine and your website but I am still not sure what exactly your purpose is. Is the magazine for people who break into systems for the pleasure or profit of it, or is it for persons, such as myself, who enjoy learning about such intricate portions of the computing industry? I glimpsed through your latest issue at Tower Records and I noticed some stuff on IP addressing and such (which I enjoyed thoroughly) but then I saw the article on the guy who changed the system time on a virtual pet (which I felt was wasted magazine space, since he did not really get into the specifics) and it confused me a bit about the purpose of your magazine. I am thinking about purchasing a copy, but I don't want to find that after reading the magazine, it wasn't exactly what I was looking for. If you could summarize for me what your magazine is basically about, it would clear up my confusion and help in my decision about making the purchase.*
>
> *Forgive my ignorance, but what does 2600 stand for and what is with the payphone photos?*
>
> THE COMPUTER JUNKIE

If you've read the magazine and visited our site and you still don't know what our "purpose" is, you'll probably get even more confused by the other things we do and say. For the record, 2600 hertz is a magic frequency and we print payphone photos to cover up what's really on the back page. But we've said too much.

Dear *2600*:

> *Alright. There are a few things that piss me off in this world. I don't like it when I am screwed over because of someone who feels they are better than me, I don't like when someone gets on your back for asking something you don't know, and I* don't *like how newer hackers are treated in online society. I myself got interested in hacking about two years ago. When I started out, I had gotten a pretty bad rep in the hacker community. I didn't get caught doing anything, I didn't piss anyone off or do anything stupid,* I just asked a question. *Maybe some people would have thought that it was a dumb question too, but the fact that I was treated with no respect because I did not know something that they did really pissed me off. When I started out I knew that the hacker community was all about free exchange of information and exploring parts of the Internet that were confidential, merely for the thrill of breaking the rules. I did not figure the group to be a bunch of idiots about everything, I did not figure that I would be laughed at like I was an AOL member every time I entered an IRC hack channel, and I* did not *expect for anyone to treat me with any less respect than anyone else. Now, I do not think of all hackers this way, but I feel that these are the few that screw up the way that hackers are looked upon in modern society. Some people really have to mature. Just because you're a hacker doesn't mean you have to be a kid out of high school with nothing to do, because not everyone is like that. So for all of you hackers thinking that you "control" the lesser bunch, think again.*
>
> PaKo

"Laughed at like I was an AOL member"? Sounds like you're guilty of the same gross generalizations you're accusing others of. But your accusations are quite justified—there are far too many snap judgments being made based on questions, names, or originating sites. Why is this? Mostly because people are insecure about their own images so they find it necessary to put others down for whatever reason as quickly as possible. The ironic part about this is that there are and always will be enough idiots for everyone to put down—this prejudging is completely unnecessary unless, of course, the people judging fear for their own reputations. It's not worth blowing a gasket over—these people are what they are and you won't be able to change that. Letting it affect you will only give them more strength. And assuming this is what the hacker world is all about just makes it bad for all of us.

We're about asking questions. That's why we're all here. If you ask a stupid question, you can count on someone telling you that. But you should also be able to count on them answering it to stop you from asking it again.
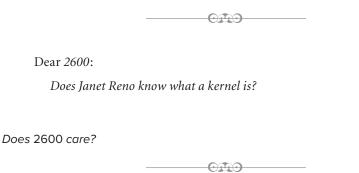
———— ◯◯◯ ————

Dear *2600*:

> *Two FBI agents were at the meeting in New York. They kept leaning in and listening to the conversations. Just a suggestion, but maybe if it were possible to move the meeting somewhere else? A suggestion is the World Trade Center. Directly in the middle of the two three-story buildings are a whole load of seats (out in the open) near a waterfall where tourists go. It'll look like we're a bunch of tourists. Good luck.*
>
> <div align="right">TWISTED CIRCUITS</div>

You're missing the entire point of our meetings. We're not trying to hide! That's why we meet in the middle of public areas. Understand? If FBI agents show up (and just how did you know they were FBI agents?), they're welcome to. Anyone dumb enough to do illegal things at a public meeting won't be getting our support anyway. And if the feds wind up doing illegal things, then we're more than happy to provide them with the arena in which they'll hang themselves.

———— ◯◯◯ ————

Dear *2600*:

> *Does Janet Reno know what a kernel is?*
>
> <div align="right">KRIS</div>

Does 2600 *care?*

———— ◯◯◯ ————

Dear *2600*:

> *While dialing an ex-girlfriend's number repeatedly (she owes me dead presidents and is running), I stumbled on an interesting phenomena. After about eight times of getting her voicemail, the number would come up busy or I would get her busy ("I'm on the phone right now")*

message. Then after another try or two I would get a strange dial tone and then a partial playback of a voicemail message. It lasted about 10 seconds and I assume the message was hers. After the message ended I would get disconnected. I tried back several times within a two-day period and always heard the same partial message playback. It happened five times and from different phone numbers. At the dial tone and during the message, pressing keys seemed to have no effect.

She is in the 201 (Northeast NJ) area code and subscribes to Bell Atlantic's Home Voice Mail. I am pretty sure that dialing the number repeatedly overloads the switch. I wonder if the overload could somehow give me access to more messages or perhaps the entire voicemail box or beyond? Let me know what you find out.

<div align="right">

RepoMonster

</div>

We find it very unlikely that you could single-handedly overload the switch by calling back eight times in a row. What probably happened is that your stalking victim, while in some sort of a panicked state, tried desperately to make a different outgoing message to maybe hide her identity, failing in the process. Either that or she deliberately did this in order to confuse you, which she again obviously failed to accomplish.

<div align="center">⚬⚬⚬</div>

Dear *2600*:

Why is Janet Reno on the cover of 15:2?

<div align="right">

SMOKESCREEN

</div>

Sometimes you have to scare people to get their attention.

