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Micro Men

By Tony Saint

Tonight we're going to paint a picture of success,
peopled with characters who have imagination,
confidence in themselves,
faith in the future
and a very positive attitude to life.
Which means, simply, that they
never, ever take no for an answer.
Like Joe Radley, driller of fine holes
for the electronics boom.
Like George Taylor, who has turned
15 of holiday money
into a 3 million pound business.
Like Clive Sinclair, electronics wizard
who could beat the Japs and the Americans
at their own game.
I consider it very much my role
to foresee the future.
For example, I anticipate totally
automatic personalised cars
powered by electricity drawn from
internal batteries or the mains.
That's a very real goal.
Starting in the early 1960s
Sinclair has introduced a world
to a series of remarkable technological advances.
Miniature amplifiers,
personal in-ear radios
and his real breakthrough,
the world's first slimline pocket calculator.
Sinclair went on to produce dozens of models
before foreign manufacturers flooded the market.
Undaunted, Sinclair moved on to
the world's first digital quartz watch
but faulty components spelt disaster.
Faced with financial ruin, Sinclair had to
turn to the government for help -
selling a share of his company
to the National Enterprise Board
in order to fund future projects.
What we've brought in is public investment,
and business know-how -
and we're confident that the portable
television we've developed together
will be a great success.

This is claimed to be the world's first truly commercial pocket television. It's been launched by an English company in London today - in America, later this week. This is one of the things we hope will be making money for Britain this year, and in years to come. Whether it does or not, you can at least say that it works, and that it goes into your pocket. The answer is no. But why? Have you even looked at these accounts? We're in no position to throw away taxpayers' money on concept products! This is not a concept product. It's dreamland, Clive. We're running a proper business here. Not an amusement arcade! There is no more research money for the car. I'm sorry. Nothing personal, Clive. Who are these people? What do they think they're running here? What's the point of funding an invention if you can't stomach the inventor? Clive... Jesus Christ! What the bloody hell's the matter with you? I don't give a shit about components. Just get it working! What the bloody hell do you think I pay you for? Fuck's sake, I'm surrounded by incompetence! The top end, I've got people who don't know their arse from their elbow... I'll have a word with him. ...at the bottom end, there are people who can't even answer a fucking telephone! Yes, maybe later. Come on - pub. Cheers man. I've had enough of these Bolshevik penny-pinchers.

And bugger technical instruments!
We've taken technical instruments
and hi-fis as far as they can go.
I've watched the pocket calculator we invented
be hijacked by the Japanese
and their ugly plastic grot.
I'll be damned if they take away my car.
They don't have the first idea about
Sinclair Radionics.
Can't they see we exist to push barriers?
We won't be constrained like this.
What's that line from Browning...?
'A man's reach must exceed his grasp,
or what's a heaven for?'
Who's that for?
No grudges, you know me.
As inventors, we're obliged to dream.
To be unconstrained in our quest for progress.
Always to be pushing at the barriers.
And we must never forget that allied to
innovation is a clear Sinclair aesthetic.
Practicality, simplicity and elegance
are the pillars of my vision.
Remember that, boys.
Elegance, above all.
Excuse me, Clive. I'd like you to meet
a friend of mine - Hermann Hauser.
Hermann, this is Clive Sinclair.
A pleasure to meet you.
German?
I'm Austrian. A common error.
I was just talking about the importance
of elegance in innovative design.
As with your Black Watch?
Oh - yes.
But your watch didn't work properly.
Elegance and functionality, no?
Hermann's doing a PhD at the Cavendish.
It's on oxidisation.
Yes, well some of us didn't go to university,
did we, Chris.
We prefer the cut-and-thrust of the real world
but I'm sure watching things rust
has its interest.

I'm sorry, you'll have to forgive him.

Chris, Clive here.

I'd like to have a word with you in private.

Meet me in the Rolls in five minutes.

We've had six months of this state control,
and it's been even worse than I thought.

This interference in my business is intolerable.

I've asked you here because I trust you, Chris.

I want you to consider yourself freed
from your employment at Sinclair Radionics.

What?

Don't worry, you'll still work for me.

I hold another company name:

Science Of Cambridge - it's a shell,
no more than that,

but I want you to start operating it.

Right...?

I've rented a property in King's Parade -
probably start with a couple of small projects.

There are some of those calculator chips
down in the store,

do help yourself to those.

Okay. I mean, I have been speaking to Hermann
about a basic micro-computing kit.

Yes, yes. What you'll be doing
is preparing the ground

for me to move in when this Stalinist
shibboleth crumbles, as it surely will.

You, Chris, will be keeping the flame alive.

He'll drive you up the wall,

but there is something about him.

An absolute belief in what he's doing,
and he's loyal to his staff like nobody else.

You know, he took me and Jim on
when we were just kids.

