

DragonSmoke #01

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Reality expands to fill the available fantasies. – Laran Stardrake

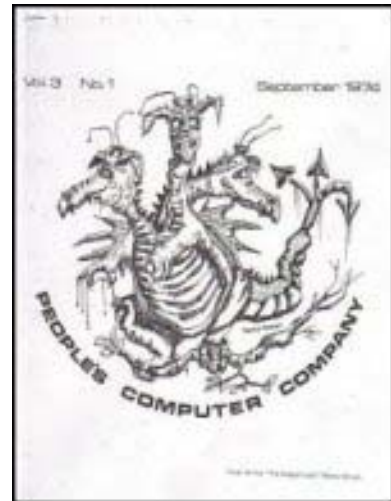
DragonSmoke is a quasiperiodical about our past, present, and future adventures. DragonSmoke is also a half-bakery of ideas, especially ideas about games, activities, investigations, projects, and other tools and toys to help learners learn – and teachers teach – math & science.

A Byte of DragonSmoke History

DragonSmoke began in *People's Computer Company*, Volume 3, Number 1, September 1974. The cover picture was Nancy Hertert's 3-headed dragon that became PCC's logo, soon to appear on T-shirts and buttons. Bob was PCC's editor – DragonSmoke was his page of this and that and other stuff.

You can read some of the history of *People's Computer Company (PCC)* in the books *Fire in the Valley* and *Hackers*, and at the PCC Alumni Site.

- Fire in the Valley (<http://www.fireinthevalley.com/>)
- Hackers (<http://www.echonyc.com/~steven/hackers.html>)
- PCC Alumni Site (<http://sumeru.stanford.edu/pcc>)



Keep on readin'. Read Todd Oppenheimer's book *The Flickering Mind: The False Promise of Technology in the Classroom and How Learning Can Be Saved*, and visit

- The Flickering Mind (<http://www.booknoise.net/flickeringmind/index.html>)
- The Flickering Mind: Meet the Characters (<http://www.booknoise.net/flickeringmind/characters/index.html>)

Gaia turned. Bob & George wrote columns in magazines about learning and teaching. One column was called "DragonSmoke" and a puff of DragonSmoke appeared frequently in other columns.

- "DragonSmoke" in *Antic*, a magazine for Atari users. Read "DragonSmoke" articles at <http://www.atarimagazines.com/index/index.php?column=DragonSmoke>.

- "Programming Problems" in *Recreational Computing*, the successor to *People's Computers*, which was the successor to *People's Computer Company*.
- "Computing Problems" in *The Computing Teacher*, the magazine of the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) (<http://www.iste.org/>).
- "GameMaster's Apprentice" and "School Is in the Heart of a Child" in *The Rainbow*, a magazine for Radio Shack Color Computer users.
- "Your Basic Backpack" in Stan Veit's great *Computer Shopper Magazine*. We wrote 29 teach-yourself articles about GW-BASIC and QuickBasic. Visit Stan's minipage at <http://sumeru.stanford.edu/pcc/PCCminipages/z54fba455.html>.
- *The Basic Teacher*. Alas, alack, and oh heck. Stan Veit sold *Computer Shopper* at the summit of its glory. The new publisher soon terminated "Your Basic Backpack," so we continued for nine issues of *The Basic Teacher*, a magazine in the spirit of "Your Basic Backpack," and then moved on to other adventures.
- *DragonSmoke*, a newsletter. We wrote & published 10 issues in 1985-1986, then changed the name to *Adventures in Learning* and did 11 more issues.
- "Power Tools for Math & Science" in *The Computing Teacher* (now called *Learning and Leading with Technology*), the magazine of the International Society for Technology in Education. We wrote 40 episodes and then changed the name to "Starship Gaia" with Bob and Paul Davis as authors.
- "Starship Gaia" in *Learning and Leading with Technology*. Bob & Paul cranked out 13 episodes about such things as the exploration of Mars and Metric Backpack.

