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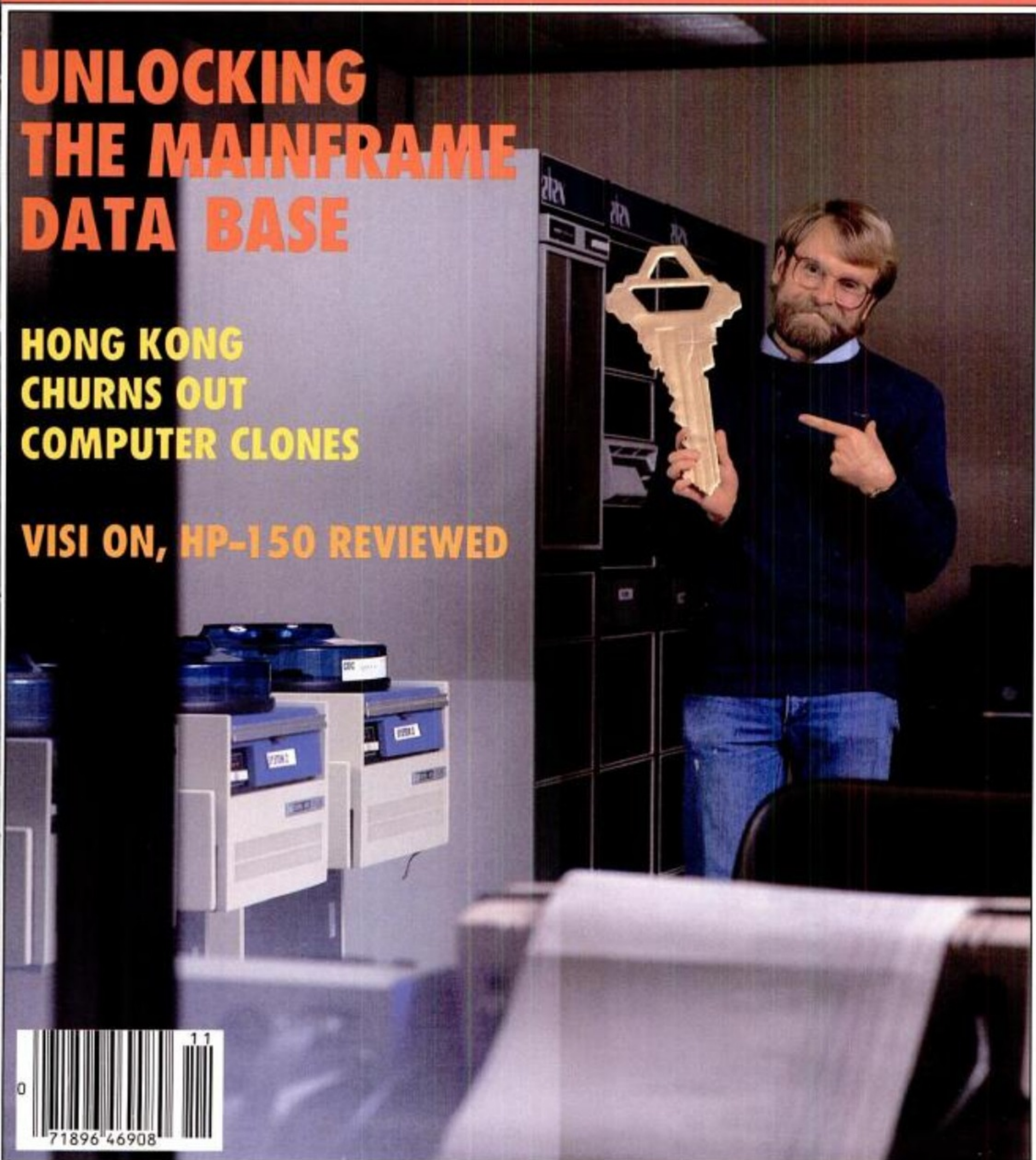
Volume 6, Issue 11

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UNLOCKING THE MAINFRAME DATA BASE

HONG KONG CHURNS OUT COMPUTER CLONES

VISI ON, HP-150 REVIEWED



company is gearing up to challenge the low-end Apple Macintosh and IBM PCjr with its own Laser 3000. The micro-processor it normally uses is the 6502A running at 2 MHz, but the computer can also accept Z80A and 8088 plug-in modules — thus potentially enabling it to run Apple II, CP/M and MS-DOS software. Supposedly it has twice the graphics resolution of the Apple II, with a resolution of 560 × 192 pixels. You can connect up to four 164K storage disk drives to the computer, as well as a plotter, light pen, joysticks, an acoustic coupler and a cassette recorder. The computer's price is expected to run at around \$650.