And this whole thing, starting this company,
it's been great.

A real chance to show what I can do.

He's coming to see the new
computing kit tomorrow.

I think he's going to like it.

Now, whose move?

What is a pawn?

A piece whose only function

is to protect the king.
To lay down his life, if necessary,
as part of a greater plan.
But the object of the game -
this is to kill the king.
Now are you a pawn, Chris,
or a bigger piece on the board?
Checkmate.
No, it's not.
Oh, maybe you're right.
I don't really know the rules.
CPU... RAM chips...
It's a basic micro-processing system.
It's a kit. To make your own computer,
at home.
Whatever for?
Right, well - you can find out how chips work,
how to program using computer language -
once they've got that, they'll want more powerful
computers - computers we can produce.
Hardly going to have IBM quaking in their boots.
It's a bloody ugly thing.
But it's better than nothing.
Some people like putting these together,
I suppose.
Is this the best furniture you could find?
Er, yes.
Well it doesn't exactly smack
of the Sinclair brand.
Still, it won't be long until I'm out of this
NEB cage, then I can really get cracking.
Start work on some serious products.
We've got to face facts.
Sales of the television have been disappointing.
With a little more time,
and further investment -
What? More money?
As I keep telling you...
innovation is not something you can
pay for in Green Shield stamps.
Excuse me, we've pumped nearly
For what?
The taxpayer has to get something back
for their investment.

There are some areas of the business
we can salvage.

Salvage?

It's time to break this business up.

We're calling in the receivers.

It'll be wonderful to be running
my own company again.

It's marvellous.

It's been a terrible time for Clive.

So nice to see him happy and relaxed again.

So a brave new future lies before us.

I've mapped out a number of new products
the company might set about developing.

Those communists at the NEB have got
the instruments and the calculators,
but I've held on to the television.

The car is still mine.

I was going to suggest that we try developing
a new upgraded micro-computer.

Chris, it's an amusing little gizmo
aimed at a few hobbyists.

No, it's something I want to pursue.

Well, it's not exactly the Commodore PET.

No, it's not meant to be. It's a brand new-
Did your Prussian friend put you up to this?

I don't know what you mean.

I don't wish to discuss it any further.

I wonder why that is?

I beg your pardon?

I'm sorry Clive - but I've always believed in
what you've been trying to do,
now I'm asking for the chance
to take this forward.

I feel I can do something with this,
it's a worthwhile project-

It's pointless! Amateurish! Ugly!

All I'm asking is that you allow me
the chance to develop the idea.

No.

But why?

Because we haven't got the funds to waste.

We have to concentrate on developing
authentic Sinclair products,
like the television, the electric car.

The car? Christ's sake Clive, not the car.
Get out of my bloody house.
Get out!
Is everything all right?
It's nothing.
He'll be back at work tomorrow morning.
I can't believe what I said.
You don't know what he thinks of that car.
Christ, what have I done?
Freed yourself.
You had a taste of being the boss,
and you liked it.
There's no going back.
So what am I going to do?
My father wants to know if I'm
coming back to work in the family firm.
What are they in?
They make wine.
Oh really? I didn't know that.
But I like Cambridge.
I've been thinking of starting a business
here. Computers interest me.
Maybe you could do with a partner?
Seriously? You'd give all that up
to go into business with me?
Have you ever tried Austrian wine, Chris?
No.
If you had, you might understand.
As the Americans would say,
a golden handshake.
Good luck with your future endeavours.
Ten thousand pounds, you say?
What sort of business did you say it was?
Computers.
Oh, I say, how interesting.
Very science fiction.
Well, we like to help new concerns where we can.
Just need to check a few bona fides.
You know how it is.
Tell me again, which college were you at?
That one.
Jolly good. Thought as much,
just by looking at you.
A fresh start.

Goodbye, old friend.

Better.

Now they say in business that the key to success is to use the resources you have, well here in Cambridge we have one resource in abundance -

Cambridge Processor Group.

They build computer systems for fun.

Our secret weapon.

Steve - Steve Furber?

Could we have a word?

That's him - Roger Wilson.

Spent the summer holiday building and programming a computerised cow feeding device for a farm up in Harrogate.

The computer journals you asked for.

You said you wanted all of them.

Thank you, Nigel.

It's nearly two thousand pounds!

Still too much.

So expensive!

But why so expensive?

We must observe the British tea ritual.

Thank you.

So. We all know the MK14?

Mmm. Sinclair. I saved up for one of his hi-fi kits when I was a kid.

Looked nice. Matt black, System 2000.

System 3000. System 2000 was in silver, in the System 3000.

Whatever it was called.

Never bloody worked.

Anyway.

We all want to go with the 6502 processor.

Of course. It's the only choice.

For the moment.

Plus, a whole new look.

That's right. We'll start with kits, but we want to market this with a proper ready-made moulded keyboard and built-in assembler.