Books

Addison Wesley published Bob's first book, *Computer Methods in Mathematics*, in 1969. It was about BASIC as a problem-solving tool for high school math. Soon came *Teach Yourself BASIC* (1970) and *My Computer Likes Me* (1972).

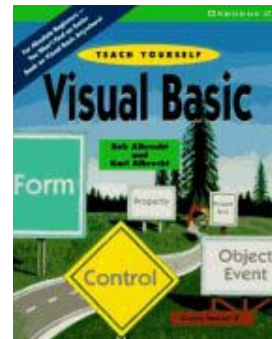
Beginning in 1971 or thenabout, Bob, LeRoy Finkel, and Jerald Brown wrote lots of books, mostly books for beginners about BASIC, mostly published in John Wiley & Sons Self-Teaching Guide series: *BASIC*, *BASIC for the Home Computer* (probably the first trade book about Microsoft Basic), *Atari BASIC*, and *BASIC for the Apple Computer*.

- Jerald R. "Jerry" Brown (<http://sumeru.stanford.edu/pcc/PCCminipages/z7ad31d2e.html>)
- LeRoy Finkel (<http://sumeru.stanford.edu/pcc/PCCminipages/za4d0a902.html>)

You can read the two Atari BASIC books online at

- Atari Basic (<http://www.atariarchives.org/basic/>)
- Atari Basic – XL Edition (<http://www.atariarchives.org/basicxl/>).

Don Inman, Ramon Zamora, and others joined the author team, and more books emerged: *TRS-80 BASIC*, *TRS-80 Color BASIC*, *QuickBasic Made Easy*, *QBasic Made Easy*, *The Shareware Book* (PC-Write, PC-File, and PC-Calc), *DeskMate Made Easy*, *Teach Yourself GW-BASIC*, *Simply Excel*, and *Visual Basic for MS-DOS*.



Bob's last computer book was *Teach Yourself Visual Basic* with son Karl as coauthor, published in 1996 by Osborne McGraw-Hill. Enough. Bob quit writing computer books and plunged full-time into his real love: writing math & science instructional stuff for learners and teachers.

Recent and Current Adventures

Life is an adventure, another adventure, and more adventures. Current adventures include hiking, writing, mentoring, and tutoring.

Algebra Backpack. Everything you need to learn algebra is on the Internet, so why are publishers churning out expensive new algebra books every two or three years? The new books look very much like the old books except for cosmetic changes. Does algebra change that rapidly? Well, no – so why are the books rewritten every two or three years? Greed, of course – the new book gets *adopted*, thus making the old book "obsolete" so that people must buy the new book that looks much like the old book. We'll rant more about this in future DragonSmokes.

Metric Backpack. As our tiny contribution to metric evangelism, we're developing *Metric Backpack*, a collection of tools and toys to help people learn and teach the *International System of Units* (SI), commonly called the metric system in the USA. SI is well designed, easy to learn, and easy to use. The dark-side system is the *United States Common System* (USCS). It has been kludged together over many centuries, is poorly designed, hard to learn, hard to use, and used only in the USA, where it contributes muchly to making math harder to learn and teach.



Play Together, Learn Together. For a decade or two or more, we've played together, learned together with students, teachers, parents, anyone. We collect old games, create new games, invent variations of old games, and organize **systems of games** that spiral through the grade levels to help learners learn and teachers teach – math and other stuff.

In DragonSmoke and elsewhere in StarshipGaia.net, we'll suggest variations and ways to play games you may know about, and for sure much ado about our new games that you don't know about because they haven't been published elsewhere.

Mentoring in Professor Richard Zimmer's **Mars Society** and **Mars Habitat** courses at Sonoma State University. Fall 2004 we embarked on our 13th semester of this adventure. Most of our students intend to become elementary school teachers. They're designing communities on Mars for the year 2030 and beyond.

Tutoring students in math from fifth grade through high school algebra, geometry, precalculus, and calculus. An amazing and boggling adventure!

To be continued in **DragonSmoke #02**.

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