<div align="center">⚬⚬⚬</div>

Dear *2600*:

I snail-mailed a letter to you without a return address, and I saw my letter in print in the next issue. My question is was there a reason I was given a new handle and my words edited to say the same first two sentences but the next couple altered? If this is because of monitoring

you guys are under and don't want to get your readers in trouble, I understand. But if it's not, wouldn't it be just like the censoring your mag is against? If this thing is common just tell me, because it does make sense to safeguard your readers. I'd also like to know if once you've given a reader a handle if future letters are appended with the same handle. And if I'm just dumb and paranoid and your response is that it was another guy's letter, then why *is the reason why we only see his? You guys don't have to print this but at least reply to this via email.*

RANT-o-MATIC

We can't reply individually to letters. Letters are signed with the handles or names that we are given. We don't make substitutions. We have no idea what letter you're referring to so we can't address specifics. We edit for clarity, literacy, and, in rare instances, to protect the writer from revealing something damaging about themselves. It's pretty far from censorship.

Dear *2600*:

Please forgive my last email to your magazine. I was drunk at the time.

RANT-o-MATIC

———————— ⟳⟲ ————————

1999 ————————————————————

Dear *2600*:

I was wondering why your association is not writing any articles dealing with the Y2K bug? I have been reading quite a few articles about this upcoming problem and I am interested what the ramifications would be in the hacking world. I was surprised in your last issue when you didn't cover this and downright shocked when I picked up 15:4 and didn't see a peep about it! With the loss of most UNIX-based systems, what will be left of the Internet as well as most of the commercial systems based upon this dated OS? This is the biggest single event in the computer genre since the microprocessor!

ZACK

It's also by far one of the most overblown events. We're being stirred into a panic by people who either have something to sell or some sort of agenda. The potential of the Y2K problem demonstrates nothing new—computers are always vulnerable to certain things and if you let your life be completely controlled by them you're pretty much asking for a rude awakening. It's far more likely that such an awakening will come when you least expect it, not on 1/1/2000. Oh and incidentally, UNIX systems will do just fine.

Dear *2600*:

> *Message: Please help me. I have been hacked on my geocities page. Is there a way to reverse this, or a way to hack it back?*
>
> <div align="right">TOPACE12</div>

If you "hack it back," you may be committing a felony, depending on where you live. Be very careful. We suggest getting a book on HTML to avoid becoming a real legend in the hacker world. Putting up a web page before you know how to put up a web page is generally a very bad idea. The .gov sites are an exception.

Dear *2600*:

> *Great magazine! Anyway, I just wanted to know how I could start my own newsletter. I want to distribute it around a few schools nearby and at 2600 meetings. How could I start one? Should I just type it up on my computer and print it 300 times then put it where the school newspaper goes?*
>
> <div align="right">LeeTKuRp of HoC</div>

This is one of the questions we're asked most frequently. The best advice we can give to any aspiring zine publisher is to focus on content and grow into your audience. If you look at our early issues, they were tiny but filled with material people were hungry for. As the years went on, we expanded. But we never could have started in the style we have now. We weren't ready for it then on many levels. For something like a school newsletter, the same basic rules apply. Make sure

you have something to say. There's nothing more important. Once you have that, work on how you want it to look without draining your abilities. Then figure out the cheapest possible way to get it printed and, before you know it, people will be hunting for it. Good luck.

———— ⚬❦⚬ ————

Dear *2600*:

> OK I have some real serious stuff to tell but I need to be reassured that I can trust your company that you don't do this sorta thing just so you can turn people in then I will tell my very serious and true story for you but I must be reassured first please reply.
>
> <div align="right">Anonymous</div>

How can we lie to you? We published 2600 *for 16 years just so you would finally walk into our little trap. Welcome.*

———— ⚬❦⚬ ————

Dear *2600*:

> Why are people so afraid of hackers? People in my school are afraid I'll do something to their credit or something, and I never even threatened any of them. I'm starting to wish I did.
>
> <div align="right">Valen</div>

Understandable but you must resist the dark side.

———— ⚬❦⚬ ————

Dear *2600*:

> In the main library of my city, I saw that they changed the old Windows NT computers to computers from Sun Microsystems running Solaris. The interface royally stinks and the keys are misplaced. I found out that if you press Alt+O and type anything you want, you'll get a gray screen that says: "Whatchew talkin' 'bout, Willis?" I wonder what is that?
>
> <div align="right">Jack</div>

From what we're told, this has something to do with the financial difficulties "Different Strokes" star Gary Coleman has gotten into. Since he gets a royalty every time that line is used, his financial standing will soon be restored. Your library will receive a bill every time you do that with the help of the secret locator chip that comes with all upgrades.

———— ⊖⚙⊖ ————

2000 ———————————————————

Dear *2600*:

> *What is it that* 2600 *does? (I know, I know, buy the magazine.) Where is the "About" button on your website? Everyone else has one... why don't you? I have heard of* 2600 *from co-workers, so I decided to check it out. After I checked out both "Free" and "Kevin" on the first page (to make sure they both went to the same place), I was unable to find any kind of history or explanation of what exactly* 2600 *is all about. Is it something to do with phones? It is, isn't it! How am I supposed to know?*
>
> <div align="right">Dan Wheeler
MSNBC Interactive</div>

We're working on a special remedial site for the media.

———— ⊖⚙⊖ ————

Dear *2600*:

> *I was thinking of starting a 600 meeting group at my college, just thought I'd see if it was cool with you guys. Is it?*
>
> <div align="right">scorchmonkE</div>

Fine with us. You might want to check with the people at 600 though.

———— ⊖⚙⊖ ————

Dear *2600*:

> *Why does "*resist" appear in the last bullet on the table of contents in the 17:1 Spring 2000 issue?*
>
> <div align="right">PHUCT</div>

That's what is known as a printing artifact. It's a hazard of the digital age. Some people see small words and what appear to be significant comments hidden in their issues. Others see Jesus. As always, we apologize for the confusion and inconvenience.