The products we produce are going to be led by you, the engineers.

And so I'm pleased to announce that Nigel

will be heading the new computer division -
not just a division, but an entirely new

company:

A new company, gentlemen.

A new beginning.

Perhaps we should remind ourselves
of the secret of the Sinclair success.

That is, being first to market.

Letting people know what they want,
before even they know about it.

Now the MK14 has been a modest success,
as I knew it would be,

appealing to a specialist interest,

And yes, there are companies

making more advanced computers

but these are affordable only for use
in offices or laboratories.

But is the personal computer

not a desirable notion?

Something every citizen would quietly crave
if he actually knew what it was?

This is my vision.

A computing device in every home in Britain.

I quote. 'Personal computers will become
steadily cheaper.

Prices could drop to around a hundred
pounds within the next five years.'

Poppycock!

Because, gentlemen, we are going to
achieve that in a matter of months.

Price is the key.

Whatever happens, I want a computer
that we can sell

for the magic sum of ninety-nine pounds.

At that price, the man on the

Clapham omnibus will want one

even if he has absolutely no idea
what to do with it!

Beg, borrow or steal components.

But one thing is clear in my mind.

It has to look like this.

Now just imagine a future where anybody
could go and buy a computer kit

to program at home.

We could sell, what, eight thousand,
maybe even ten thousand computers?

What programming language are you proposing?

Which one's the best?

They all have their limitations.

Then why don't you write us a better one?

Look, I've heard Sinclair might be developing
a new computer of his own.

Is that true?

I don't know. We don't speak.

Besides, with the team we've assembled

I'm 100% certain

that we're way ahead of Sinclair.

Good evening, and welcome to The Money Programme.

Tonight we enter the world of the microchip,
and report on a story of British
perseverance and invention.

We ask:

Clive Sinclair's ticket to a fortune?

It took Sinclair just nine months to
develop the ZX80,

and he began to sell it by mail order
in March this year.

It costs 99 pounds, measures nine by seven inches
and weighs just twelve ounces.

All you have to do is add an ordinary TV
and a cheap cassette recorder.

Eventually there will be some
two hundred programs available,

mostly educational; some technical,
and many suitable for children.

Jesus, it's like trying to read Braille
through a pair of gardening gloves.

Clumsy programming language - limited.

Z80A processor - big ROM.

Nice bit of circuitry there.

Ah.

Well?

It's like we thought. It's clever.

Done on the cheap, but clever.

So, we know what we're up against.

We produce something better.

Better keyboard - bigger memory.
Smarter chip - and improved language.
I know. But the genie is out of the bottle.
He's done it - he's got there first.
It's a working computer for less than a ton.
It's brilliant. A clear run on us.
Look at the positive.
Clive is playing his hand first.
If he is bluffing, we will know.
If he is holding the full house, we will be able
to look through the pack and find
the three aces with which to beat him.
You don't play cards either, do you?
No.
So it goes well,
but we still need to push on.
Progress on the ZX81?
Our first specs are done, and we start work
on an initial prototype next week.
What about that bloody screen flicker?
Hopefully not.
Jim, I was wondering if you'd had
any contact with Chris.
I'm always in the lab.
I hear he might be going to market
with a new product.
Well I have... He hasn't...
I'm not really sure.
It seems a shame he's not still with us.
He'd have enjoyed this.
That's all.
Sinclair computer offers
and a proper integrated keyboard
that won't give you arthritis.
The Acorn Atom is the product that serious
computer users have been waiting for.
You seem intent on attacking Clive Sinclair.
That's not personal. It's a vastly
superior product, that's all.
You're attacking him again.
It's about computers, that's all.
It pains me to say it, but many of these
companies won't survive this gold rush
in the personal computing market.

There may be many clever people in the industry,
but business acumen is thin on the ground.
Far too much what I call 'kite flying' -
that is to say, people announcing products
that just aren't ready.
But make no mistake - I welcome competition.
We are a market leader, but we
don't take our position for granted.
Great, OK. Can I ask you about the new
RAM pack attachment?
Yes - well, it was thought that we might
do something to boost the machine's memory.
Yes, right. Because a lot of our readers are
saying that the connection's not that good -
that they fall off.
We are aware of this issue.
Our engineers have looked into it -
and I am informed that the use of a piece
of blue-tack about the size of a runner bean
will resolve the problem.
Blue-tack?
Quite so.
Well that's genius!
You see, our readers would love that.
Which magazine did you say?
Sinclair User.
Ah, yes, well - you have my blessing.
Clive!
Chris.
Everything going well?
I've given up.
What's the progress on the new machine?
All the boys in the lab are doing their best -
Well they need to do better.
Getting it out quickly is vital.
It needs to trump the '80,
but also to obliterate the competition.
We need to keep our rate. Cynthia,
take a memo. To all staff:
In this competitive environment, we cannot
afford information to leak out
about our new products.
Be hereby notified that work on the ZX81
is top secret.

