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**Title**            **Why Phone Phreaks Do It**

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**Abstract**       Overview of phreaking and blue box operation told through "Jasper", a 21-year-old phreak.

**Keywords**     Captain Crunch; John Draper; Nick Clainos (attorney)

**Notes**           Date estimated based on Draper's trial being mentioned as "next month." Very small portion of the article missing. Includes nice photo of blue box with circular buttons.

**Source**          Alan Rubinstein

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# Why Phone Phreaks Do It

By Rick Carroll

Jasper is fairly typical of his underground colleagues.

He likes to make free calls around the world — not to talk, but to call.

He is a phone phreak, one of perhaps 5000 electronics wizards in the Bay Area, who have turned America's biggest monopoly into their personal plaything.

He's 21 (phreaks range from teens to late 20s), works in electronics and is openly contemptuous of the phone company ("because it could be so much better").

## WONDER

Jasper grew up wondering how things work, building crystal radio sets, dismantling clocks, reading Popular Electronics, repairing his mother's toaster and tinkering all the time.

He's been phreaking about a year, not to rip off the phone company but "to satisfy my curiosity of how the system works and what I can make it do."

This scientific interest in the phone company is what motivates pioneer phreaks who, unlike the new wave of criminally minded, are more interested in learning than larceny.

But whatever the motivation, this rapidly growing, loosely knit band of whiz kids is making Ma Bell — or "the old lady," as they sneeringly call the phone company — sit up and serve them — free of charge



Attaching a gadget like this to a phone, your typical phreak can dial almost everywhere free.

switching systems, or — as they say: "seize a tandem"

One spokesman, Bob Brown, said, "It's difficult

"They're really not that private," he said "They've

them or any phreaks:

"The phone company will have to change every switching station in the United States. That would cost more than they can afford to spend and besides," he said, grinning, "phreaks could still seize tandems by way of Mexico or Canada.

"They'd really have to change the switching stations around the world—otherwise, there's not a whole lot they can do."

Possession of a blue box is outlawed across the nation; a conviction can bring five years in prison or \$5000 fine.

## FELLOW

That doesn't deter the likes of Joe Ingressia, the blind fellow in Tennessee, who doesn't even need a blue box. He has perfect pitch and can whistle up free long-distance connections by duplicating the phone company's switching system signals.

"I've quit phreaking," Ingressia told The Chronicle on the phone from his home in Millington, Tenn.

He works now as a \$2-an-hour trouble shooter for the phone company, a job he got by calling the United States Embassy in Moscow on a blue box after making sure phone company sleuths were eavesdropping so he could get arrested.

Ingressia, who can tell by ear where trunk line troubles lie, said, "I figured that if I got arrested, people would notice I could do these

criminally minded, are more interested in learning than larceny.

But whatever the motivation, this rapidly growing, loosely knit band of whiz kids is making Ma Bell—or “the old lady,” as they sneeringly call the phone company—sit up and serve them—free of charge.

#### WEAPON

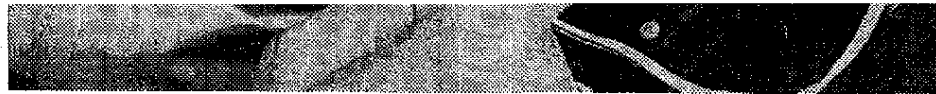
Their secret weapon is the so-called “blue box”—a simple gadget anyone can build in an evening with \$20 worth of parts available at any electronic supply house.

A “blue box” is the “Open, Sesame” in the otherwise locked world of telephony.

Innocent appearing, the “blue box” is about the size of a transistor radio, but with a speaker on the back (some have a removable speaker on a cord) and 13 numbered buttons on the front, like a Touch-Tone phone.

It “talks” the same language as Ma Bell—or duplicates those peculiar callope tones you sometimes hear in the background after dialing long distance.

Those tones, reproduced on the “blue box,” enable phreaks to control the phone company’s long-distance



### Attaching a gadget like this to a phone, your typical phreak can dial almost everywhere free.

switching systems, or—as they say: “seize a tandem”—and call free anywhere.

“I’ve never seen a ‘blue box’ that’s blue,” Jasper said. “Maybe the first ones were. Most are black or whatever color plastic case is available.”

#### NUMBER

Nobody knows how many phreaks practice the illegal art of blue boxing, but Jasper and his colleagues claimed between 7000 and 10,000 boxes are in Bay Area use, mostly in the Santa Clara Valley.

“There are more in San Jose than anywhere,” he said, “because it’s an electronics town. The general electronics knowledge is higher. Parts are more available. The whole environment is electronics.”

Phone company officials in San Jose are reluctant to talk about phone phreaks out of fear publicity will stir even greater interest and use.

One spokesman, Bob Brown, said, “It’s difficult to estimate how many blue boxes are in use... or how much revenue the phone company has lost because of toll fraud.”

Toll fraud, simply, is making long-distance calls without paying for them.

#### USE

He would say blue box use is “widespread and growing” and that the phone company is using “specialized sophisticated electronic devices and techniques” in the intensifying war against phreaks.

One statistic is known—phone phreak arrests are increasing each year.

“There were 45 arrests across the nation in 1971, compared with six in 1970,” Brown said.

There have been seven arrests in California this year and four in the Bay Area, including the legendary Captain Crunch, who faces trial in San Jose next month on toll fraud charges.

#### 1960S

The phenomenon of phone phreaking, ironically, got its start in the late 1960s, when the phone company phased out its human operators in favor of computerized equipment.

“The more automated Ma Bell becomes, the easier she is to deal with,” said Jasper.

“That’s the advantage of electronic equipment over humans. You can confuse the equipment and make it do what you want.” And that’s almost anything.

“They’re really not that private,” he said. “They’ve got all the equipment, the facilities, and access to monitor anyone’s phone at any time.”

Clainos also claimed phreaks “aren’t hard-core criminals.”

“They’re electrical geniuses who got sidetracked. Most quit phreaking after their first brush with the law.

“With the pioneers, or technicians, like Captain Crunch, it’s over,” he said, “but the criminal wave is hitting now.”

#### GENERATION

This new generation of phreaks who don’t give one watt about how things work—only that they do—is growing at an alarming rate and, according to Jasper, there’s only one way to stop

got by calling the United States Embassy in Moscow on a blue box after making sure phone company sleuths were eavesdropping so he could get arrested.

Ingressia, who can tell by ear where trunk line troubles lie, said, “I figured that if I got arrested, people would notice I could do these things and they would hire me.

“Well, when I got arrested, I almost had to keep from smiling in the police car. I knew I was on the way to getting what I’d wanted for years—a job with the phone company.”

#### PHONE

Ingressia, 23, said phreaks help the phone company more than it realizes by “finding troubles in the system and reporting them.

“We’ve reported several hundred troubles in various offices over the years,” he said.

“I think the phone company could improve service by hiring more phreaks. But the company’s afraid. They don’t know how much we know. And they don’t trust us.”