With the 1997 end-of-lease question still much in the air, Hong Kong's preoccupation with the People's Republic of China is understandable.

It may soon be possible, however, to page top Chinese leaders and bring them to task.

Hong Kong's Star Paging Holding recently scored a lucrative first-time-ever contract with the PRC to set up a paging system in Shanghai and in Beijing using a NEC-based system. Radio-paging is a big growth business in Hong Kong, where countless businessmen and entrepreneurs wander around with beepers waiting for fortune to call.

In fact, Hong Kong probably has one of the largest networks of digital micros in the world, built to sustain its paging industry.

Despite President Reagan's high-tech agreements with the PRC, high-tech traders still express considerable disgruntlement with the gap between the announcement of policy and the reality of trying to import American-made computers into China.

"It might take you 18 months just to get your license approved and to go through all the channels for just a few machines," one observer notes. "So this being Hong Kong, the attitude is 'Why bother with the license?' Just hire a truck and load it up. Or break the system into component parts and get Chinese visitors to carry them into China. After all, the Chinese border is not in business to protect Reagan.

"All you have to do to make a sale is to go to the local ComputerLand, buy a 64K machine, then take the Star Ferry across the harbor to Kowloon where you buy a 256K add-on memory board that you mail into China. It's all perfectly legal." It is estimated that some 500 - 600 Apple IIs have entered China in this way, in piecemeal fashion.

On the Hong Kong waterfront, there is a mile-long stretch of junks and lighters that travel unimpeded up the Pearl River into China every day. What their cargo contains is anybody's guess. ●

The black-market micros of Sham Shui Po

BY ALEXANDER BESHER

Contributor

Today in Hong Kong you can buy a custom-made personal "cloneputer" just as easily as you can get a suit tailored.

For as little as \$600, you can pick up an Apple II. And why pay \$5,000 for an IBM PC XT, when you can get a PC XT clone with a 10-megabyte hard disk and bundled clone software for \$3,000 or less?

The Mecca for fake PCs in Hong Kong is not found behind some opium den or in

squatting on the sidewalk and assembling circuitboards purely by rote without understanding what they're doing.

In the evening, Hong Kong's multi-colored neons light up more dazzlingly than any color graphics display. Outside the Golden Shopping Center street, vendors are serving up bowls of steaming noodles, barbecued spareribs and other snacks. Inside, the shop-lined corridors are buzzing with the frenetic activity of browsers and buyers. The shop owners, respectable looking gentlemen in white shirts and ties, put aside their soldering

'Take the MTR subway to Sham Shui Po and go out the Kweilin Street or Tongfook Street exit. You can't miss it.'

some back-street bazaar. Instead, it's a modern three-story building in Kowloon that boasts the proud name of Golden Shopping Center.

Ask any Hong Kong hacker or computer buff where to find it, and they'll give you easy directions: "Take the MTR [Mass Transit Railway] subway to Sham Shui Po and go out the Kweilin Street or Tongfook Street exit. You can't miss it. Look for the Mr. Floppy billboard. It's the only time you'll see an outdoor advertisement for disk drives in all of Hong Kong."

There are more than 500 stores in the Golden Shopping Center alone. An estimated 300 other computer stores are randomly spread out in the back alleys of the neighborhood. The center developed some three years ago as a mix of electronics stores and a few computer stores. Gradually the computer stores took over, especially when the market for fake Apples boomed.

The last time the police raided the stores was a year ago. And the last time anyone was prosecuted was last May, according to Sham Shui Po watchers.

Not included in the Sham Shui Po count of pirate outlets, of course, is Hong Kong's plethora of photo and electronics stores that may also be selling one or two clones along with their cameras and recorders.

The best time to visit the Golden Shopping Center is during the early evening. In the daytime, business is generally quiet, although you may spot some old beggars or street urchins

irons and circuit boards and quickly get into the spirit of the Hong Kong haggle whenever a customer enters their tiny stores.

"How much is that dBase II package?"

"Including diskettes and manual, only HK \$260 [about U.S. \$27]," the owner says.

"Thanks, I'm just looking. I'll be back later."

He follows you out of the shop. "I give you for only HK \$250 [U.S. \$25]. How about utility program, you want? Very available, only our shop has."