Prizegiving at the boys' school today.

Do you mind? I'm reading.

'A plan to make Britain the most computer-literate country in the world.'

That's quite a thought.

They're making a TV series about computing, and they want their own machine to use in demonstrations.

It's the biggest free advertising campaign in history.

Whoever gets the licence to produce it, they'll make a fortune.

Hello, Acorn Computers.

It says they already have a favourite.

Yeah. The Newbrain.

In Newbury.

Newbury Newbrain. But why them?

It's the wrong machine.

What they want is something closer to what we're doing.

Yes. But the same thought will be crossing the mind of -

Someone on the line for you.

Says he's an old friend. Clive.

Chris.

Clive.

Are you well?

Yes, fine. You?

Thriving. You don't object to my choice of venue?

I like these places.

They're traditional. And honest.

Quintessentially British.

I took the liberty of ordering for you.

Their oxtail soup is warming and nutritious.

Very filling.

Business going well?

Yes, fantastic.

Good. I'm pleased there's room left in the market for niche products.

No, the cream will always rise to the top.

But cream can go sour.

Not if it's kept cool.

Well let's hope your cream can withstand the heat of the kitchen.

You wanted to talk?

I don't know if you'd heard,
but there's this BBC computer project.
That - yes, I think I read something
about it somewhere.

I'm sure it won't amount to much,
but I wanted to discuss it
in case you had any concerns.

Concerns?

Clearly it amounts to a breach
of their non-commercial charter.
It's outrageous.

Any machine bearing the BBC logo
would carry an enormous advantage.

You think?

Their patronage of the Newbury project
is intolerable.

At the very least it should be
an open competition for the contract.

At the very least.

Well it seems only fair, especially for
smaller companies like yours.

Very altruistic.

Assuming you were intending on bidding?

I hadn't really given it much thought.

What about you?

I think we should both write to the BBC
making our feelings clear.

It is in both our interests that Cambridge
remain at the heart of the computer industry.

You're asking for my help?

I'm looking to join forces,
for the common good.

This is about doing the right thing.

So he's sitting there, suggesting
that we should - I don't know -
join forces to stop them - but I can't believe
that he's not actually pitching for the job.

So there would be competition?

With him as odds-on favourite?

There wouldn't be time for a competition.

The BBC want this machine ready in weeks,
in time for the broadcasts.

And Clive knows that!

He's ready to step in -
And if Clive gets it,
he'll have the whole market in his pocket.
It'll be curtains for us, and every other
computer business in the country.
And he wants me to help him win
the bloody contract!
We'll have to throw our hat in the ring.
But he's got a huge advantage.
I mean, he's already manufacturing
god knows how many computers a week.
On average.
But the Atom is a superior computer.
No question.
Absolutely.
Quantity is his strength - quality is ours.
We just have to convince the BBC
that they need what we've got.
I finessed his real intentions from him -
if there's a BBC contract in the offing,
he'll bid - I'm sure of it.
Even though he knows he hasn't got a chance.
Our next machine, gentlemen,
will win hands down,
because we know so much better what is
needed, and how to do it, than the BBC.
I don't know if it will be that simple, Clive.
We're pretty well-advanced with
the development already -
the BBC's specs are quite different
to what we're doing.
Well tell them what they want -
not the other way around.
An affordable but elegant machine
with a few basic functions -
just as we're developing.
We are the computer experts.
They can stick to making Doctor Who,
and Home With Mother.
Don't worry. When the Newbury project fails,
they'll come to us.
We are expanding even quicker than anticipated.
Well, things do seem to be going well.
Fifty thousand pounds.

Doing the old college proud, eh?
And so it is with great pride
that I take on this role
of president of this organisation
of like-minded individuals.
Where to be clever, is to be among friends.
Thank you.
Mr Sinclair?
Excuse me.
Yes.
We'd love to congratulate you on your speech.
My name's Susan, and this is Mindy, and Barbara.
Hello!
Hello. And you're enjoying the symposium?
Oh yeah - everyone's very lovely,
and all these clever people.
It's so inspiring that you can develop
so many projects at once.
Quite. Sinclair Research is making significant
progress with the portable television,
the home computing system,
and - what I'm most proud of -
the personal electric transport.
Well, I'm just full of admiration for any man
that can take care of three things
at the same time.
Good, good. That's good, because as president -
I really want to promote the organisation
as being fundamentally social.
What you were saying about being able
to put every book ever written
into a machine the size of a sugar cube -
were you serious?
Oh, absolutely, yes. This quest
for miniaturisation is a major credo of mine -
to reduce the size of something -
making it more efficient and convenient -
that's right at the heart of everything I do.
Still, it's nice to get your hands
on something - big, once in a while.
See you later.
No, I appreciate you calling me back.
It's not easy to actually speak to
someone from the BBC.