<p align="center">❦</p>

Dear *2600*:

> *I was wondering how your old issues were originally distributed. They were just sheets of paper with holes punched. Did they come stapled together or in a wrapper or something? Just curious about the history of* 2600.
>
> <div align="right">AKOLADE</div>

Originally, 2600 *was mailed out as three sheets of paper folded into an envelope with loose-leaf holes punched in them. When we expanded to eight pages, we attached the paper so that it was two 11x17 sheets folded to fit in the same size envelope. We'd be interested in seeing recollections from original subscribers on the early days of* 2600.

<p align="center">❦</p>

Dear *2600*:

> *When I first started reading your magazine I had no idea what the hell you were talking about. But my desire to learn the craft of the hacker and its ethics kept me going. Before I knew it, I was doing my thing because the first thing you told me was to read and not ask the dumb question "Can you teach me to hack?" Now all the magazines I read earlier are definitely worth my money. Thanks for your mentorship. I promise to teach and lead the next line of newbies as you lead me in the right direction.*
>
> <div align="right">DREYDAY _ 33
NEW YORK CITY</div>

Dear *2600*:

> What am I supposed to do to have an answer from you? I've wrote
> you an email and nobody answered me anything.
>
> SoJo73RO

Many people take it personally when we're impersonal. But there's really no avoiding it. We get more email than most people could imagine. And while it may indeed seem trivial for one of us to take a few seconds to answer you personally, multiply that by many thousands and all of a sudden we've run out of time to put out a magazine, run a website, do a radio show, fight lawsuits, and work on whatever other project happens to be on the calendar. We've never had a U.S. president return one of our phone calls and we have yet to take offense. We know they'd like to, but there just isn't enough time. Of course, the real irony is that if you had included your question, we might have been able to answer it here.

2001

Dear *2600*:

> A colleague of mine recently went to a seminar in San Francisco
> regarding intrusion detection technology. These seminars are very
> popular now. His instructor, who claimed to be a previous security
> expert for AT&T (isn't everyone?) told the class to read 2600. But the
> warning given was to buy it from the newsstand and not to subscribe,
> otherwise "you will get checked out." I asked him who would be doing
> the checking. But since he didn't have the insight or forethought to ask
> his instructor, it is unclear as to whether the alleged checker-outer is
> associated with 2600 or an outside agency (possibly government?).
>
> So, in the interest of information gathering and because I am a sub-
> scriber, are you going to be checking me out?
>
> Boneman

This would be unnecessary since we checked you out before you subscribed. That's why we made sure you heard about us and followed the plan by subscribing.

Writing this letter, however, was not part of the plan and we will be taking corrective action.

Dear *2600*:

> Let me start by saying that I think your magazine is great. The first time I read it was the issue before the current Winter issue and now I'm hooked. Your blatant honesty about things is great. Anyway, I was wondering about a rumor a friend told me. Supposedly the government blacklists anyone who subscribes to your magazine or anyone who buys it in the stores using a credit card. Now I have no problem buying it with cash, but I was wondering if the rumor is true or not. I'm sorry if this is an annoying question and you receive it often, but I wanted the truth. Keep up the kickass mag.
>
> CyberInferno

Even if it were true, do you think they would tell us? If they did, we'd certainly tell you. But most importantly, if such a thing were going on, the best way to fight it would be to challenge it by getting as many people on those lists as possible. Even the hint of such oppressive tactics should not be tolerated. (And don't forget to wear gloves when handling currency unless you want your fingerprints in the central database.)

Dear *2600*:

> I'm 12 years old and I've picked up your Spring 2001 issue. I'm now trying that decoding thing on the Windows encoder. I've got a couple of questions. What is the difference between a hacker and a cracker? Are there such things as "good hackers?" Do you guys focus on computer security or the opposite? And are there such things as computer whizzes who aren't nerds? If you ask me, I think that 2600 *is the best, because I want to start a software company someday. Oh, yeah, why do you guys call it* 2600 Magazine?
>
> Adam J.

Where do we begin? How about before answering your questions, we remind our loyal readers that it's extremely important that questions like these get addressed patiently and as frequently as necessary. The people who ask them have obviously been influenced by all kinds of outside distortions and unless we take the time to correct them, they could easily become far more prevalent.

Now then, let's address these questions. "Cracker" is simply a word created by people who are tired of correcting misconceptions about hackers. The problem with doing this is that it preserves the misconceptions under a different name. By dismissing someone as a "cracker," we ensure that nobody knows any facts as to what the person is actually doing. Is the person damaging computer systems? Then he can be called a vandal. Is he using a computer to fraudulently bill other people's credit cards? Then he's engaging in credit card fraud. The point is we have plenty of ways of describing people who do bad things with computers or technology, just as we have existing laws to prosecute truly illegal activity. To answer your second question, if you believe that what hackers do is good, then there are quite a few good hackers. What hackers do is figure out technology and experiment with it in ways many people never imagined. They also have a strong desire to share this information with others and to explain it to people whose only qualification may be the desire to learn. There are quite a lot of people who call themselves hackers but relatively few who fit the definition. This is because our society doesn't seem to require someone to prove they're really a hacker— presumably because most people are so awestruck by the very concept and by the belief that they couldn't possibly understand what a hacker is, let alone question one. Suffice to say that if the "hackers" you know seem primarily interested in fashion, image, and putting down anyone who's new or of a certain age, it's quite possible they've simply latched onto a culture they themselves don't understand or appreciate.

As for your other questions, hackers need to experiment with—and appreciate—the concepts of computer security and security breaching. It's hypocritical to treat such things differently as your own situation changes. For instance, if your computer system gets breached, you should treat it as you would have wanted the security manager of the system you once breached to have treated it—however long ago that may have been. If you truly believe in the hacker spirit, then that should follow you through life, not end as soon as you "grow up." And yes, it's possible to be a whiz and not be a nerd. In fact, most any combination is possible.

