Literary page

Reality God Body Monitor

by S.R. Fisher

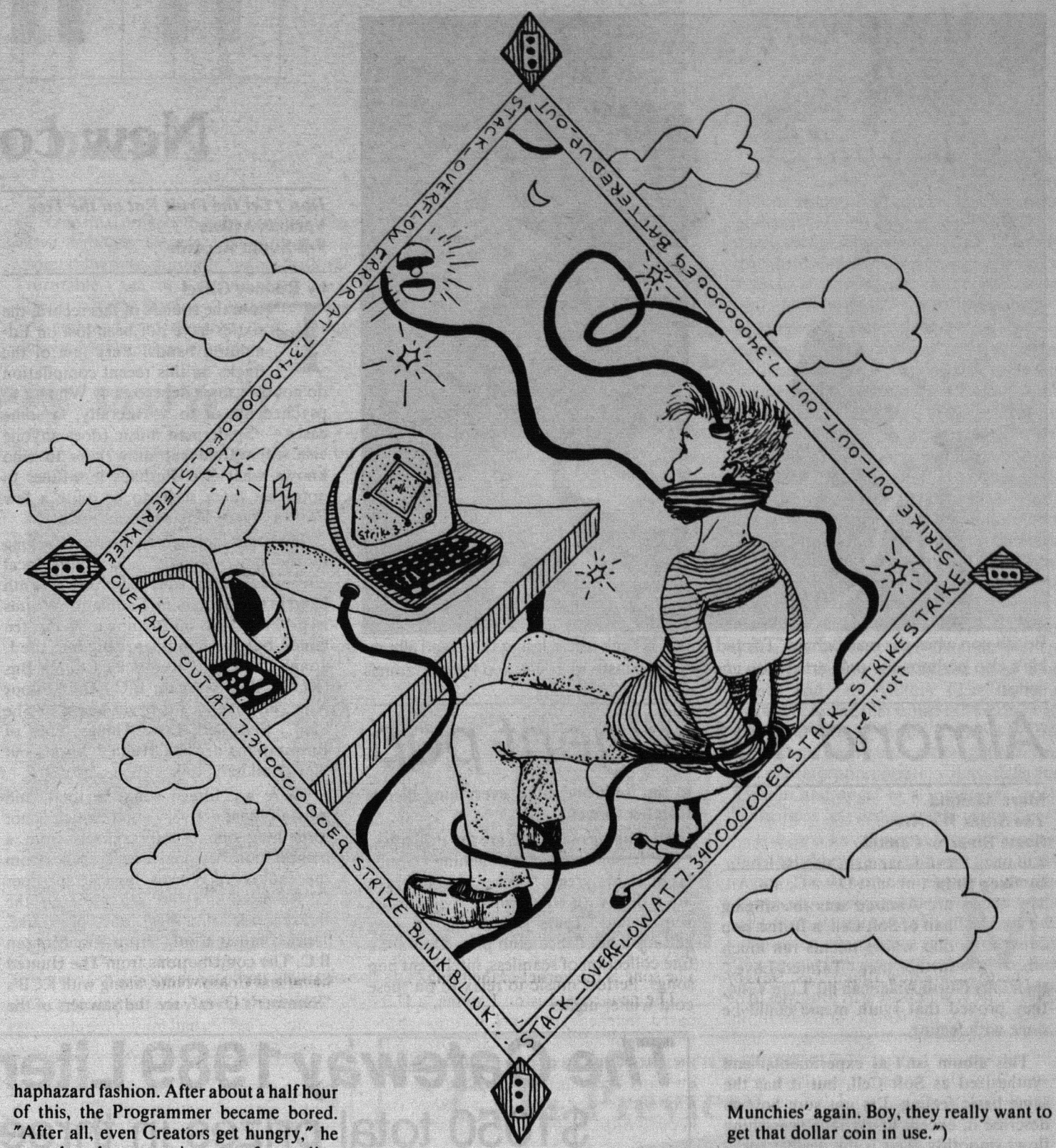
A green glow illuminated the bottom of the Programmer's face. The rest of the room was completely black. Trenches of concentration appeared on his forehead. Digits struck lightly on the keyboard, causing characters to appear on the screen. They almost seemed to have personalities.

