THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

By Robin Robertson

ow I owned a Macintosh, I joined the local Users group, and went along
o the meeting. I was curious to see what other Macintosh owners looked
ke. They looked very male. There were few women at the meeting. And,
e newsletter told me this Group (the Sydney Macintosh Users Group)
ad 285 members.

nd to start a conversation with anyone, I
y had to ask: 'Is yours a 128, 512 or a
-Plus?'

he meeting was held in a lecture theatre of
ney University, and some people brought
ng their Macintoshes — although they were
wed in without them. They put them on
desk, plugged them in and tapped on the
board. The meeting went on around them.
sat behind them, watching their screens.
y were doodling with Macpaint, or answer-
dialogue boxes, or changing the back-
und patterns behind a revolving ball. It was
watching a flow of consciousness which
med to have nothing to do with the
eting.

I felt an answering tug. Was that my Mac calling?

ccasionally, these Macs beeped and I felt an
wering tug. Was that my Mac calling?
ut I found other people at the meeting were
as soppy as me . . . Macs may be mere
nks of hardware, cloned from the same
n grey parent, but we loved them as indi-
uals. And we all wanted to bring out the
t in them.
hich was why we provided them with only
best software. We knew a Macintosh was
y as good as its software . . . copy protec-
permitting.

Copy protection, the bug that bugged everyone

opy protection. The bug that bugged
ryone.
hen I bought my first software, I received
in disk, a fat manual and heaps of hype.
er swallowing the hype, and digesting the
nual, I was convinced this was the perfect
tware. It was now up to the disk . . . it
ked very small, considering what it had to
up to.
ac, however, was awed by it. It was the
STER DISK. There was no higher calling. In
honour, I had to polish Mac's screen, and
e the Vegemite off the mouse.
ut, I was reluctant to use this disk at all. It
ht wear out. Or I might leave it in the
ket of my jeans when they go through the
sh.
wanted to make a back-up copy. Just one.
didn't want to make 1,000 copies, and sell
m to my friends. I don't have 1,000 friends,
if I did, they wouldn't necessarily own a
cintosh. Besides, selling someone else's
ware is, I believe, quite illegal, and I don't
nk they'd let me take my Macintosh to
on.
ut, this software was copy protected or, in
n english, paranoiac. Even before I took it
of the plastic, it was convinced of my
inal intentions. I was guilty, never to be
ved innocent.
let me make a back-up copy, and lulled

me into a false sense of co-operation. When
I inserted the back-up copy, my normally
well-behaved Mac spat it out and demanded:
PLEASE INSERT MASTER DISK. And it would
have nothing to do with me until I did.

After it had scanned the master disk, the
back-up copy was no longer an object of suspi-
cion — until the next time. If I ejected it, to
check files stored on another disk, for in-
stance, then reinserted it, Mac would again
demand you-know-who.

Who has the time — or the elbows — for this
silliness? Yet, we pay up to $900 to play copy
protection games with our software. Doesn't
that price entitle us to unrestricted use of the
product?

Of course, copy protection takes many forms.
There's the software which refuses to be cop-
ied, but the manufacturer promises to send a
back-up copy, in return for the registration
form and a $10 fee. I almost like this idea — if
they are quick about sending the back-up
copy. I hate waiting to play with my new soft-
ware. I'm always dying to unwrap it, and see
what's inside.

Then there's the copy protection which lets
me look — but not touch. It doesn't interfere
when I make a copy disk and insert it in the
drive. But, when I try to open the files, it plays
dumb. Its excuse is: AN APPLICATION CAN-
NOT BE FOUND FOR THIS FILE.

Worse still is the copy protection which
doesn't actually admit to being copy protec-
tion. This software lets me work with the copy,
and never demands its master disk. All its files
have applications. We get on beautifully. Days,
weeks go by. I give it more responsibility, more
files — then zap! The system crashes, and
everything, including me, falls to pieces.

