

## Computer buffs getting the message

By Cecil Rosner

On any given evening, hundreds of computer buffs across the city will access one of Winnipeg's electronic bulletin boards to leave messages that range from the educational to the downright obscene.

At least 30 computerized bulletin board systems, or BBS's, have sprung up in Winnipeg over the last three years. For the inveterate message-leaver, the marriage of computer and telephone line has eliminated the need to pin notes onto the boards of supermarkets or community centres.

### MicroWorld/18

"Winnipeg has one of the most active BBS systems in the country," said Don Pochinko, co-owner of Tronica Computer Centre on McPhillips Street.

Pochinko dedicates about \$10,000 worth of computer hardware in his store to run a bulletin board system himself. Users can read reviews of new movies and videos, exchange information about their computers, leave electronic mail to their friends, buy or sell computer accessories and generally chat about anything that interests them.

Anyone with a computer and modem can telephone one of the services and leave or read messages. Some charge fees for the service, but most are run out of people's homes and are free.

Because a bulletin board can be set up by anyone with the appropriate software, there is a wide variance in the quality of systems available in the city.

Tec-Voc School, St. James-Assiniboia and River East school divisions have set up systems to help students develop their computer skills and to promote educational goals. Computer user groups also use the systems to exchange ideas about their machines and discuss developments in software.

One of the boards, called Dial-Your-Match, is an electronic dating service which allows users to chat via their computer terminals to prospective mates.

While the serious systems insist on a proper code of conduct, many boards have no qualms about allowing users to leave risqué and obscene messages. Some feature special X-rated sections.

A Winnipeg Grade 11 student, who operates a local BBS, makes no apologies about the content of his system.

"Mine's an open board. You can do whatever you want on it, and I don't basically care," he said.

"Some people might be offended, but if that's what the users want,

### WHERE TO CALL

Here is a sampling of some of Winnipeg's computer bulletin boards. They can be only be accessed by using computers equipped with modems.

RCP/M I	943-9007
RCP/M II	774-8963
RCP/M III	775-3296
VE4-MICRO	942-1109
TVC5	685-7921
Tronica	532-5411
Demented Data	832-5397
Late Night	832-6694
The Hideout	774-2231
M.U.G.	839-9938

that's what they get," he said. Another board, called Demented Data Systems, openly talks about software piracy and exchanging copyrighted materials. Disclaimers are often displayed on the boards, stating that the operator assumes no responsibility for material that users choose to post.

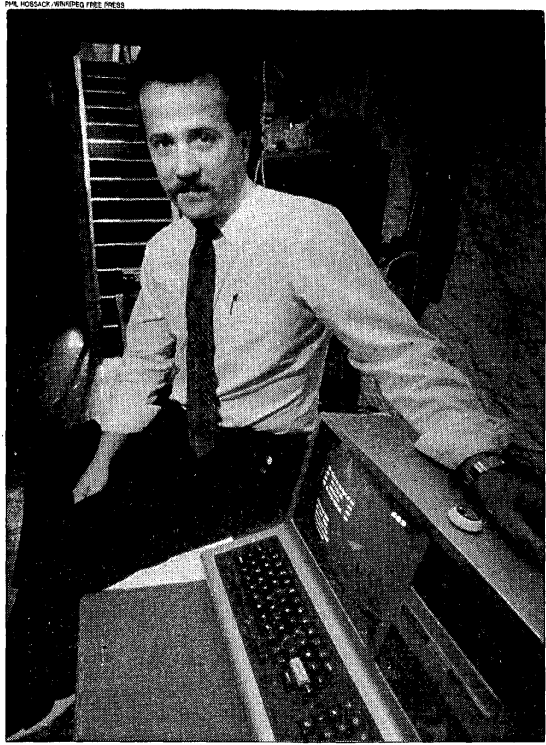
Many system operators (or Sysops in the lingo of the bulletin boards) recognize the potential for mischief inherent in the systems and are taking steps to verify the identity of users before they are allowed on-line.

Larry Isford, owner of J&J Electronics which runs one of the larger systems in the city, said a user Schneider said there are no major problems with the bulletin board services in the city. MTS only monitors the J&J board because it was asked to, and doesn't bother keeping tabs on the other systems, he said.

As for trading of illegal information on the boards or using software to make unauthorized long distance calls, Schneider said they have no evidence that is taking place in Winnipeg.

"Maybe we're a bit of a backwater, but we're fortunate we don't have any of that here."

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Message left on Larry Isford's BBS did not amuse a senior provincial politician.

has made its way to Winnipeg, according to some veteran bulletin board users. The program is being used discreetly so as not to arouse the suspicion of MTS security.

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are some of the bigger public database systems, but charges for using the services can run \$30 an hour or higher.