The Programmer was alone. All other Programmers had gone, leaving this one behind to finish his Work. The Program at this point was a small group of simple instructions, arranged in a carefully planned manner. A single eyebrow raised up, as his eyes blinked to release themselves from the strain. The Programmer stood up, stretching and, as a habit, muttering to himself.

(Almost as an after-thought, he struck two keys and the Program began, printing characters in a seemingly endless random order.)

"Artificial Intelligence," went the mutterings. "Fake Smarts. Hum. Wonder how artificial *my* intelligence is." He seemed to find the idea amusing. "Yes, the Ultimate artificial intelligence: The brain of a Programmer." On the screeen the characters had become more complex. The commands that the Programmer had entered allowed the Program to develop on its own; in effect, to learn. Structured, simple designs began to appear. At the top of the screen, however, the title remained unchanged: THE_HOLE_OF_IT. The designs got more intricate, and began to get tangled. Characters were appearing near the edge of the screen, threatening to overflow. A beep sounded. The Programmer, alerted to the approaching disaster, quickly sat down and manoeuvred the cursor around the screen, trimming the designs to more manageable sizes. "This is like a baseball game. 'In the Big Inning'."

For a while the Programmer stayed in front of the Monitor, editing the Program's parameters as it became too large, deleting a few over-ambitious characters, and correcting little bits of code that didn't seem to work quite the way he wanted it to. Once, a program within a program was created, a simple procedure that seemed to lead other designs around in a confused, haphazard fashion. After about a half hour of this, the Programmer became bored. "After all, even Creators get hungry," he mused, and went out in quest of a vending machine.



The Program continued on. The screen bore little resemblance to the simple shapes that appeared before, now looking like something from a David Cronenberg film. The designs' edges were dangerously close to the screen boundaries, just one character away. Frantic beeps were emitted from the Monitor.

Suddenly the screen flashed. In a silent, yet cataclysmic border incident, half of the screen's characters were wiped out. The shoddy mosaic of characters left seemed to falter. They reproduced and formed a new design, slowly at first but eventually at a rate far faster than before. Again the screen flashed, and again the character population was reduced, this time to a third of its former might.

("They raised the price of 'Marshmallow Munchies' again. Boy, they really want to get that dollar coin in use.")

Now the characters built up a new design, almost seeming to test itself before proceeding with another addition. The design was now extremely deceiving; it had a beauty to it, but that beauty lay in regions of chaos. However, this design had improved upon its predecessors, and, despite the chaotic regions, it appeared more stable. Again, the borders of the design crept to the edges of the screen. By now the title at the top had completely disappeared, the two cataclysmic flashes being too much. The design snuck to the margin, a large number of its characters being sacrificed for its progress.

Strangely, there was no cataclysmic flash. Instead, the characters overflowed the screen, into some dark recess of the Computer's memory. There was no warning beep from the Monitor this time; it seemed to have been overridden. The design grew, the interior being jumbled, but the hidden parameters (presumably) staying stable.

This situation continued for only a short time, but it seemed forever before another significant change appeared. The chaos of the design's interior now diseased the whole screen. The Programmer returned, munching on a Three Musketeers bar. He was just in time to see the hypnotical disorder filling the Monitor halt abruptly, and a few lines of text appear: "?STACK_OVERFLOW ERROR AT 7.34000000E9"

The Programmer gazed at the screen for a long minute. Disgusted, he turned the terminal off, plunging the room into near darkness. "Well," he grumbled as he left, "that's one computer assignment I won't get a good mark on."

(Behind him, a point of light on the disk drive blinked four times, and disappeared into the quiet gloom.)

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