

The Newsletter of the National Dragon Users Group

DRAGON



UPDATE

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THE GAFFER'S BIT

Ever noticed that the entire computer industry seems to be composed of lemmings?!. Funny, isn't it, how all those brilliant business types fail to notice the obvious ... that most people now don't have spare cash around to keep on "upgrading" their systems several times a year, and that with the exception of a few certifiable idiots most computer owners HAVE managed to work out that the system the manufacturers assured them would solve all their problems a couple of years ago is STILL capable of doing exactly the same jobs as it was then, and that as the jobs haven't changed there's no need for a change of system either!. Obvious, isn't it?, yet you're supposed to be gullible enough to believe the 8088 XT you bought a couple of years back has suddenly become senile, so has the 286 you bought a few months later, and the 386SX, and the 386DX, and the 486/50 is far too slow, hasn't enough RAM (what can you do with just 8M?), and with a pair of mere 300M hard drives where can you keep your files?. Of course, the software companies make matters even worse ... grotty OS like Windows, designed so that you'll need to scrap all your expensive DOS software for the newer versions, programs padded out with useless screens and "facilities" no one would ever use, and so badly written that anyone would think the rule was "never use a byte when you can use a Meg". Perhaps when all the IBM type companies have finally gone bust people will get around to developing a NEW computer again ... just like they did in the "good old days" when machines were interesting and programmers could still write working programs that fit into 3K of RAM. OK. perhaps I'm being optimistic, but the computer scene has gone into self destruct mode now, and really it will HAVE to revert to the old ideas if it is ever going to restart. Yes, I KNOW that a computer is "just a tool" (and so are most of the "experts"!) ... so is a cement mixer, but that doesn't make everyone want to rush out and buy one!. Remember an old machine called "Dragon"? ... people actually LIKED that, they published magazines, had shows, formed User Groups thing. Can't imagine anyone feeling like that about the IBM, can you?!

The Editor's Bit...

From a mightily cold evening in October, via an insubstantial piece of iron oxide, to a mightily cold evening in December, via an insubstantial piece of paper. Such is the Fantastic Voyage of Update, truly a miracle of publishing (although this is probably due to the fact that the copier is not only on ITS last legs, but also on Paul's as well).

I could rant and rave about the pitifully low attendance at the Bristol show, but at time of writing I don't have any jaw-breakingly major details, so I shall leave that to the People In The Know.

I could also rant and rave about the pitifully low level of software sales, but I wouldn't want to depress you too much on the front page. So I shall do that later on, in the depths of the inside.

Please, please, please send in articles. Have pity on a poor (literally) editor with nothing to print on a dark December/October evening. All contributions muchly appreciated, as stocks is very much in the negative at the moment. And besides, Paul is desperately keen to get to our ninth birthday issue next August. Honest.

Circuit Analyser...Chris Jolly.

This article describes a 'bare bones' small-signal circuit analyser for the Dragon, written in BASIC and capable of analysing circuits containing resistors, capacitors, inductors, and bipolar transistors. No bells or whistles are provided - these are left as an exercise for the reader. The program keeps details of the different kinds of component in four arrays, one for each component type. The sizes of these arrays determine how many of each are allowed: in the listing, 10 resistors, 10 capacitors, 5 inductors, and 5 transistors, but these limits can easily be changed (line 20). The details of each component include the numbers of the nodes to which it is attached. There is a unique node number for each node (connection point). There are three special node numbers: -2 for the input, -1 for the earth, and 0 for the output. Otherwise, node numbers can be assigned arbitrarily, but they must start at 1, and no numbers may be missing. The best way to enter a circuit for analysis is to draw it out on paper, then mark the input as -2, output as 0, and earth as -1. Note that for the purposes of small-signal analysis, any fixed supply rails can be considered to be earthed, and should be marked as -1 as well. Then mark the other nodes starting at 1. When entering transistors, the small-signal parameters h_{fe} , h_{ie} , and h_{oe} are required. These can be obtained from the manufacturers' data sheets. Here are some values for the popular transistors BC107B, BC108B, and BC109B at typical DC operating conditions:

```
IC=0.1mA, hfe=250, hie=60E+3, hoe=10E-6
IC=1mA, hfe=350, hie=8E+3, hoe=20E-6
IC=10mA, hfe=400, hie=1500, hoe=100E-6
```

When you select SOLVE from the menu, you are asked for a low frequency, a high frequency, and the number of intervals to take between them. The intermediate frequencies are calculated at logarithmic intervals. Three columns of numbers are printed out: the first is the frequency at which the circuit was solved, the second is the calculated gain in decibels, and the third is the phase of the output relative to the input in degrees. By choosing PRINT ON, hardcopy of the results can be printed.

