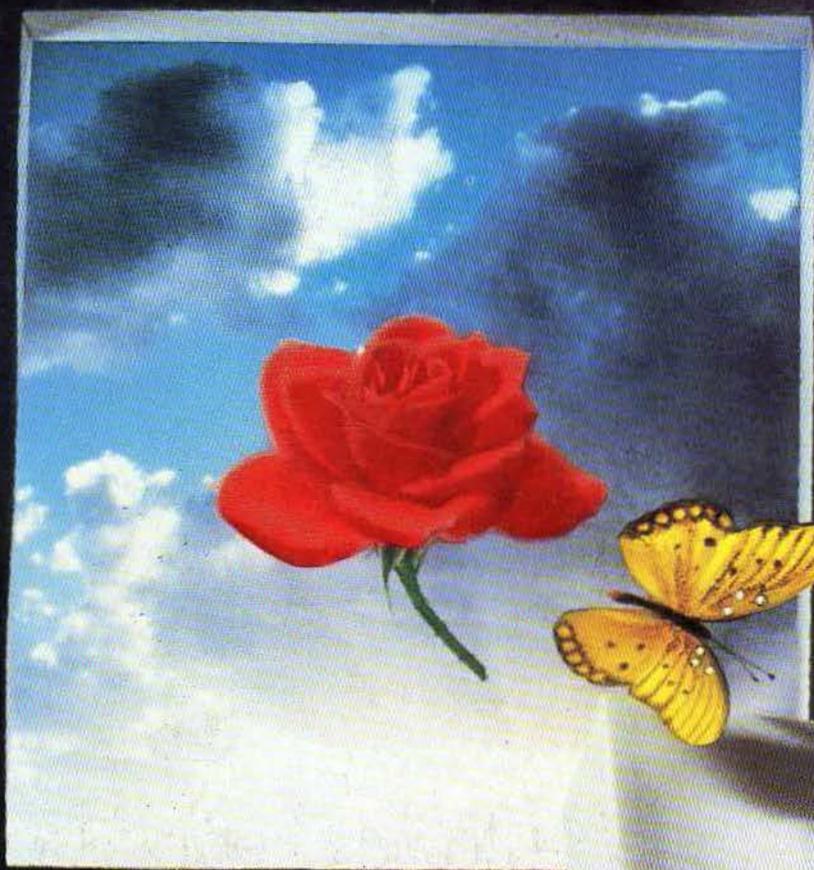


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•Users are greeted
with a menu offering everything
from UFO reports
to the status of Zeta Reticuli. •

ANTI MATTER

Long a standard element in video-arcade games, flying saucers are finally turning up on the personal-computer screen, as well. The mode of transmission: COMPUFON, the first computer bulletin board developed to serve fans and students of the UFO.

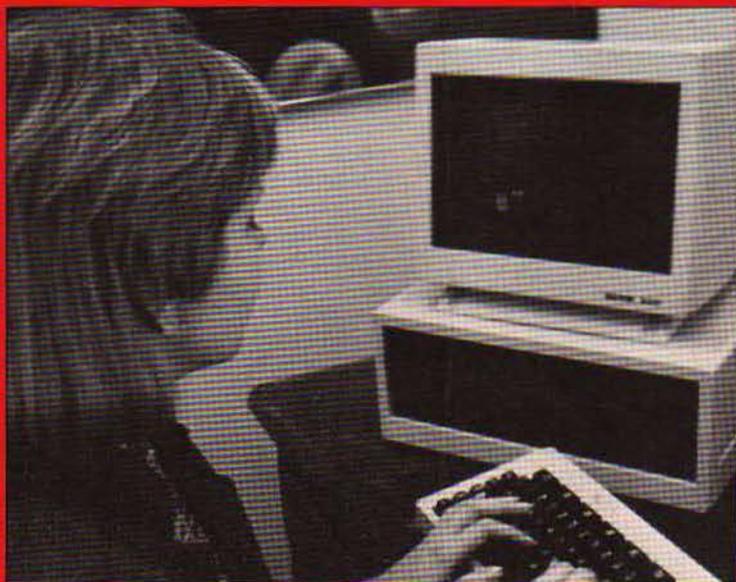
COMPUFON, run by twenty-eight-year-old accident investigator Michael Hart, out of his home in Duvall, Washington, went online in November 1984. Hart started out with an Atari computer, a Hayes modem, and only 12 loyal subscribers. But by January 1986 he had upgraded to an IBM PC capable of handling as many as 5,000

pages of text, and he boasted a membership at least 100 strong.

Users signing in, Hart explains, are greeted with an A-to-Z menu offering everything from the Freedom of Information Act to the status of Zeta Reticuli, a major site on the star map described by Betty Hill. Callers can also access NASA's space-shuttle schedules and a list of stars located within 54 light-years of planet Earth.

But COMPUFON's most important feature is its list of UFO reports, usually 50 or 60 items long. About 80 percent of the reports come from Bob Gribble's National UFO Reporting Service, a hot line used by air-traffic controllers and law enforcement agencies across the country. Other listings come from such organizations as the Aerial Space Phenomena Review of Massachusetts and Project Stigma, devoted to the study of animal mutilations.

Hart adds that each sighting is listed in one of four categories. A UFO appearing on the bulletin board, he says, is



UFO UPDATE

classified as a nocturnal light, a daylight disc, a radar signal, or an electromagnetic effect. As new sightings are filed old ones are bumped off.

According to Hart, he bought the original bulletin-board software from a fellow hacker and "doodled with it until I got what I wanted." He's now trying to set up a similar system in San Francisco and to ease communication for users in Germany, Italy, and Japan.

"I'm trying to export my software abroad where needed," Hart explains. "And I'd like the Japanese to establish a computer terminal here; that way

they could tap into the line for seventeen cents a minute. As it stands, communication with the Orient is exceedingly expensive and slow."

As for users in the United States, they can either receive information directly via modem or leave a message requesting a particular printout. Hart will retrieve the information and mail it free of charge. Except for the cost of a phone call, Hart adds, *all* use of COMPUFON is currently free. But because expenditure of time and money has increased with COMPUFON's popularity (Hart has recently resigned as computer consultant to the Mutual UFO Network to devote more time to the bulletin board), that may have to change.

Why put all that into a computer service devoted to something as ephemeral as UFOs? "I guess because of my innate curiosity," Hart says. "Besides, I thought it was an important service to provide."

To reach COMPUFON by modem, just dial 1-206-788-5901.—DENNIS STACEY