As for our name, 2600 *hertz was the magic frequency that people with blue boxes used to seize lines and explore the old phone network. Which brings up another important point—hacking is by no means confined to computers.*

<center>⊙⚬⊙</center>

Dear *2600*:

> *I have a story that may interest you. However I'm afraid that if I published it, I wouldn't be around to see it if you know what I mean. Can I submit a story anonymously?*
>
> <div align="right">Phaceoff</div>

We know exactly what you mean. Many people submit stories to us and then go on vacation and wind up not seeing them when they're published. It's a very real fear that should not be ridiculed. And to answer your unrelated question, yes, by default all stories are submitted anonymously. Your byline is what you want it to be. Naturally, you should take steps to ensure that your outgoing mail isn't being monitored.

<center>⊙⚬⊙</center>

Dear *2600*:

> *Like most of the world I watched in horror as terrorists attacked New York and Washington last Tuesday. I am relieved to hear that the* 2600 *team is safe and I wish to express my sympathy to anyone who lost family or friends in the attacks.*
>
> *There's not much that I can do to help in this situation. I don't have any of the equipment listed as being required for the rescue operation. I'm overseas so donating blood wouldn't help. Is there any fund which I can donate to which will assist in restoring some communications in the disaster area?*
>
> <div align="right">The _ Chaotic _ 1</div>

Obviously, needs have changed since September. On the 11th, people were lining up for hours in order to give blood—but the sad fact was that not very many survivors were found. Don't think that this means such things aren't desperately needed. We heard of cases where people actually refused to give blood unless it

was guaranteed to be used for WTC survivors! We can only hope that most people have come to realize how essential such donations are every day everywhere. If anything positive can come out of September 11, perhaps this is it.

2002

Dear *2600*:

> *I want to learn how to "hack" in such a bad way it makes me sick! I have the hunger for the information and a* lot *of time on my hands. I don't know how to even* begin *to start my hacker education, what books to buy, what progs or tools to get. I just picked up your mag in a bookstore and couldn't believe it. Finally answers or some type of help! I was ecstatic! Can you guys at least point me in the right direction? By the way, you guys* rock!

<div align="right">

Mingus

</div>

We get about a dozen of these letters every day. So consider yourself honored that yours was selected completely at random. There are a couple of things that have to be understood. First, relatively few people are hackers, even though quite a few either want to be or walk around saying they are. Most of what constitutes hacking is the whole process of figuring things out. While we can offer tips and suggestions on specific applications of technology, we cannot tell you how to think. That's something you either develop on your own or not. If you keep an open mind and don't shy away from activities which most would view as a complete waste of time, you're off to a good start. And learning a little history is always a wise move—there are plenty of online resources in addition to our magazine which document the milestones of our community.

Dear *2600*:

> *I think my girlfriend has been cheating on me and I wanted to know if I could get her password to Hotmail and AOL. I am so desperate to find out. Any help would be appreciated. Thanks.*

<div align="right">

HSFk2

</div>

And this is yet another popular category of letter we get. You say any help would be appreciated? Let's find out if that's true. Do you think someone who is cheating on you might also be capable of having a mailbox you don't know about? Do you think that even if you could get into the mailbox she uses that she would be discussing her deception there, especially if we live in a world where Hotmail and AOL passwords are so easily obtained? Finally, would you feel better if you invaded her privacy and found out that she was being totally honest with you? Whatever problems are going on in this relationship are not going to be solved with subterfuge. If you can't communicate openly, there's not much there to salvage.

Dear *2600*:

> *My father passed away last year. Unfortunately he used my name and Social Security number in the past. Now I don't have a good credit report and I need help. Can you help me? I am the father of two baby girls and I would like to buy a house one day.*

LOP

Assuming you don't want to continue the family tradition and simply use your kids' SSNs, you need to clear your name. You seem to be under the impression that hackers go around wiping people's credit reports or creating new identities. Of the relatively few who do know how to easily do such things, hardly any would ever do it for hire. And we don't talk to them.

So the first step is for you to stop acting like you're guilty of a crime. Unless you are. (We still won't be able to help you but we'd at least respect your honesty.) If it happened the way you said it did, there are ways of dealing with it. Check with the Social Security Administration and the various credit bureaus and tell us what they say. If you're forthcoming with them and don't do anything stupid like ask people to help you get fake credit, you at least have a chance of setting things right. And even if that doesn't work, there are other channels which can give you a voice.

Dear *2600*:

> *I've been reading* 2600 *for, well, most years I could read and compre-*
> *hend what was written on the pages of* 2600. *It comes time now that*
> *I have a band and we have been ripping our brains out for names to*
> *call ourselves and finally I suggested "2600." My only questions are:*
> *Is this legal? Is this okay with the writers/editors of my favorite zine?*
> *I know* 2600 *is only a degree of megahertz used in phreaking, but it is*
> *a name trademarked by you. Is this all right?*
>
> DREW

It's hertz, not megahertz. While it's a very nice thought, we wouldn't be entirely
comfortable with a band going around with that name. What would happen if you
became really big and your music started to suck? People would forever associ-
ate the name "2600" with corporate rock and we'd probably wind up getting sued
by the giant record company that signed you. Imagine the irony. But seriously, we
have no say in this. You can call yourself whatever you want. We'd be happier,
though, if it were a reference of some sort rather than the entire name. After all,
there's always the chance that we're going to quit this publishing thing and turn
into musicians one day.

Dear *2600*:

> *I want to have a* 2600 *barbecue on my roof this summer. How can I*
> *advertise?*
>
> MARBLEHEAD

And just what in hell is a "2600 barbecue?" If you're trying to set up a meeting,
just look at our guidelines at `www.2600.com/meetings`. *It's unlikely having meetings*
on your roof would qualify though as our meetings are in public areas and usually
don't involve fire.