Acorn Computers, customer help desk.
Well, quite. What I want to stress is that we're
doing some really interesting work here -
Have you actually plugged it in?
- and all we're saying is that we should get
the same chance that Newbury's getting to -
When did they pull out?
Afternoon sir.
Ah, yes, hello.
Did the speech go well?
Yes. It seemed to create some interest.
That's nice. Nigel told me to
give you a message -
he said the Newbury Newbrain is out of the race.
I knew it! Have the BBC called us yet?
Yes, they wanted a proposal from us
As I predicted.
And also proposals from Dragon, Oric,
Camputer - and Acorn.
Get me Acorn on the phone, now.
This is Clive Sinclair -
I'd like to speak to Chris Curry.
He's bloody where?!
He's sharper than a serpent's tooth.
Yes, but he's nowhere near ready.
How do you know?
Well everyone knows. They're not like us Clive -
they don't operate in secret.
Cocky like that.
Very well. Let him make a fool of himself,
then these broadcasters will have to
come grovelling to me.
How long?
Four days.
Four days?
They want the programme on the air
in the new year.
Four days!
Christ! I know, but I was standing there
with my foot in the door -
what was I supposed to say?
'Don't come, because the computer I'm trying
to sell you doesn't actually exist.'
Is there any chance? By Friday?

What will Roger and Steve say?
What do you think they will say?
They'll say it can't be done.
Perhaps they just need a little encouragement.
Roger! Hermann. I have a question for you.
Can you adapt the new machine
for the BBC spec? We've got a week.
I understand.
He says it cannot be done.
I knew it. Bugger!
So, I ask you Steve.
You think it can be done?
No? I'm surprised when you tell me this.
Because Roger told me that he thought it was
possible to do it in a few days.
Yes, he seemed to believe so.
But I will tell him that you disagree, no?
Roger! Hermann again.
Now, I need your advice.
Steve says he thinks he can do it.
No, he really does.
He seemed very confident.
No, I didn't tell him that you said
it was impossible.
Do you want me to call him back
and tell him that now?
Okay. See you tomorrow.
Sehr gut.
They'll fall flat on their faces.
We need do nothing,
and the contract is ours.
That's what we're going to do? Nothing?
Of course not! Never stand still.
The BBC will be here on Friday morning.
We need to be able to show them
a working prototype that fits this spec.
I know you can do it.
I'll make the tea.
That one.
What if we move the space bar to here?
We could just lose all of this.
At the moment I can't see how that's linking up -
Kebabs, everyone!
That one.

Goodnight sir.

This was the spectacular scene
only a few days ago.

Three and a half thousand special guests -
All right - now we need to wire up
the whole thing.

Good.

Miss one connection, then it won't work.
Shouldn't take too long, should it?
Well - I've done the first seven.

Great.

About three thousand to go.

This time. Come on.

Christ! Dammit. Must be some kind of
contact failure, I don't know.

I thought we had it working?

It must be something -

They're here. I'll try and stall them.

We've had it.

Well - very good of you to come.

We do really appreciate the opportun-
sorry, the opportunity to-
sorry, this thing's about to break.

This is the wire to the development system?

Yes.

You've used a clock wire for this?

This is a breakthrough for us, I hope,
and the BBC as well.

To - have you here.

Sorry, wrong door. This - that can't be.

I'm so sorry, gentlemen -

I feel very embarrassed.

What if the wire is causing a skew
on the internal clock?

It's directly beneath - I'm so sorry.

Why are they going upstairs? It's absolutely
downstairs. Ridiculous.

If we cut this cord -

But that's its backup life support!

At the moment of birth,

if the child is to prosper -

the cord must be cut.

No, no, no!

Here we are, gentlemen. As you can see,

we're only able to show you a -
- Fully functioning prototype.
Marvellous! Let's see what she can do.
Yes, sir?
Cynthia - I'm not taking any calls.
Except from the BBC.
Hello?
Yeah.
Clive Sinclair.
Ah yes - I was expecting your call.
You've-?!
Bloody fucking hell!
Hey, what are you thinking-
Sorry, that wasn't my aim.
I'd like to add the government backing
to the BBC computer literacy programme,
and I'm proud to announce that the BBC Micro...
will be at the heart of a
new government initiative
to put a computer into
every school in the country.
The exclusive manufacturers of the
BBC Micro, Acorn Computers,
tell me they have already taken twice
the number of anticipated orders.
The public is excited by this new technology,
and Britain is at the forefront of it.
Can we just see you using the machine, minister?
Yes, yes, of course.
If you remember, it's the Return key.
Isn't that absolutely marvellous?
Why even bother with them?
Demand for the ZX81 has been phenomenal.
Our only problem is how to meet the orders.
We're having to step up production -
turnover's looking like over 30 million -
it's incredible.
I want the Spectrum brought forward.
It's still in the developmental stage, Clive -
I'm sorry, I don't know-
We'll meet them head on. Acorn may have
their friends in government and at the BBC,
but Sinclair understands what the
man in the street wants.