"You can beat them down to nothing," says my guide, an English expatriate who used to be a programmer in Liverpool. "You can beat them down to the price of diskettes."

He is a Sham Shui Po regular, having bought an Apple II clone for himself soon after he arrived in the territory. He put in a Hong Kong-made speech-synthesizer board after he married a Chinese woman.

"It's really great," he says. "She can't read English, although she can understand it. If she wants to check the *TV Times* to see what's on the tube at a certain time, she simply types the name of the program into the speech synthesizer, just copying the letters onto the keyboard without knowing what they mean. Then she'll hear what she's inputted, 'Tuesday, 8:00 P.M., Hill Street Blues,' so she knows what's showing that night."

Ninety-nine percent of all the shops in Sham Shui Po deal in fake Apples, but the

trend seems to be changing as manufacturers in Taiwan gear up for production of IBM PC-compatibles (see page 79). Look-alike IBM PC cases are beginning to proliferate, even though most of them still contain Apple parts.

One bona fide IBM PC clone actually comes in a case that bears its own brand-name, something that's highly unusual in the world of pirates. It's called Intelligent. Most clones have esoteric names such as CCC or 777.

An American Air Force officer who flies to Hong Kong frequently is bargaining with the owner of the shop selling the fake IBM PC. The price is high (U.S. \$3,000), and the exasperated American says, "I can get it for half of that in Taiwan."

The owner is unfazed or is perhaps holding out for a lengthy bargaining session. "Yes, you can get cheaper in Taiwan. But I guarantee always give you good service. Our shop very reputable, many faithful customers."

You can buy any piece of pirated Apple software at cut-rate prices in Sham Shui Po. A PeachText or C Compiler will cost you only \$4 compared to a price of \$40 back in the States. What's free is the sensory overload you get just by traipsing from floor to floor. The noise, the heat and the wild profusion of merchandise make you swoon. The stores seem endless, and you can barely distinguish the names from one another — Diamond Computer, AA Electronics Company, Master Computer, Manic Computer, Goldtronics, Wong's Computer Company.

Bookstores also exist that sell nothing but pirated copies of American manuals that have been printed in Taiwan. Everything is marked down 50%. You can buy the *Microsoft Software Book* for \$1. The narrow aisles are crowded with university students and browsers flipping through the texts. Countless titles have also been translated into Chinese — *dBase II*, *Visicalc*.

As we meander down the brightly lit corridor past the PC hawkers, my guide pauses beside an interesting-looking window display.

"You can tell the good fakes by the quality of their PCB boards," he remarks. "The Japanese have good ones; the Taiwanese ones are only passable; the Hong Kong ones are the worst."

The machine in the window features 48K CPU, 42 function keys, IC, USA ROM and NEC RAM of 64K, with a manual and a cable, and it's selling for only HK \$1490 (about U.S. \$300).

Inside the store the owner nods and smiles as he wires another unit together. Here in Sham Shui Po, they make their computers fresh, just like the bread in a Chinese bakery. ●