This article will be continued next month.

```
10 'SMALL SIGNAL CIRCUIT ANALYSER BY CHRIS JOLLY
20 DIM R(9,2),C(9,2),L(4,2),T(4,5),NR(9,10),NI(9,10)
30 NN=0:NR=0:NC=0:NL=0:NT=0:SP$=""
40 CLS:PRINT#67,"(1) ADD RESISTOR";
50 PRINT#99,"(2) ADD CAPACITOR";
60 PRINT#131,"(3) ADD INDUCTOR";
70 PRINT#163,"(4) ADD TRANSISTOR";
80 PRINT#195,"(5) SOLVE";
90 PRINT#227,"(6) PRINT *SPS";
100 PRINT#259,"(7) QUIT";
110 K$=INKEY$:IF K$="" THEN 110
120 ON INSTR(1,"1234567",K$) GOSUB 140,230,320,410,540,1570,1590
130 GOTO 40
140 'ADD A RESISTOR
150 CLS:PRINT"ADD RESISTOR"
160 INPUT"VALUE (OHMS)";R
170 INPUT"NODE 1";N1
180 INPUT"NODE 2";N2
190 IF N1=NN THEN NN=N1
200 IF N2=NN THEN NN=N2
210 R(NR,0)=R:(NR,1)=N1:(NR,2)=N2
220 NR=NR+1:RETURN
230 'ADD A CAPACITOR
240 CLS:PRINT"ADD CAPACITOR"
250 INPUT"CAPACITANCE (FARADS)";C
260 INPUT"NODE 1";N1
270 INPUT"NODE 2";N2
280 IF N1=NN THEN NN=N1
290 IF N2=NN THEN NN=N2
```

```
300 C(NC,0)=C:(NC,1)=N1:(NC,2)=N2
310 NC=NC+1:RETURN
320 'ADD AN INDUCTOR
330 CLS:PRINT"ADD INDUCTOR"
340 INPUT"INDUCTANCE (HENRYS)";L
350 INPUT"NODE 1";N1
360 INPUT"NODE 2";N2
370 IF N1=NN THEN NN=N1
380 IF N2=NN THEN NN=N2
390 L(NL,0)=L:(NL,1)=N1:(NL,2)=N2
400 NL=NL+1:RETURN
410 'ADD A TRANSISTOR
420 CLS:PRINT"ADD TRANSISTOR"
430 INPUT"TYPE";T
440 INPUT"BASE (OHMS)";B
450 INPUT"NODE (SIEMENS)";NDE
460 INPUT"BASE NODE";B
470 INPUT"COLLECTOR NODE";C
480 INPUT"EMITTER NODE";E
490 IF B=NN THEN NN=B
500 IF C=NN THEN NN=C
510 IF E=NN THEN NN=E
520 T(NT,0)=T:(NT,1)=B:(NT,2)=NDE:(NT,3)=C:(NT,4)=E
530 NT=NT+1:RETURN
540 'SOLVE THE CIRCUIT
550 CLS:INPUT"LOW FREQ.(HZ)";F1
560 INPUT"HIGH FREQ.(HZ)";F2
570 INPUT"NUMBER OF INTERVALS";N
580 FF=(F2/F1)^(1/N)
590 F=F1:FOR L=0 TO N:GOSUB 600:F=F*FF:NEXT:RETURN
```