Simplicity. Affordability. Elegance.

Elegance above all.

This new BBC micro looks like it was invented by a blind Bulgarian bricklayer.

It's not funny.

The next computer has to do everything theirs does, and more.

And it has to be half the price of theirs.

We start taking orders now.

If Chris Curry wants a battle - well, let's show him what we've got up our sleeve.

High resolution graphics.

Up to a massive 48K of RAM.

Sound and full eight-colour capability.

All available from 125. I give you, the Sinclair ZX Spectrum.

Well let's take a look at

a typical office of today,

and what are the first things you see, apart from the man working in it?

It's the filing cabinets. Now, what's going to happen to them, Mac?

Well, most of them are going to go, Chris, along with invoices and bills, those are all going to be sent through by the computer.

What about our old office friend, the faithful typewriter?

Are we going to say goodbye to that as well?

So a secretary's job will really be enhanced, as she's able to help her boss in understanding the speed at which his business is changing

We've done 10 CLS? All right - space, question mark -

Does that mean you're going to do away with paper altogether?

Are the stationery doors finally going to close?

No, they're not. Because people really do still like to read things on paper and not on screens-

Three... two...

- A lot of the time they are used for manipulating data - characters, words and letters and so on.

And we can show you some of the instructions on here.

You'll recognise that -

I'm beginning to recognise what looks like the beginning of a program -

yes, a computer program.

Well the first one is probably new to you - it's CLS, which is a very concise way of saying 'clear screen'.

And that's a bit of your standard BASIC -

- that's right, yes -

- computer jargon. Well I think I -

Afternoon, Clive.

Just do it properly next time, all right.

Good lad.

Since the Department of Industry launched its multi-million pound Micros In Schools scheme with a great fanfare, there's now at least one in every secondary school

and one in almost half the primaries.

Britain, it is said, is ahead of anyone else in the world.

You can buy a pet, an apple, an acorn, a tangerine - even a new brain.

In fact, computers suddenly seem to be everywhere.

I'm sorry, did you say -

Million.

As you can see, we are experiencing growth at an exponential rate.

I'd have to make a call.

Which college was it again?

In six years, Acorn, who make the BBC Micro and Electron

has grown from a small company to a multi-national

with a turnover of more than 90 million pounds.

I think you've been doing computers for six months?

Yeah.

And you're completely fascinated by it?

My mum can't keep it under control.

Hello again. People in Britain are at the forefront of the computer revolution with titles like Manic Miner, Hungry Horace and Chuckie Egg, computer games have become the

latest craze to sweep the nation.
According to a survey today, British children
spend more time using computers
than anywhere else in the world.
Sinclair has sold hundreds of thousands
of its ZX Spectrum computers.
This is a small home computer.
If you press that button - R -
- it's a game of chess.
So what can the average user
actually do with a home computer?
An exciting variety of useful applications.
So not just games?
No, absolutely not.
What do you use your computer for?
Mainly games.
You know, we can't cope with this demand.
Then take on more people - boost production.
Can somebody get that phone?
We'll need a further cash injection to expand
at the rate we are growing.
Exactly - and I know how to get it.
A share issue.
What, we float the company?
Computers. Cutting edge technology.
The city will love us!
Come on! What can go wrong?
And then you just delete it by pressing
these two buttons here together.
So you press this button here -
And this button here - no, sorry, no,
this button -
yes, that's right, this button here -
and you see the thingy flashes on the screen
there, that's perfectly normal -
then all you need to do is press enter,
and it changes - colour. Changes colour.
What else can you do on it?
Me? I can change the border to another colour -
let's try blue.
Can you play games on it?
Yes! Yes you can. Hundreds of games
for the Spectrum.
Excuse me. Do you have any games

for the BBC Micro?
Yes, somewhere - yes we do.
Making the most of your
establishment connections, more like.
Oh yes - so respectable.
No games for the Micro.
Damn the BBC - and the government.
And all the rest of your lackeys!
People seem to forget that
this is just a fad. Nothing else!
All this nonsense about
computers replacing shopping.
Saving people a trip to the bank.
These things won't save the world!
It's nonsense - nonsense!
So that's the plan.
We pump the money from the share issue
into a pared-down version of the BBC Micro,
the Electron -
we drop the price - produce on a big scale -
and go head-to-head with Uncle Clive's Spectrum.
We go downmarket?
Look. The squeeze is on in this industry,
in case you didn't notice.
There's a rival machine launching every week -
we have to keep growing.
So there we have it, gentlemen - a new strategy.
Alongside an upgraded Spectrum,
we launch the Quantum Leap, or QL.
A new computer designed for use in the office.
With a proper keyboard, and functions
for business and education.
An upmarket computer.
A serious computer.
Do we need to change tack now, Clive?
I mean - the success of the Spectrum has been -
You've got a company valued at 136 million.
You're talking about making a
computer from scratch.
New hardware, new operating systems -
it will take years-
We're announcing in three months.
And anyway, this spec -
I mean, it's a backwards step for us.