Dear *2600*:

> *In the Backtalk section of 19:1 you advised Mingus that "Most of*
> *what constitutes hacking is the whole process of figuring things out."*

Fair enough. However, you precede this statement by claiming that "...relatively few people are hackers, even though quite a few either want to be or walk around saying they are." Buh!? Granted, there are plenty of people who claim to be hackers despite having no knowledge of how to go about hacking and, more importantly, no interest in that knowledge. Nonetheless, if the hallmark of a hacker is the ability to figure things out, then surely a great many people are hackers, though most may not choose to classify themselves that way. It seems to me that the more constructive answer to the multitude of pests who ask to be "taught" to hack is to stress that anyone can be a hacker, but a true hacker teaches him/herself.

<div align="right">CZAR DONIC</div>

Your way of saying it is certainly more constructive but it's also important to understand that while anyone can be a hacker, relatively few actually see this through and far too many attach the name to themselves for no other reason than wanting attention. What we're trying to say is that people need to work at it—like most anything else, it doesn't just happen because you want it to.

<div align="center">⚬⚬⚬</div>

Dear *2600*:

Thanks for your kind information on your interesting website. I do not know where can I find an answer for my question but please trust me that I need to find a way to hack the passwords of one of the users of Yahoo! mail service.

<div align="right">ALICE</div>

OK, we trust you.

<div align="center">⚬⚬⚬</div>

Dear *2600*:

I am living in Japan. I will be racing pro here and I would like to put the 2600 logo on my car. It will consist of the 2600 logo along with your URL. I will email you pictures of the car when the design is finished. I

also have Jinx Hackwear going on the car. I think the more we can get people to open their eyes in every aspect of life, not just the technology industry, the better....

<div align="right">GARY</div>

We have a logo?

Dear *2600*:

> *I'm not trying to piss off the magazine and all of the hacker community by asking this question, as I too am a phreak, but the question is why is it okay for us to snoop into other people's private files and though we're not destroying anything, look around? I mean, I find exploring and learning okay, but hacking isn't just the method of "checking things out." It does involve eventually invading people's personal documents. I really enjoy my privacy, but hacking and phreaking are like having someone stare through my window and I'm morally supposed to be okay with this? I'm not reprimanding anyone for hacking/phreaking as I enjoy both and I love this zine, but why is it okay for hackers that don't value the privacy of others, but when theirs is at risk, they can freak out? Explain. Thanks.*

<div align="right">ANONYMOUS</div>

First off, it's not okay to violate someone's privacy, no matter what you call yourself. Doing this is not, contrary to popular belief, one of the tenets of the hacker world. That's not to say it doesn't happen—it most certainly does. But most people who are involved in hacking have no interest in violating privacy and are, in fact, more interested in protecting it. The fact that massive privacy holes exist and that hackers are the ones who often discover this doesn't mean that their goal was to violate privacy. It's far more likely in such a case that the goal was to prove a system insecure, be the first to figure something out, or demonstrate that a supposedly trustworthy entity really isn't all that trustworthy. There are those who veer off the path and abuse this just as there are those who steal when they realize how easy it is. To assume that these acts are at all related to hacking is just plain wrong. But it's good to see people trying to think it all through. Read on for another angle to this.

Dear *2600*:

> *I've recently discovered the joys of searching for *.eml files on Kazaa. Microsoft Outlook saves email messages as *.eml, even though they're just normal text files. Lots of people have emails saved which they don't realize they're sharing. So far I've gotten instructions to call the American embassy in Lebanon, two moms cursing up a storm about some other mom who goes to their kids' hockey games, some home-wrecker begging the "if it wasn't for* her *could you have feelings for me?" question, lots of product registration codes, and lots of pictures of ugly strangers. It's fun! Just be warned that lots of these are viral, since I guess people want to save viral messages as evidence or something. Lots of Nimdas, Klezes, and stuff. Even worse than that, though, are the massive amounts of cheezy forwarded jokes you'll get.*
>
> <div align="right">Rob T Firefly</div>

Now this is clearly an invasion of privacy. But it exists because of bad design and lack of education. It's unreasonable to expect people to not look at something that is literally in the public domain simply because it's supposed to be private. That's just human nature. It's more reasonable to expect people to learn from this and do a better job designing systems and keeping their own files private—scenarios made all the more likely because someone played around with a system and figured something out. Again, we don't condone this kind of abuse but we also don't believe it warrants an hysterical reaction with all kinds of retribution. At least now there's a better chance that people will be aware of this.

<div align="center">⊙⚬⚬</div>

2003

Dear *2600*:

> *How can I get a copy for myself? By the way I am living in Iran.*
>
> <div align="right">KAYVAN</div>

We do offer a special "Axis of Evil" incentive for people inside participating countries. Simply mail us something of interest from your country and we'll respond

with anything from a single issue to a lifetime subscription, depending on how interesting what you send us is. Just another way to annoy the authorities.

⸻ ◯⚉◯ ⸻

Dear *2600*:

> Now that I have had an article published, is there someone that I could send future articles to through a more direct means? I have no problem submitting them like everyone else. I am just blatantly trying to jump the line.

> No Name

No line jumping here, sorry. Every submission is judged on its own merits, not the name(s) attached to it. But it was probably wise of you to leave your name off of that question.

⸻ ◯⚉◯ ⸻

Dear *2600*:

> Why do hackers refer to a hacker that is not causing a problem with the system he or she is observing a "white hat" and the one who is committing a crime a "black hat?" You would think a group of ultra-liberal free spiriters would be less driven by color. Don't say it doesn't matter what color is chosen for the term because if it doesn't matter then reverse the terminology. I'm personally getting tired of white people associating crime, evil, and bad things with my heritage... especially when the white people in our society are committing most of the crimes.

> Ken

To begin with, hackers are not the people coining the "black hat/white hat" phrases and using them. Rather, they are used by the people who have money to make by creating an atmosphere of fear mongering so that people buy their products or attend their expensive conferences. As to the problems you have with the actual colors that are being used, that's a language issue that goes far beyond

anything we can address here. But you certainly don't help matters by continuing to label races albeit in a different direction. And finally, please don't label hackers as being allied with any one particular political view. We certainly have our opinions here but they are just that—our opinions. They may or may not reflect what most other hackers agree with. Individuals are free to make up their own minds.