PEEKING THE DRAGON (42) BY ALTHEA WILSON

17th October 1992 - Who says there is no new software coming out for the Dragon? Sitting in front of me is a stack of disks which have all been put out through NDUG. For those people with an interest in amateur radio we have got AMATEUR RADIO UTILITIES DISKS 1 and 2. Priced at only 4.00 for the pair they are crammed with utilities. If utilities are what you are into there is DISC UTILITIES 2 priced at 3.00. This is a disk full of utilities written by various authors covering many aspects of disk management. The music lovers are catered for with MUSIC DISC - EINE KLEINE NACHTMUSIK adapted for the Dragon in his usual brilliant way by Dave Cadman for 3.00. Also compiled by Dave is POETRY DISC which is a varied collection prompted by an argument over the words of a particular poem. This is also priced at 3.00. To me the gem of the collection has to be RAMDISC EXTRA by David Linsley which was prompted by a plea in one of my previous articles for a RAMDISK for the Dragon. Well we have now got one, working on either the D32 or the D64. There are a couple of other useful utilities on the same disk. A bargain at 3.50.

I hear loud whispers on the grapevine that there is a mega-adventure being written for the Dragon which, if all the stories are true, would not even fit on my PC with all its extra memory. Also being worked on is a 128K expansion board. This should prove very useful especially for word processing and databases. I hear that it is for ordinary Dos and not OS9 or FLEX. Who said the Dragon is defunct?

I can answer one of the questions in David Linsley's article WHERE ARE THEY NOW. Jonathan Cartwright is in Warwick writing for a software house having obtained his degree at Lancaster. Having written for the Spectrum and Amstrad he is now turning his attention to the PC with a point and click adventure in the MONKEY ISLAND mode. He tells me that it is a far cry from writing ROLABALL for the Dragon but he is amazed that he is still getting royalties from some of his old Dragon efforts. Reminds me, I must reply to his letter and shock him with the news of all the Dragon Shows and all the new material for the Dragon.

23rd October - One piece of new software that I missed out of my earlier writings is the CACHEPACK devised and written by Tony Davis and Dave Cadman. This is a very specialised piece of software for radio amateurs and requires your own personal callsign to be put upon the disk. Unfortunately this will not be reviewed as it is so specialised unless somebody buys it and would like to inform us what they think about it.

As this article will appear in the issue that comes out around Christmas may I take this opportunity to wish you all A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

As yet nobody has contacted me with help for the problems that P.S.Ceallaig and Gareth Rutter were having as outlined in my last article so I am sorry that I am unable to help the aforementioned.

In the last Update I reviewed Graham Kinns' PC GRAPHICS DISK 1 and asked if anybody had tried them on disks other than 40T 5 1/4" disks. Well, David Linsley tells me that he has used it with 80T double sided 5 1/4" disks. I still cannot get it to run with 3 1/2" disks but have managed with every variation of 5 1/4". David also agrees with me that this disk should have been commercial and not PD.

I see in my last Update several references to the "rubbish in Dragon User" before it folded. I was one of the authors of that "rubbish", but at least I contributed which is more than most people did. I even got paid then, instead of having to pay for the pleasure like I do now. If more contributions of articles do not come in for Update then this newsletter could eventually go the way of DU. Maybe you all think my articles are still "rubbish" so why do I bother? Because I love both my Dragons (64K and Nora, in that order!!!!) that is why.

Coming soon!

No, not the end of the World, but something that many people would think even more improbable, a completely new and ORIGINAL adventure game for the Dragon!. Not one of your "10K Specials" either ... this one will make Hitch Hiker look like something for the ZX81!. First sections are currently being test run, and the program should be ready early next year. Disc only, because they don't make tapes long enough!.

Looking At DASM. By RAD, part two.