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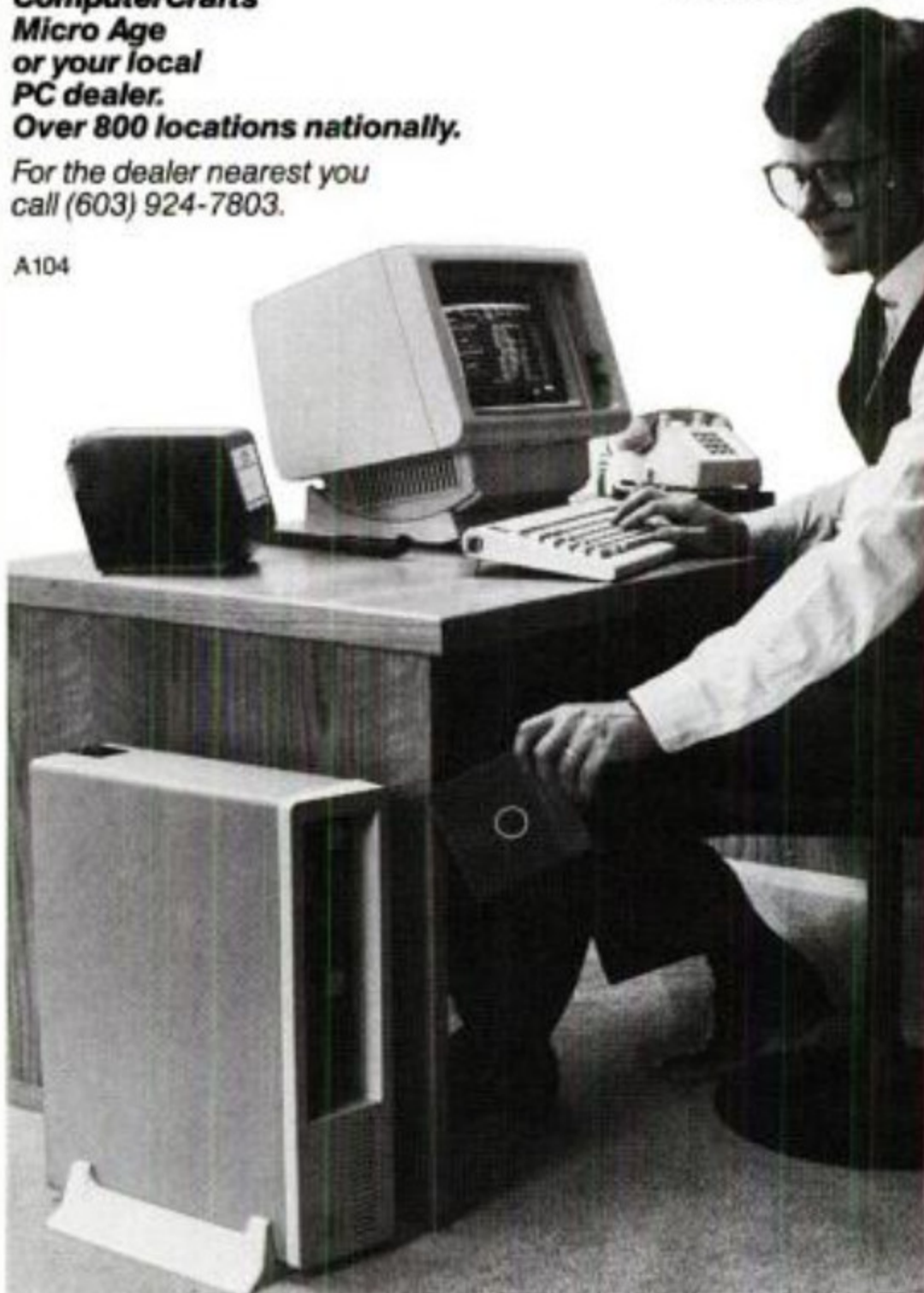
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Thread Tools

18th Sep 2012, 21:38

#1

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Soldato



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Apple II

many many moons ago

is 1984/84 I lived in Hong Kong, My father was working over there and the whole family went and lived over there. I went to a really good school that is now closed called St.Georges.

anyway my first computer was called a Banana



it was basically a Cloned Apple II , I seem to remember it cost around £100 i think , not sure cause my parent bought it for me, I do remember the games were £1 each, 50p for the disk (5 and a Quarter inch) and 50p for the software

I bought the games from this place



video here

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LguPrwMQIQI>

damn i want to go back there now 😞

trust quote

19th Sep 2012, 17:19

#2

00bob00
Wise Guy

Joined: Oct 2002
Location: London
Posts: 2,271

me and my brother had an adaptor for the SNES which allowed you to play games off a floppy disk, this is the place we bought our games. Dirt cheap and reliable. We loved this place, it's pretty much a shadow of what it used to be after HK cracked down majorly on piracy but holds great memories for me.



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Apple Hardware



Stephen SM WONG

3/24/04



★ **Other recipients:** won...@netvigator.com

Yeah, your Apple][clones website is very good. It brings back some of my long lost memory. In Hong Kong, I did get hold of "Banana", "Pineapple", "Laser 128" and some other bare board clones. So many years before, I did some of the soldering of main boards, 80-column cards, Z-80 cards, disk controller cards, printer cards, sound cards, serial cards, etc.

It's amazing to do mail merge in Wordstar running CPM and printing on a Epson MX-80. And did some useful book keeping on Multiplan. UCSD Pascal was an amazing programming environment, boot it, you had to swap a few diskettes, compile a program, you had to fiddle a few more.

And my schoolmates were crazy to work on undocumented M/C of 6502 and 65C02. We did had a hacker's file circling with many tricks explored by game developers. CALL -151, and go.

Apple][was fun to play with, say, how to draw a line on the hi-res screen!

Thank you for making the Apple2clones.com!

Stephen Wong @ Hong Kong

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