We should be working on improving the hardware.
Look - computers are for the common man now.
Games. Entertainment.
That's where the money is.
WH Smiths are ready to order
one hundred and twenty thousand.
Peripherals like the Microdrive are selling well,
and really, logic suggests that we
expand into building our own software
for the Spectrum.
Exactly. I mean, the games market alone-
Games! Games!
Everywhere I go, games!
This is what my lifetime of achievement
has been reduced to.
Clive Sinclair, the man who brought you
Jet Set fucking Willy!
My lad's up to level eight.
I mean, apparently there's even a game now
about me trying to get a knighthood,
for Christ's sake!
This is a serious company, dammit,
making serious technological advances.
Sorry to interrupt, but I really thought
you should see this.
Congratulations!
I've been -
given a knighthood!
The QL, or Quantum Leap, represents just that
in the home and business computer market.
With its brand new operating system
incorporating SuperBASIC
and innovative built-in Microdrive
data storage system,
and yet another revolutionary keyboard,
it really is sheer professional power
in the Sinclair style.
With all these features, you could be
forgiven for expecting to pay
quite literally thousands of pounds.
But no - the Sinclair QL will sell for merely 399.
Just before I hand you over to our
Head of Computing, Nigel Searle,
just to fill you in on some details -

let me be the first to say,
the future is here -
and it's ready to ship in 28 days.
No I understand that, yes.
Yes - no, that's no problem.
We're fully geared up to produce that volume.
Definitely - yes, you have my word.
No, thank you.
Okay. Bye bye.
WH Smiths have confirmed the Electrons.
I knew it!
It says here the market might have peaked.
Do we want to run the production lines that hard?
Hermann, they've just ordered 120,000 computers.
Does that sound like it's peaked?
Chris - remember you've got meetings with the
lawyers and accountants later this afternoon.
Right.
Thank you.
Is that the payroll?
Christ.
Again.
No, no, no. Needs more power on the start up.
That'll drain the battery.
Then spend more improving the battery!
Twelve million quid out of the coffers for this.
Well he's a genius, remember?
Trying to.
Clive. Sorry to interrupt again.
About the Quantum Leap.
Christ, not again.
We can't keep advertising it.
The phones are ringing off the hook with people
wanting to know where their machines are.
Well get the bloody things out then.
We're not ready.
The Microdrives aren't working.
Half the memory's hanging out of the back.
Well employ more people on the job!
Clive! More people isn't the issue.
We need more time to iron out all the problems.
For fuck's sake Nigel.
We announced the QL will be shipping
in 28 days. It will be!

That was sixty days ago.
Sales of the Spectrum have slumped.
In December 1983 every child
wanted one for Christmas.
And by December 1984, every child
who wanted one - had one.
There are currently some 600 home
computer manufacturers in Britain.
How many of them will still be around
by this Christmas?
Well certainly less than 600, that's for sure.
And the market is very fragmented.
It cannot contain anything like that number
over a long period.
The cheapest of all is this one -
made by the newly-knighted Sir Clive Sinclair.
It's survival of the fittest.
Who's most innovative - who best meets
the end users' requirements.
It's a tough marketplace for our rivals,
but as far as Acorn are concerned,
an interest in our computers
is still in the ascendancy.
At Sinclair Computing, we've recently developed
a truly groundbreaking machine -
the Quantum Leap.
Just recently we received our biggest ever order
for our latest product, the Electron.
We've already taken a huge number of orders
from eager consumers -
consumers who want the very best.
The QL, or Quantum Leap computer
designed for the upper end of the market
has been dogged by production
and marketing problems.
From next week, the Sinclair QL -
now priced at just under 400 pounds -
is to be reduced by fifty percent.
And although Sinclair originally
promoted this machine
as being capable of more serious applications
it failed to make any inroads
into the business computer market.
And that's where Amstrad comes in.

We are business men - we're not made up
by a team of ex-graduates
who are throwing a few electronic components
in a plastic box.

To make matters worse, the boom in
schools buying computers has also passed -
and it was demand from schools which helped
catapult Acorn from being a two-man outfit
to a turnover of 93 million pounds.

I believe with the right products
at the right price,
then market demand will just
keep growing and growing.

And so for 1985 the most serious
computer game of all
is being played by the companies themselves,
trying to turn around the continuing
and devastating slide in their industry.