In part one, the CLEAR command was mentioned. This provides a stack for DASM to store the LABELS and their addresses, from the bottom of the cleared space working upwards. A short BASIC routine is provided (see later) which, when added to the source code after the END, will print all the labels and their addresses when the assembly RUN is made. Following line 10 (see part one), the next line is:- 20 LOAD DASM.BIN : EXEC for the Disk with the DISC in drive 1, or EXEC &HCFFA for cartridge. The next line is used for Assembler DIRECTIVES and can set the number of lines to be shown at one time on screen, whether or not ERRORS can be printed, if the print should be in Long Format which shows the Machine Language Addresses and Bytes in Hex as well as the Basic Source, or short format - just the Basic source repeated, if the dump should be made to PRINTER and many other facilities. Starting with the ERROR commands, and everyone makes errors - ALL will print out all errors and an explanation in lower case which stands out well as the assembly is RUN. OFF will stop DASM from printing or displaying anything, and should be used only when you have eliminated all errors. When that is used, no errors will be displayed, but an ERROR INDICATOR will appear on assembling. ERR will cause DASM to print only those instructions which have an error, and this is the normal setting. The next important command is the PAG command, which will make the DASM stop after printing a number of lines to the monitor. Pressing any key except BREAK will continue the assembly run. If BREAK is pressed at any time, DASM will stop and return to BASIC code. PAG can also be used when output is specified to printer (see later). The default setting of PAG is 15 lines - PAG 15, too many for most screens, and I usually use PAG 4. Note the space between PAG and the operand 4. These directives are sufficient for any beginner for whom the next line would be:- 30 ALL : PAG 4 setting an all errors print and four lines per page, advanced by pressing the space bar. Adding a further directive:- :FML to that line would produce Long Format, which shows the address in memory of the Opcode, and the first eight bytes of the operand concerned. Because of the limit of the Dragon text screen to 32 characters per line, FML is not recommended for use without the Printer directive as well. The default setting is FMS which shows only the Basic Source listing. Although these directives are described here for the start of the assembly source, they can be inserted at any point within the Basic source to initiate events at that stage, e.g. printing the errors from a particular point within the assembly etc. Further directives next time.

PRO-TECH SYSTEMS, FOR DRAGON & TANDY.

- UNIVERSAL DISK CARTRIDGES, FROM £59**
 (CAN RUN DRAGON-DOS, DELTA, DREAM, TANDY CO-CO ETC. SWITCHABLE)
 -DISK CARTRIDGE KITS, £14
 -ALL DOS ROMS, DRAGON-DOS, CUMANA, DELTA, TANDY AND
 'COMBI DOS', (DRAGON DOS PLUS DELTA OR DREAM)
 -NEW CUMANA DISK DRIVES, (NOT SURPLUS OR RECONDITIONED ONES)
 CSA354, 3 1/2" 1Mb, PU. £75; CSA1000S, 5 1/4" 1Mb, PU. £112,
 (DELIVERED DIRECT WITH CUMANA GUARANTEE. ALSO FOR ATARI & BBC).
 -ST354 3 1/2" 512K, (CASED), SPECIAL PRICE £47.
 -CHINNON 3 1/2" 512K, (BARE), £32
 -CONNECTORS FOR ABOVE, £6 AND £8
 -TANGENT/DRAGON DIY HARDWARE UPGRADE PCB'S.
 -TOP QUALITY, 3M DISKS, (IN FIVES, BUT AT 100 OFF RATES)
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 -10% DISCOUNT ON NEW DRIVES, PRINTERS, & MONITORS.

FOR DATA SHEETS AND PRICE LIST, SEND 2 STAMPS (2nd-CL) TO-
 PRO-TECH SYSTEMS(GB), 25 PELICAN ROAD, PAMBER HEATH, BASINGSTOKE, RG26-6EN

CoCo Graphic Designer Plus—Paul Marlow

CoCo Graphic Designer Plus (CGDP) is a set of three utilities for producing signs, greetings cards, and banners. To use it, you need a 64K CoCo, at least one disk drive, and a mouse or joystick.

On running CGDP, you are presented with the main menu, which offers: make sign, make card, make banner, setup printer, setup data drives. The first three load in the design sub-programs. Setup printer chooses the linefeed for your printer, either CR or CR+LF, and then the baud rate, from 300, 600, 1200, 2400, 4800, or 9600. The basic CGDP offers 29 drivers with more available on request. On the setup menu, only 5 are displayed at any one time, but you can scroll through the list by clicking on either the up or down arrows next to the printer list. After choosing your printer setup, you can leave by clicking on OK to save your options, or CANCEL to leave the options in their original state.

The data drive setup menu allows multi-drive owners to choose which drive to have the picture, border, and font files on. Again, this screen can be exited by clicking on either OK or CANCEL.

Now, to the actual designing. On choosing make sign, the sign program is loaded into memory, and the sign designer options are displayed: select picture, place picture, select border, edit text, preview sign, print sign, save sign, load sign. Select picture does just what it says and offers you the choice of two pictures for use on your sign. The basic CGDP comes with 32 pictures, but there are 6 other disks available, each with 132 pictures, giving a total of 792. All the pictures are loaded from disk, and you click on the one you want by scrolling through the list in the same way as before.