2004

Dear *2600*:

> *I realize that most of you don't agree with projects like TIA or Big Brother, but at the same time you want all information public. How do these two coexist? Would you agree with Big Brother if anyone could access the information it collected? Keep up the great work.*
>
> TCHNPRGRMR

Actually we know of very few people who want all information to be public. We believe information, particularly that of a private nature, needs to be protected. Often this isn't the case and one of the best ways of determining this is for systems to be constantly tested for security holes. This leads to the messenger frequently being blamed for the message. Hackers who uncover unprotected private information are treated as if they created the weak security when all they did was figure out a way to defeat it. The media portrays them as the threat to your privacy when in actuality hackers do much more to protect it. We consider their actions to be responsible, especially when they reveal their findings to the world.

Meanwhile, all kinds of corporate and governmental entities seek to invade our privacy on a constant basis for reasons ranging from surveillance to marketing. While it would solve nothing to give everyone access to the information these entities collect, it's extremely important to understand exactly what they're doing and how, as well as ways to protect oneself from such intrusions. This is something else they don't want you to know.

Dear *2600*:

> I'm thinking of starting a meeting in my city. Unfortunately, I've never
> had the opportunity to actually attend a 2600 *meeting. Can you tell*
> *me what basically happens at these meetings? Are they organized by*
> *any one person and if so, how are they run? How many people are*
> *usually in attendance (on average)? I just want to make sure that if I*
> *go ahead with this, I do it right. One way that I would like to survey*
> *the interest in starting a meeting here is to print inserts and put them*
> *in the* 2600 *issues in my local Chapter bookstores, requesting that*
> *those interested contact me to assert their interest. In order to get the*
> *inserts in as many issues as possible, I'd like to do this as soon as an*
> *issue comes out. Can you tell me when the issues hit newsstands?*
>
>   N˛cow

Meetings are open to everyone and there is no set agenda. To many, "gathering"
would be a better description. We don't tolerate any kind of disruptive, exclusion-
ary, or illegal behavior and many are surprised by how little of that we've had to
deal with. You don't have to be an expert in any particular field but curiosity and
open-mindedness are essential if you want to get anything out of a meeting. More
*info can be found on our website (*www.2600.com/meetings*). You can also find out*
when an issue is about to hit the stands on our main page.

Dear *2600*:

> *Hi my name is Ashmit. I guess you already know that lol. Anyways,*
> *I got your email from the* www.2600.com *website. The reason I am*
> *emailing you is because I was hoping you could help me out with a*
> *little something. I need to know whether you can gain access into a*
> *web server and its databases. If you can then we are set. Basically, here*
> *is the deal in a nutshell. I need someone with the abilities to get into*
> *my school server and change a few things. I have saved up $3500 over*
> *the past year for this and am willing to pay it in cash, as I am from*
> *the Winnipeg area. You do not have to worry about getting caught*
> *because I am sure as long as you erase your traces, there is no way of*
> *either one of us being caught,* guaranteed. *I hope you can help me out*
> *because I am extremely desperate.*
>
>   Ash

"Desperate" doesn't begin to cover it. Whatever your problems, and we certainly won't try to minimize them, they are nothing compared to the world of hurt you'll enter if you do stupid things like offer complete strangers money to help you do illegal things. But even if you weren't a complete stranger we would tell you the same thing. And just where did you get this distorted view of the hacker world where this is the kind of thing we do? Yeah, we know—the mass media. It's still no excuse. There should be something in your genetic code that alerts you to the fact that you're doing something extremely stupid and wrong.

So we're clear, the offer was in Canadian dollars and not American, right?

———————— ⊖⚙⊖ ————————

Dear *2600*:

> *I have acquired info of a possibly useful or at least informative nature that could affect multiple governments. I acquired this info after being arrested for crimes related to it by the Secret Service. I am still going through the courts. Do you want this information?*
>
> LeStat

You have to ask? That's what we're here for!

———————— ⊖⚙⊖ ————————

2005 ——————————————

Dear *2600*:

> *I'm just one lame kid from Serbia who wants to learn all of the techniques. I know a lot about hacker history, LOD, MOD, Kevin Mitnick, etc. Please help me to learn how to become an elite one day.*
>
> tamsto

The first thing to learn is never to use the word "elite" as a noun. In fact, don't even use it as an adjective. It's radically lame. If you're really interested in learning, there is much you can ingest through these pages and by investigating on the net. It's not about doing things the way everyone else does. It's not about one particular form of technology or a series of steps. Rather, it's a state of mind that you can

apply to almost anything in your life. It involves questioning, experimenting, persistence, thinking outside the box, and, above all, avoiding those people who latch onto the hacker community to be trendy. These are things you must develop within yourself; there are no magic answers to memorize. Once you have a hacker mentality (which comes quite naturally to many in the hacker world), you can then apply it to whatever you already have an interest in and begin to break new ground. Good luck.

Dear *2600*:

> *Just wondering why* 2600 *isn't a monthly or bimonthly publication? Thank you for your time and keep up the good fight.*
>
> <div align="right">Jason</div>

We're not monthly or bimonthly for the same reasons we're not weekly or daily. We're quite comfortable in the quarterly lifestyle.

2006

Dear *2600*:

> *I have written an article that I am interested in publishing anonymously. I do have some concerns over the protection of my identity should the company I am writing about demand it of you. I have been a reader for about eight years now and would never have considered writing the article to begin with if I was not confident that your organization would keep my identity anonymous, but I guess I am just looking for a little reassurance before submitting it. I have sought legal advice on the topic and was told that if the company were to invest in identifying me and if they were to successfully identify me they might have a case for revealing corporate secrets. To be honest, even as I am writing this I seriously doubt this particular company would care to invest in finding me.... Then again....*

Also, I know there are no strict guidelines for article submission as far as length, but my article is a little over 2000 words. Is that cool?