Well you see, the way it works is this.
We send them out, and the shops order them.
Jesus Christ.

And the shops order them when they need them.
Aha?

The thing is - they needed them
three months ago, not now.

Smiths ordered 120,000 Electrons.

Did you get that order in writing?

Now, if it was your CD players -
we can't send them out quick enough this year.

Some people have been waiting three months
for their QIs. And they're the lucky ones -
The ones we're actually managing
to deliver just don't work.

We can't keep advertising it, Clive.

People trust Sinclair. They trust me.

If they don't work, give them
another one that does.

Look, stop fretting, Nigel!

Our advertising campaign will
guarantee healthy sales.

If Curry wants to muscle in on the Spectrum
market with his ugly tat,
then I'll be damned if we don't respond.

I'll chop him off at the knees

in his own territory. Here, take this.
Sinclair QL commercial, take 17.
Harrods. Asda and Dixons might be next.
What?

They can't all be pulling their Electron orders.
Well, not yet.

Jesus, Hermann, I've got suppliers
all over me for money.

Well, we cash in more of the stock.

No - can't do that.

Or what about using some of
the advertising budget?

No way - that's vital.

We have to advertise on TV
like IBM and Commodore -

we can't spare a penny of that money.

Going to have to find it from somewhere else.

This is the new Acorn Electron.

It's powerful. It's versatile.

And it's only 199 pounds.

But there's one feature that will make it
particularly welcome

in homes all over Britain -

it speaks the same language as
most schoolchildren - BBC BASIC.

The Electron. Now your children can
teach you all they know.

The Acorn Electron can be found
at local Acorn dealers
and major high street stores.

Jesus.

Just thought I'd check on you.

What are you getting for Christmas, Valerie?

Oh - one of those new CD players.

That's if Simon can find one in the shop.

What about you?

I'll be happy with an empty warehouse.

I brought something for you to eat.

Oh! Just like old times.

Very good!

It was fun then, wasn't it?

Dangerous, walking in traffic.

Keep to the side, if I were you.

That's the place for pedestrians.

Are you sure? You want to go
with the one knocking Sinclair?
Just run it. I want full pages everywhere.
What the fucking hell is all this about then?
What?
You fucking bugging shit bucket!
All right - all right.
Jesus Christ!
I'm fine.
Ridiculous.
Don't do that again.
Get out, and stay out.
Still got that temper, Clive.
Someone needs to teach you a lesson.
That's funny. Because everything I learned,
I learned from you.
You learned nothing.
You took, and you took - and you gave nothing.
You wouldn't listen to me.
What choice did I have?
We could have been the British IBM,
but you wouldn't listen to me when you should've
- and now look at us.
Shares in the Acorn microcomputer company
were suspended on the stock market
this afternoon.
It follows rumours of financial problems
at the company.
Share prices in Acorn have been under pressure
since the city heard that they had
made a big loss in America.
For some months now, it has been known
that Britain's most famous inventor
Sir Clive Sinclair has had financial problems.
His company Sinclair Research brought
computers out of the lab and into the home,
and was a runaway success in the early eighties.
But the market has slumped
as rapidly as it peaked.
And just before the weather -
and you'll like this Barry -
Will I indeed? I'll be the judge of that!
It was a battle of the boffins
in a Cambridge pub last night

Ha ha! Tell me more.
As two rival computer clever-clogs
came to blows over a business disagreement.
Fisticuffs, Greg?
Eyewitnesses reported the pair of eggheads
having a crack at each other!
Yolk on the carpet, Greg!
It's official - we're a joke.
Hope all the people we have to lay off
see the funny side.
We're not a joke, Chris.
The bottom has fallen out of
the whole market, that's all.
It's the same for everyone.
It's the same for Clive.
Does that make you feel better?
No, it doesn't.
I'll go and start letting everyone know.
What are they all going to do?
They are clever people.
They'll think of something.
Maybe they already have.
Chris. It's Clive here.
Clive Sinclair. We haven't spoken in months
and I wondered if - if you weren't too busy
just wondered if you might like to
meet up for a drink.
Like the old days. If you're around.
No grudges.
I've always predicted the computer boom
would come to an end.
Now it belongs to ghastly barrow-boys
like this Amstrad fellow.
But we adapt, Chris. We move on.
Businesses come, businesses go.
This was but one step on a greater journey.
And you know - ultimately -
The path of the future
will always be laid by the amateur.
The quiet chap - scuttling off to his shed
to work on that idea that he and he alone knows
will change the world.
That's the British way.
That's what made this

the greatest country on Earth.

'A man's reach must exceed his grasp,
or what's a heaven for?'

True enough.

But you know, the future still needs inventing.

I've been looking into the possibility -
of a flying car.

Time, gentlemen, please.