Place picture allows you to choose where on the sign you want the pictures, and what size they should be. Select border gives a choice of 16 borders, with another 176 alternative patterns available. To choose the border, click on the its picture and it will appear next to the two designs in the signs parts box to the right of the screen.

Edit text gives you a page to the right of the screen, and this is the one of the few times you actually need to touch the keyboard. You can choose the position of the text, either left, right, or centred; the size of the text; and the font style. There are only 6 fonts in the standard CGDP, but you can buy another 20. In edit text mode, the options chosen are reflected on the page to the right of the screen. For example, if you choose large size bold lettering, that is exactly what appears on the page, so there is no guess work needed in deciding what the text will look like on the finished sign.

Preview sign is the most useful feature of CGDP, in that it actually shows you what the finished sign will look like, either small or actual size, so that you can make any necessary changes before printing.

Save and load sign suffer from one of two minor flaws in the program, in that no matter how many drives you have, your sign is always saved to drive 0. As the CGDP disk is almost full when you receive it, you are forced to remove the master disk and insert another disk before saving.

The design card and design banner programs are almost identical to design sign. However, in the card designer two pages are designed, one for the cover of the card and the other for the inside. Each is printed in one of two halves of the page. The inside page is printed upside down in the top left corner, and the cover printed right way up in the bottom right corner, allowing the page to be folded to form the card.

Banner design does not allow the choice of border, and there is no preview option as the banner is always in view at the bottom of the screen.

The actual printing process suffers from the second flaw, in the amount of time it takes. As the CoCo uses a serial printer port, it takes longer to print anything than it would using a centronics port. My DMP106 only prints at a maximum of 2400 baud, and as CGDP prints everything using double pass printing, it takes a long time to print even a sign, let alone a banner.

This is one of the best programs I have ever seen for the CoCo, and can recommend it to anyone who fancies producing their own designs. It is available from: Zebra Systems Inc., 121 S.Burrowes Street, State College, PA 16801, USA. Price, \$29.95 plus \$6.00 shipping and handling. Zebra accept VISA.

Letters To The Editor...

Particularly with Ossett '93 in mind, would it not be a good idea to get readers to recommend what to buy to improve one's set-up?

I have a Dragon 64, purchased at Ossett in 1991, and a single disk with SuperDOS, from Ossett 1990, which I use almost daily with VisiText Deluxe. I also have a Star LC24/10 printer purchased locally. So, what next?

This year I bought, amongst other things, Read PC. Would it be possible to get somebody to recommend some compatible PC utility programs? I use Mike Hosken's Datasort a lot, as well as David Lawrence's Unifile and Varifile for data storage, but they do consume a lot of precious memory. At long last, Up-2-Date has produced a snag-free Analyzer which I am beginning to try out.

So, how about some advice that would please not only Dragon users, but could also give more support to the people who make the Ossett show such a friendly and helpful occasion?

J.S. Mitchell.

We Are Not Alone...

In response to Gareth Tuttiet's piece last issue, John C. Peach would like it known that the Oric is in fact alive and well, and has two support groups in the form of Oric Users Monthly and the Club Europe Oric, with OUM being up to issue 62. Mr Peach runs an Atmos in addition to a Dragon 32.

"...with the large memory that stays large..." anyone?
Stephen

Silicon Village... Ian Jones.

Along with my latest Shop TV catalogue came a card promoting Silicon Village, which is a Viewdata standard database. I was just about to throw it away when the word FREE caught my eye.

What it boiled down to was that it was possible to log on to Silicon Village without having registered by using the free agent account. This is achieved by using the ID 444444444444 and the password 4444. This may seem familiar to anyone who has used Prestel/Micronet, and like Micronet did it offers the home user a variety of games, mailbox type messaging, and special interest groups. Access to messaging wasn't available to me as a guest user, so I had a quick look around some of the other parts of the database, which you are guided through as if it was a village. For example, if you want to know what the latest news is, then you select the option to go to the newsagents. There are a lot of similarities to Micronet, but I have to say that Silicon Village seems better organised. The advert also included a reply card to register for a free 30 minutes trial, so I will have to send that off and have another look.

Silicon Village boasts:

WAVEGUIDE, a TV/Video magazine.