NAME REMOVED

First, we sure hope that wasn't your real name you used in that letter if you're this worried about keeping your identity secret. We can keep our mouths shut but many others can't. In all of the years we've been publishing, we have never given out the name of someone who didn't want their identity revealed. There have been unfortunate instances where information in the name someone used was enough for their employer to track them down and take action. That's why it's so important to not give away details of your location, name, appearance, or anything which someone could use the process of elimination in order to come knocking at your door. We take confidentiality very seriously, even if other members of the media don't. But you also have to take precautions on your end, such as not submitting something under the same username that people already know you by. If you wish to remain anonymous, just say so and we won't use any name at all to identify you. But even this may not be enough if you're sending email from an insecure location, such as your school or workplace. As for length, that's not something to worry about if your subject matter is interesting, which we suspect it is.

<div align="center">❦</div>

2007

Dear *2600*:

> *We're a group of young hacktivists from Canada and we are going to be starting our own printed mag. We're going to be breaking ground with some top notch articles and I'm sure a few of our articles will mention* 2600. *When they do, I'll email you again to let you know, as we would love to reference and tell people about your mag. Here's the thing: I am interested in hearing a short story about how* 2600 *got started and put on the stands all over. Any tips? Thanks in advance for the advice.*

ALEXANDER CHASE

It sure wouldn't be a short story. The thing about starting a magazine is that it takes a really long time to develop from scratch. We began very small and grew to a size we were comfortable with. That's the most important bit of knowledge we can share with any new publication. If you start too big, you will burn yourselves out and go broke in the process. That's assuming you aren't already big with lots of money to invest. But then you're not really a zine. The key is patience and determination, coupled with a good dose of insanity. We wish you luck and look forward to seeing what you come up with.

Dear *2600*:

> *I just realized upon Googling my past screen names that a letter I wrote a while ago was published in your magazine but I didn't receive my free subscription! This is probably because I stopped checking my last email address and moved on to other emails.*
>
> <div align="right">Marcio</div>

It's also probably because we don't offer free subscriptions for letters. Look at how many letters we get! We would go bankrupt extremely fast. We offer free subscriptions for articles, which generally go into far more detail than letters. If, however, you were to send us a two-paragraph article and expect a free subscription for that (as many do), it would likely get converted into a letter if it were to get printed at all.

Dear *2600*:

> *What OS do you prefer: Windows, Linux, or Mac?*
>
> <div align="right">Davis</div>

We don't discuss religion here.

Dear *2600*:

> *Given that there are no guarantees in life anyways, what would you say to a curious one who wonders approximately when the deadline is for letters to the editor for the next issue? Thanks!*
>
> Omid

We would say that you made the deadline. Congratulations.

⎯⎯⎯⎯ ⊙⌘⊙ ⎯⎯⎯⎯

Dear *2600*:

> *Hey guys. Are you interested in Polish payphones? Well, if you are I could take some photos. Just tell me.*
>
> suN8Hclf

While this somehow feels like we're entering into a drug deal, yes, we are interested. Hook us up. Thanks.

⎯⎯⎯⎯ ⊙⌘⊙ ⎯⎯⎯⎯

Dear *2600*:

> *Do you have any surveys which show the most popular computer companies? Under each company what is the most popular computer? What is the most popular OS? Who has the best customer service? Do you have anyone who can write a program starting with DEBUG? Do you have anyone who does assembly language programming on a DOS/Windows OS? If so, what books does he recommend to help me learn this language?*
>
> FK

Do you ever write anything that isn't a question? Most of what you're asking has nothing to do with our subject matter, is way too general, and is really stuff that you get to learn on your own after playing around with computers for a while. You will find plenty of people willing to give you advice once you get involved.

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2008

Dear *2600*:

> *I always thought* 2600 *came from 2600Hz. Today a friend told me that Amiga* 2600 *was meant. Now we have some money on this question. Can you help me out with the proper answer?*
>
> <div align="right">JAN</div>

We can say with certainty that our name has nothing to do with the Amiga 2600. You probably meant the Atari 2600. We had nothing to do with that either. Nor did our magazine, whose very first headline on our very first front page in January 1984 shouted out "Ahoy!", have anything at all to do with the Commodore computer magazine named Ahoy! which started publication the same damn month. ("Ahoy!" incidentally is the correct quote of how Alexander Graham Bell used to answer the phone, despite what you might learn from certain televised cartoons.) Now that we've gotten all of that sorted, perhaps we should discuss what percentage we will receive of the bet we helped you win.

Dear *2600*:

> *I'm a huge fan of* 2600 *and frequent visitor to your site. I've been reading the magazine (when I can find it) for over a decade now, since I was a freshman in high school.*
>
> *I'm writing to ask if you, or anyone who runs the site, knows the exact date the first issue of* 2600 *was published. I know it was January 1984 and that it probably actually hit the shelves of stores within the first week of the month, but I can't nail down any one day to credit the event to. I run a little blog called* The Great Geek Manual *where I write a daily chronology called "This Day in Geek History" and, as a fan, I would like to include the first publication of your magazine. In fact, I would love to include all the major milestones in the history of both your magazine and website, if anyone has any dates handy. It's not a very popular blog, just a few dozen readers, but I would really appreciate any help you could give me. Thanks!*
>
> <div align="right">ANDREW</div>

We didn't hit any shelves until years after we started publishing. In 1984 we were a fledgling monthly newsletter that only had three sheets of paper. Our first issue in January went out to several dozen people and was mailed sometime in the middle of the month. Those of you early subscribers may remember that we fell into the habit of mailing each issue on the 12th of the month for some reason. We hope that helps.

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Dear *2600*:

How can I use the services of a hacker?