Some Manitoba users say they are encouraged by the establishment of a large Canadian system called TimeLine in Laval, Que. Users can access the system by going through the local Datapac network, which allows them to use the service for about seven cents a minute instead of normal long distance charges.

Charles Sinesofsky, one of TimeLine's system managers, said more than 300 people across Canada have joined the service and are in regular communication with each other. As well, a number of computer user groups have expressed interest in using the service as a way of having members across the country stay in touch.

"It took over two years to develop the software for the system, and

we're still adding and upgrading," said Sinesofsky in an interview conducted via computer terminal through the TimeLine service.

Up to 15 users can log onto the system at once, which allows people to conduct conversations through their terminals. For anyone who regularly gets in touch with someone from another part of the country, the service is far cheaper than normal long distance charges, he said.

Some users prefer to spend all their time playing StarFire, a space game which pits people against opponents from other parts of the country who are on the system at the same time.

Sinesofsky said running the system is a full-time occupation, although he does other freelance programming work. Although there have been growing pains in its first eight months of operation, he eventually hopes to make it a profitable venture.

designed to make the victim put a fist through the screen:

"Arf! Arf! Got You!"

Streeter finds it hard to describe his feelings at that moment.

"One, there was disbelief. Secondly, just devastation."

Luckily, Streeter had copies of 500 of the destroyed programs, and was able to restore them after a day's work.

According to PC magazine, there are several versions of the "Arf! Arf!" program circulating. In each case, computer hobbyists are promised one enticing thing on an electronic bulletin board, and get quite another.

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## Another mad monk in Russia

By David Hutton  
The Sunday Times, London

MOSCOW — Seventy years after the death of Grigori Rasputin, another religious mystic has been touring the Soviet Union. People have given him their life savings and women have taken off their clothes for him — all convinced that they will then be "purified".

Unlikely as it may sound an officially atheist country, the holy, tall, shaven-headed Mirzabai Kimbatbaev has over people is reminiscent of that of Rasputin, the "Mad Monk" and debauchee, who even influenced the wife of Czar Nicholas II.

During the past three years, Kimbatbaev has built up a reputation as a mystic and healer. His followers include intellectuals and scientists and he even won the patronage and protection of the editor of a Moscow newspaper.

The authorities decided to act only when a girl under his influence apparently committed suicide. He has been put on trial with several members of his cult, though the charges have not been disclosed.

Two articles in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* newspaper about the case have started a heated debate. The strength of the reaction and the arguments in Kimbatbaev's defence are evidence of a centuries-old Russian fear of superstition.

The 16th-century tyrant Ivan the Terrible was quite happy to put out the eyes of the architects of St Basil's Cathedral in Moscow so that they could never create a similar cathedral for the ruler of another country, but even he was afraid to quell a naked, lunatic monk who publicly denounced him as a limb of Satan.

### Ill-mannered lout

According to the newspaper, Kimbatbaev is from a village in central Asia and was considered an ill-mannered good-for-nothing until he met some pilgrims in the Uzbek town of Sultana. Three years ago, he learned some religious expressions, dressed in a cassock and put on a skull-cap and beads, creating an image like Rasputin's.

He gathered a following, particularly among young people, who began wearing medallions in his portrait. He began to use Rasputin's methods to extract money and favour from those he influenced.

"He created an image of asceticism and disdain for elementary comforts in an effort to influence people's psyches and make them subservient to the will of the 'healer', *Literaturnaya Gazeta* said.

And he did do wonders — there have been pockets of people, saying while doing this that getting rid of their money was the first step towards a "correct life".

When women went to see him "took them to a changing-room. He himself got undressed and forced the women to take off his clothes and then he went swimming with them in a pool."

Husbands would sometimes stand at the edge amazed but would not utter a word.

Kimbatbaev may also have asked sexual favours from women, though *Literaturnaya Gazeta* has only hinted at this.

Not every letter to the newspapers about the case has condemned him. "He was the chastest of men with a trully cosmic awareness," wrote Natalya Ivina, one of his followers. "We are lucky he is on his earth."

## Beware the barking vandal who can gobble up your memory

NEW YORK (AP) — Somewhere out there, plugged into the growing computer network in the United States, is a vandal whose bark — "Arf! Arf!" — is not nearly as bad as his bite, which can wipe out entire computer libraries.

The vandals' tool is a program he places on electronic bulletin boards, those linkups which allow computer buffs to exchange messages and information. When a

curious computer operator picks out the vandals' program, it automatically devours all other programs stored in the computer.

Richard Streeter of Fanwood, N.J., an executive at CBS Inc., was once an innocent. He had 900 programs, accumulated over several years, stored in his IBM AT computer.