Places to meet and chat with other villagers.

AVATAR, "the ultimate multi-user adventure game".

VILLAGE POST OFFICE to mail other residents.

ALL SAINTS, the Village Church - live services.

VALKYRIE women's magazine.

Daily computing news from around the world.

TVC, "for everything from village gossip to travel tips".

MARKET SQUARE, small ads. and tele-shopping.

ART GALLERY, "featuring your own exhibits".

Private areas and special interest groups.

VILLAGE COMPUTING, "news and files for your computer".

To register as a user will cost 10.00 and then a further 6.00 for the first month's subscription, with 6.00 a month thereafter. The first two hours a month is "free", and then 2.5p a minute after that. All prices will have VAT added to them.

If you want to give it a try, set your comms to 1200/75 Viewdata format, and ring 081 759 6996.

And Next Year?

What wonders can we expect in 1993? ... all the "experts" are making predictions, so here's mine. John Major claims that there is no recession and this is really another Economic Miracle. Last employed person receives redundancy notice. Pound achieves parity with the pfennig. Entry level for home computers is the 686/200 with 40Gig RAM. Mirror reports that Prince Charles is having affair with corgi. Government discovered to be part of a Virtual Reality computer program. France declares war on America and captures Euro-Disney. Power failure causes Government to disappear. Stephen Wood takes over country and swaps it for latest Batman video. 1994 cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. Paul G.

An Experimental Light Pen... J. Brown.

Having worked on photo devices in the past, and having a scrap cell from a games lightgun, my thoughts turned to a lightpen, as some time back I had a cassette for the Trojan lightpen. The outcome of my experiments is shown here in detail. The circuit is a simple, easily built, two stage amplifier. The first stage is set by alteration of the pot, and the second is the amplifier which outputs in two ways; firstly, to an integrated circuit which makes the input pulse from the amplifier a lot sharper, and secondly to a feed for the LED, which allows us to see the condition of the unit and allows easier setting up. It is powered through the righthand joystick port.

Nothing seems to be critical in construction, as I have tried other photocells, from ORP12 to some of the Siemens and Telefunken types, and all seem to work OK.