Perhaps my Macintosh was a little unwell that day

Manufacturers say this is not copy protec-
tion. I probably copied the software onto a
faulty disk. Or the copy program had a bug in
it. Perhaps my Macintosh was a little unwell
that day. But it was definitely not their soft-
ware . . .

Who can blame them? They spend many dol-
lars creating software. It is a quality product,
and they price it accordingly. But, like gold, it
loses its value if it is easily had. So, they copy
protect it. Trouble is, this also protects the
product from us, the paying customers.

I read somewhere that the free — and illegal
— software, which finds its way into people's
disk files, is not what they would have bought
anyway. It is only of academic interest . . .

Besides, they don't have the manual of in-
structions. And, any software worth its salt is
difficult, if not impossible, to manipulate
without the manual.

Microsoft BASIC has never been protected.
You have to copy it across to run it. But, could
you use it without the manual?

Nor is the latest version of Microsoft WORD
copy protected. It has been weaned from its

master disk, and from now on, it will be con-
venient to use. It will also be easy to copy.

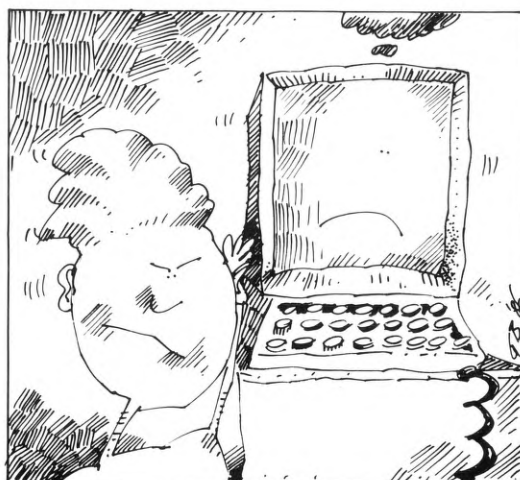Will this mean its sales go up — or down?

But, copy protection lives on. Ever mutat-
ing. Trying to outwit its predators. If you have
the June 18 1986, issue of *Punch* magazine,
read the article about computers by Michael
Bywater. In it, he writes — quite seriously —
about Apple Accounting, which is software
run on the Macintosh 512K or MacPlus. He
says: *In the Apple Accounting manual (shrink-
wrapped inside the shrink-wrapped box) there
is, on the inside cover, a little notice saying
'This program is copy-protected. After you
have been running the program for some time
the system will ask you to phone Apple
Accounting on ******** for a security code
that will allow you to continue using the pro-
gram. The telephone lines are manned from
9.30a.m. to 5.30p.m. Monday to Friday.'*

This copy protection assumes the user has a
phone, works between 9a.m. and 5.30p.m.,
and lives in the UK. If I bought Apple Acount-
ing here, I wouldn't find the same little notice
inside the shrink-wrapped manual, would I?

Whatever form it takes, copy protection
guards the software with a combination lock.
The combination is, of course, a secret, but
people usully crack it within days of its re-
lease. Then they create a disk which allows the
software to be copied. And, within the com-
puter community, this disk goes on sale . . . I
wonder if it is copy protected.

I presume you press your ear to Mac's lower regions

If you want to try your hand at detecting
copy protection, I'm told you should listen
closely to the disk as it turns in the drive. I
presume you press your ear to Mac's lower
regions. Maybe you need a stethoscope.

The trained ear, I believe, can hear the dif-
ference between a disk going about its normal
business, and the disk trying to hide copy pro-
tection. If you know what you're doing, you
can even pinpoint which track its on.

Then you're on your own. It gets all techni-
cal, and I can't spell the words . . . let alone
remember them.

Meanwhile, manufacturers find a new way
to copy protect. . . then someone breaks it . . .
and so it goes on. . . like the dog chasing its
tail.

Who will win? Certainly not us, the paying
customers . . . we are the innocent by-stan-
ders, who pay many hundreds of dollars for the
restricted and conditional use of the product.

Perhaps those very clever programmers who
install copy protection should get together
with those very clever hackers who de-install
copy protection. Imagine what they could
dream up together?