ETSJOBS

Whereas most religions require you to pray or do some sort of penance in order to obtain the goods and services you desire, with hackers you have but to ask and pay our nominal fee. Obtain any password, change any grade, even travel back in time when necessary! Your wish (plus the fee) is our command. Now go tell all your friends.

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Dear *2600*:

Tell me how much one of your hackers would charge me to delete my criminal record from the Texas police database.

[Name Deleted]

Well, we would start with erasing your latest crime, that of soliciting a minor to commit another crime. (Your request was read by a small child here in the office.) After you're all paid up on that, we will send out the bill for hiding your identity by not printing your real name, which you sent us like the meathead you apparently are. After that's all sorted, we can assemble our team of hackers, who sit around the office waiting for such lucrative opportunities as this to come along, and figure out even more ways to shake you down. It's what we do, after all. Just ask Fox News.

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Dear *2600*:

> *I have a lot of hacking-related pics on my phone and I was wondering how I should get them to you in a usable format since I do not have anything that will hook up to my computer to get the pictures off of the phone. Any advice would be very helpful.*
>
> <div align="right">ERIK</div>

It seems odd that you have a picture phone with no means of sharing pictures. If you can use email on your phone, you could always email them to us. If that doesn't work, you're just going to have to send us the phone. (And don't forget the charger.)

Dear *2600*:

> *I'd like to publish two articles; can I meet a staff member?*
>
> <div align="right">MUSIQUE MAISON</div>

Not so fast there. You don't get a personal visit until you publish 20 articles! Nice try though.

Dear *2600*:

> *What is the point of the meetings?*
>
> <div align="right">DANIEL</div>

Since we apparently won't fool you with the obvious reason, we can tell you the real one: to get people out of their homes on the first Friday of the month so that the monitoring devices can be installed.

Dear *2600*:

> *Is it true that a subscription (paid by credit card) to your magazine would probably get you on an FBI watchlist?*
>
> <div align="right">WYLLIE</div>

If you believe such a thing exists, then making that list as large as possible is the best known way of fighting it. We have strong doubts that a list of this sort is out there, as we've heard all kinds of different versions of this fear expressed over three decades and we have yet to see any real evidence that supports the theory. But the danger of our surveillance state eventually reaching this degree of accountability certainly isn't beyond the realm of possibility and it almost seems as if there are members of the public who actually want something like this. Clearly, we represent those people who don't, and it's only through education and constant vigilance that we can stave off such a nightmare for the foreseeable future. People being intimidated into not getting a copy of our magazine only moves us closer to the oppressive scenario dreaded by so many.

2009

Dear *2600*:

> *My name is Tuyishime Aimable. I live in Rwanda. I joined the* 2600 *community a few months ago. I like what you are doing. The problem is that I can't attend any meeting or any other event because I live very far from you. So I would like to ask you if you could help me to grow in that community otherwise or help me promote the* 2600 *in my country.*
>
> <div align="right">Aimable</div>

Contrary to popular belief, you don't have to live in the Western world or even have access to high tech in order to be part of the hacker community or to spread the enthusiasm of the hacker culture. If we look back at the really early days in our own country, hackers did just fine playing with rotary dial phones and glorified electric typewriters. While technology is often at the heart of it all, it's actually not just about the technology in the end. It's about the thought process. If you learn to think like a hacker, where you are and what you have access to will become secondary. By questioning everything—human or machine—and by constantly experimenting and sharing your findings, you'll be able to apply this hacker mind-set to almost any situation and, in so doing, find other like-minded individuals. This is another reassuring fact. There are always other people, no matter where you

are, who will share your curiosity and passion. It's just a question of reaching them. So our advice is to use this distance as an opportunity to start something fresh and to be a real pioneer in your country. Just because you're far away from us doesn't mean that you can't start running your own meetings or events. Of course, every country is different with regards to rules, what is tolerated, and how individual thinkers are dealt with. So make sure you're familiar with what you're up against and what you're willing to fight for. As hackers are almost always heavily involved in freedom of speech issues, the reaction against them can sometimes be a bit heavy handed. This is true of any authority figure. So be aware of this, keep reading a lot, and always maintain a level of curiosity. You will find the hacker community all around you.

Dear *2600*:

> First of all, I recently subscribed to 2600 *and I love it.*
>
> *I was thinking of starting my own small quarterly magazine and was wondering if you had any advice. Thanks!*
>
> <div align="right">Michael</div>

We assume you're talking about starting an actual printed magazine as opposed to something online. Going print is a lot harder and has many challenges but we find the printed word is more enduring, if only because it requires a certain commitment that oftentimes doesn't exist in the glut of electronic prose. Naturally, there are exceptions on both ends of the spectrum but print is in our blood so we're naturally going to feel its magic.

The best advice we can offer you is to let your zine grow into a rhythm. Most new zines either overdo it and get burned out (or lose a ton of money) or don't put in enough effort and wind up never really going anywhere. You need to gauge your readership and figure out where your content is coming from and how much of it you can manage for each issue. These things take time and you will almost certainly not get it right from the start. The important thing is to realize that you will be putting effort, money, and material into this project and you may never wind up in the black. If you can accept that and work it out so that in the worst case scenario you don't lose a fortune, then you have a much better chance of evolving into a regular publication that might, at the least, break even. But, no matter what, having

that printed object in front of you is an achievement you will be proud of for many years to come. That's why it's always better to try and fail rather than avoid failing by not trying.

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Dear *2600*:

> *Hello. My name is Ray. I am visiting Honduras, and for way too long. A year too long. Is there any way that I can enter the Honduran database to alter my date of entry and my port of entry? Thank you for any help that you can give me.*
>
> <div align="right">Ray</div>

So you'd like for us to erase a year off of your stay in Honduras? There's bound to be a good story in here somewhere and we'd really like to hear it. We have a hunch it might be a little more complicated than simply changing dates in one country's database. We'd probably have to change a second country's database, too. And mess with the memories of the people who were supposed to have seen you for the past year. It could get a little tricky. And, oh yes, expensive. But we've said too much.