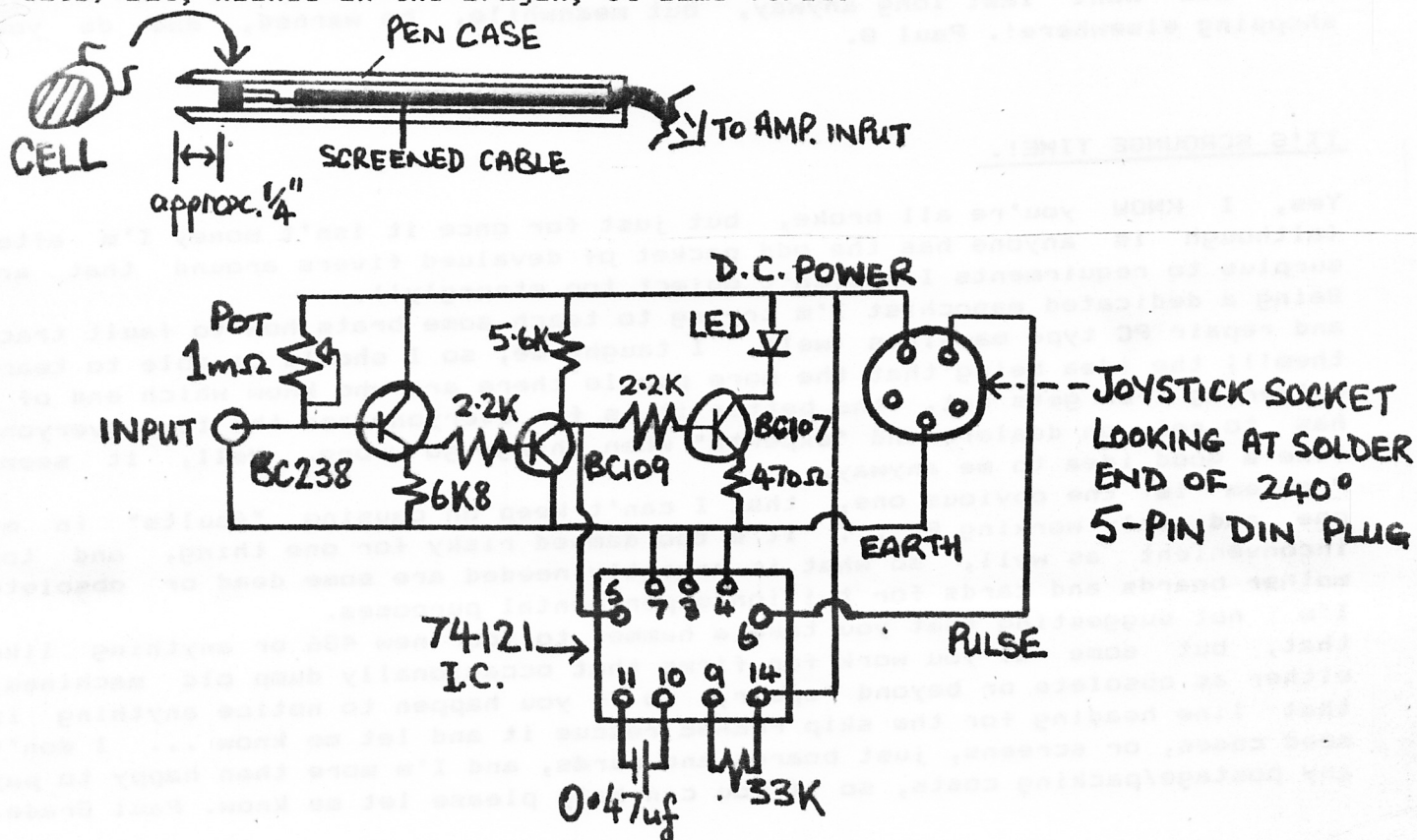
In use, the program is loaded and we are invited to place the pen on a flashing cursor to change the screen, select from a desired menu, etc. Boxes, circles, shapes, lines and so on can be drawn on the screen, colours can be filled in, text written etc. We can always come back to the menu at any time, and the program is a credit to its author. My program was on cassette, but it is also available on disc from Dragonfire. All in all, it was a worthwhile venture. My thoughts are now turning to a mouse using optics, which would be excellent with programs such as Dragdraw, Wefax etc.

The actual pen was built in an old Pentel pen case, with the optical device glued in about 1/4 inch from the face end. You should be careful here not to get glue on the face of the cell, and you should not point the device at any strong light source, as it can be easily damaged.

Setting up is fiddly, as it involves adjusting the potentiometer carefully and slowly, so that when the pen is pointed at some light source, the LED illuminates. It is not lit in normal use, but it lights up when sufficient light appears. When the unit seems to be working, slowly move the pen from right to left or left to right across a light source, and the LED should flash in accordance with the position of the source.

To test with the program, point the pen over the flashing cursor when asked to do so. If it is set up OK, then the screen will change into the menu mode. If this does not happen, try increasing the brightness of the display a little, and watch to see if the LED flashes. If it does not, try tweaking the pot a little. Use a 10 turn potentiometer, as this makes setting easier. A normal pot is fiddly, as it varies too quickly.

So, what we have really is an electronic drawing board, and displays can be saved or loaded at any time. With modifications, it can be used with different computers, and as a collector of older ones, I may give some details at a later date; but, hooked on the Dragon, it came first.



CROSSWORD NUMBER 65 ANSWERS

ACROSS: 1.Actor 5.Depot 8.Gap 9.Forms 10.Ill buildings
12.Proved. 13.Repeat 16.Deaconess 18.Boa 19.Input 20.Hot
21.Satan 22.Dummy.

DOWN: 1.Angle 2.Tap 3.Refrigeration 4.Clinic 5.Disinterested
6.Priestess 7.Tales 11.Broadcast 14.Imped 15.Wall 17.Hill
20.Hum.

DANGER. SHARK WARNING!.

You'd think that, with business the way it is, most firms would at least TRY to keep the customer satisfied, but I have to report that this isn't the case with a company trading as PC-CITY. Now I know that they don't sell Dragon related products, but a lot of members also use other machines as well, so the matter IS relevant.