But then, one night not long ago, Streeter was paging through the

Long Island-based Family Ledger bulletin board when he saw a program that promised to improve his computer's graphics. He "downloaded" the program into his computer, and sat back to watch it work.

Instead, those 900 programs — programs that help keep accounts, programs for word processing, game programs — had vanished. In their place was a simple globe,

designed to make the victim put a fist through the screen:

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## Loneliness curses lives of millions of Russians

By Michael McGuire  
Chicago Tribune

MOSCOW — Her body might have lain unnoticed for even longer in the chilly apartment in central Moscow had utility officials not wondered why the old woman was not paying her bills.

As it was, the corpse moldered for six months in the flat above a souvenir store on Kutuzovskiy Prospekt after her death of natural causes in February.

"Nobody knew she had died," a woman who lived in the building said. "No relatives ever called to see her. She had no friends. Nobody noticed her absence. Nobody seemed to care."

She was one of a growing number of lonely Soviet citizens whose lives have been cast into solitude by advancing years and an accelerating divorce rate in a society that, as in the United States, has paid too little attention to the morale and emotions of people without partners or friends.

Some estimates place their num-

ber as high as one in every four people in this nation of 272 million. They can be well-educated, elderly professionals such as Alexander Fedorovich Kurtyzn, a lawyer who died here recently at age 85.

"His death passed unnoticed. . . . He simply had nobody to take care of him," the government newspaper *Izvestiya* said in one of many press commentaries lately on the problems of loneliness.

Or they can be much younger, like Valentina, who at 28 turned to the lonely hearts column in the local newspaper of the Siberian city of Omsk.

She received more than 80 responses to her first advertisement, but found not a single man to her liking after arranging a meeting for a month.

The next time she advertised she got 100 replies, but again found the man was not what she was looking for.

"Some men," she said, "considered the column as a kind of free prostitution service. They were look-

ing for one-night stands rather than a lasting relationship. Men would arrive at our meeting place, look me up and down and then walk off without a word. Others proposed a different kind of 'friendship' than what I was looking for."

No exact figures have been released on the number of people across the country considered to be lonely, but the Communist Party daily *Pravda* estimated it is in the millions, primarily because of an escalating divorce rate, which is widely publicized.

"Every year there are 2.5 million to 3 million marriages and almost one million divorces," the daily *Sovetskaya Rossiya* reported. "One in four Russians remain unmarried by the age of 25 and another alarming

divorce touches 50 percent of the population in some Soviet cities."

Lacking any semblance of Western-style social outlets, such as singles bars, church programs and health clubs, Soviet society offers

very limited opportunities for people to find friends.

Though special family consultation centers have been set up in big cities and marriage guidance publications are widely available, the government's efforts to meet the problem are considered by some only a drop in the ocean compared to real needs.

Preparation of pupils at secondary school for future family life has been started on an experimental basis, and other measures aimed at helping families materially — such as benefits for mothers and interest-free loans to young families — have been established. A few computer dating services exist and establishment of dating clubs is encouraged in small towns.

The dating service used by Valentina was introduced in 12 Soviet cities two years ago in state-run newspapers, with less than encouraging results.

The weekly *Sovetskaya Kultura* said the number of marriage re-

sulting from the service was miserably low. Out of 1,360 people who published ads in Omsk, only 176 were said to have found suitable partners, estimates, the Moscow paper said.

"When I asked women why they decided to place an ad in the paper," a Soviet journalist said, "almost all of them replied, 'But where else can I meet someone?'"

Dating clubs set up in recent years in large and small cities across the Soviet Union have not met expectations because their purpose was too obvious. *Sovetskaya Kultura* said the clubs had become insulting and degrading to women and were hangouts for lecherous men.

The government considers the singles situation a serious social problem because of its impact on the birth rate, which is low and not meeting projected manpower requirements for the economy. Between the ages of 30 and 40, 12 percent of men and 17 percent of women are unmarried.

What appears to worry some Kremlin leaders most is the exceptionally rapid growth in the size of

Muslim populations in Central Asia and the Caucasus, and a corresponding decline in the birth rate in the Slavic and European regions. By some estimates, the Muslim population is expanding at more than five times the Russian rate.

American demographer Murray Feshbach said ethnic Russians may soon account for less than 50 percent of the Soviet population, and the trend shows no sign of slowing.

The ripple effect of the combined low birth and increasing death rate will be enormous by the end of the century, he said in an American magazine interview.

"By the year 2000, about 40 percent of all persons turning 18 in the Soviet Union will be of Moslem origin," he said. "The kids who were born in 1982 will be the new workers and military recruits of the year 2000. That group is going to be heavily non-Russian."

Western experts say the potential difficulties are immense. Many Moslems, for instance, speak little or no Russian, which makes them difficult to integrate into the Soviet military.