

Elf Qrin interviews The Mentor

THE MENTOR- Handle of Loyd Blankenship. Also known as the Neuromancer. Elite hacker and former member of the Legion of Doom, the PhoneLine Phantoms, the Racketeers and Extasy Elite. Writer of the legendary "Conscience of a Hacker." He also used to work for Steve Jackson Games, where he wrote *_GURPS Cyberpunk_*. He is currently a freelance game designer/electronic musician. [Handle is from the Grey Lensman series by E.E. "Doc" Smith.]
(from the *Hacker's Encyclopedia* by Logik Bomb)

July, 31 2000

Elf Qrin:

What has been your first experience with a computer? And which was your first computer?

Mentor:

We moved from Austin right before the summer between my 5th and 6th grade years of school (early 1976). When I got to San Marcos, I didn't know anyone, and started hanging out at the Southwest Texas State U. computer lab in the college library. It was populated with Pet-10s, CompuColors and some early Apple II machines. I mostly played games on them (Artillery, etc.).

The place my mom worked had a giant PDP mainframe, and I got to meet some of the sysops. They showed me a game called *_Star Trek_* on it that I loved. I got them to print out the BASIC source code for it, and taught myself BASIC by porting it over to the Compucolors.

The first computer I actually owned was an Apple IIe that I got in either 1979 or 1980.

Elf Qrin:

How did you become a hacker?

Mentor:

If you mean 'hacker' in the true sense, I think it happened when I started porting *_Star Trek_*. If you mean it in the 'breaking into computers', it started during that first summer when I found out the university had a PDP-4. I wrangled a guest password from a friend of the family, but it expired at the end of the summer. By then I had a pretty good list of user account pairs, and I hacked an account (something like [1,5], pw: games I think).

Elf Qrin:

How did you join the LOD/H? What do you remember of that experience?

Mentor:

I was in the "2nd generation" of LOD folks that grew out of Summercon '88. I remember sitting in a hotel room with The Leftist, Doom Prophet, Phantom Phreaker, Control C, Urvile/Necron 99 and several others I'm sure I've forgotten. We had all brought boxes of printouts, etc., and realized that among us we basically had control of the entire nation's phone network.

Elf Qrin:

What you liked more of '80s (even unrelated to computers)?

Mentor:

The 80s were very mixed for me. I had some great times, played in some fun bands, did some really stupid shit, met my wife, dropped out of college, got my first book published, and generally behaved like most 15-25 year olds.

Elf Qrin:

Why did you write the "Hacker's Manifesto"?

Mentor:

I was going through hacking withdrawal, and Craig/Knight Lightning needed something for an upcoming issue of Phrack. I was reading *_The Moon is a Harsh Mistress_* and was very taken with the idea of revolution.

Elf Qrin:

What do you think when you read the Manifesto today?

Mentor:

I still find it very valid. I only cringe when I see the phrase "beauty of the baud," but I was 21 so am inclined to forgive it :)

Elf Qrin:

You are considered a "living legend" from all the hackers worldwide. How does it make you feel?

Mentor:

If I could just get all of them to send in \$1.00 each... :) Seriously, I'm very flattered by the attention. The volume of email gets out of hand occasionally, but I try to answer every one, even with just a form letter.

Elf Qrin:

Why you quit the scene in 1990?

Mentor:

When I put up *_The Phoenix Project_*, I knew I had to stop. I was running the highest-profile (and best) hacking BBS in the world. I knew I'd be watched. I was also at the point where a lot of the original challenge was gone -- LOD had control over pretty much anything we wanted to at that time, and I personally had finished taking over huge chunks of Autonet. Prime Suspect owned Telenet. Erik Bloodaxe owned pretty much anything he wanted (plug here -- Erik Bloodaxe was the best hacker I ever met). Our phone gurus owned every phone network in the country. There was nowhere to go but down.

Elf Qrin:

What changed in the hacking scene between now and then?

Mentor:

How easy it is to get caught now days. We got all of our stupidity out of our systems prior to the era of the digital switch.

Elf Qrin:

Do you think today's hackers are as though as the old ones, when there were no hard disks or GUIs?

Mentor:

That's hard to say, I don't personally know many people active now. In fact, I don't know *anyone* really well that's active in the underground.

Elf Qrin:

What do you think about the Internet revolution?

Mentor:

Saw it coming in 1986. I love it.

Elf Qrin:

What are you doing now? What is your job?

Mentor:

I'm a multimedia developer. I do everything from sound design/music to authoring to 3d animation and digital video.

Elf Qrin:

Do you have children, and do you teach them hacking or computer science?

Mentor:

No kids, no plans for any.

Elf Qrin:

A final word for the kids who want to become hackers.

Mentor:

If you're going to break into computers, be careful out there. You're most likely gonna get caught, and it sucks. There is so much you can do legally (learn linux & programming, for instance) that I'd recommend starting with that.

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