The story begins with one of our members writing to the said firm to order a "VGA package" for his Amstrad 1640, package supposedly consisting of a VGA driver card and a monitor, plus installation disc and full instructions. Anyway, package duly arrives, minus disc and instructions, and more to the point, not working!. Monitor tested out OK on another machine, so after the usual phone calls, letters, etc. the card was sent back for replacement, and eventually replacement DOES arrive, this time WITH an instruction manual AND an installation disc!. All now well? ... not on your life!. The card worked OK, so did the monitor, but the disc turned out to be BLANK!. So yet more words on the phone and in writing, and the disc returned for exchange, along with a cheque for MORE hardware (a real optimist this one!). End result? ... no disc, and a scribbled unsigned note returned with the cheque effectively saying "get stuffed"!. With firms like THAT around it's no wonder that the computer scene is falling to pieces!. Hopefully the Trading Standards Office will eventually sort the matter out the hard way, and with any luck a firm that bad won't last long anyway, but meanwhile, be warned, and do your shopping elsewhere!. Paul G.

IT'S SCROUNGE TIME!.

Yes, I KNOW you're all broke, but just for once it isn't money I'm after (although if anyone has the odd packet of devalued fivers around that are surplus to requirements I wouldn't object too strongly!).

Being a dedicated masochist I'm trying to teach some brats how to fault trace and repair PC type machines (well, I taught me, so I should be able to teach them!); the idea being that the more people there are who know which end of a soldering iron gets hot, the better it is for everyone and the less everyone has to rely on dealers and "experts" when things go wrong. Well, it seems like a good idea to me anyway.

Problem is the obvious one, that I can't keep on causing "faults" in my one and only working PC ... it's too damned risky for one thing, and too inconvenient as well, so what is urgently needed are some dead or obsolete mother boards and cards for tuition/experimental purposes.

I'm not suggesting that you take a hammer to your new 486 or anything like that, but some of you work for firms that occasionally dump old machines, either as obsolete or beyond repair, so if you happen to notice anything in that line heading for the skip PLEASE rescue it and let me know ... I don't need cases, or screens, just boards and cards, and I'm more than happy to pay any postage/packing costs, so if you can help please let me know. Paul Grade.

No, this isn't a new style of dress for Forth programmers, it's a further implementation of John Payne's Forth operating system written to work in conjunction with Alfred Knotig's Midi interface. In case you hadn't heard of Alfred's interface, it's a device which converts digital information (1's and 0's), with the help of some software, into analogue form and can transmit and receive digital information to and from a Midi instrument. The Forth Midi program has been written to transform music written as text into Midi data so that it can be played either on the Dragon or on a MIDI instrument such as an electronic keyboard.

I'm quite impressed with the results. The sounds produced by the keyboard are quite convincingly musical.

This is done by writing the music as text on Forth screens. It helps if you know a little Forth, enough to know how to write, edit, load and save Forth screens, but that is quite adequate to use this system. Notes are given their standard musical letter names - 'A' to 'G' - the octave specified by 'O' and a number, length by L - as in Composer. There the similarity ends. The system can handle up to six voices, or parts, which can be written either as a series of chords, hymn tune style, or, more usefully, as separate musical strings. This means when the midi data is transmitted to the midi instrument, each note has its correct value, rather than all notes in a given note group having to be the same length, as in Composer. The volume can be varied and, of course, tempo - most musical devices are available, in fact.

If you have a Midi-type electronic keyboard, or are just thinking of getting one, then I can recommend this program. Of course, you'll need Alf Knotig's little Midi interface - but that cost less than a tenner - and you need to make up a lead to connect the keyboard to the interface. A connection needs to be made to one of the PIA's - I.C.35 on the D32, and I.C. 8 on the D64 - a crocodile clip is provided on a lead from the interface. It is slightly tedious to type in the music, but isn't it always? There is scope for further improvements, like sending rhythm data and instrument choice along with the notes to be played. John is still developing the program, and no doubt these refinements will get consideration.

If you want more details contact John at 3, Siband Close, Thornbury, Bristol BS12-2HR but please don't forget to enclose a s.a.e if you want a reply!.

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This Is Rumour Control...

Here Are The Facts...

Christmas is coming, the Group is definitely not getting fat, either numerically or financially, and Update is getting very slimline indeed. I can fully appreciate that most of you are sick of hearing me ask for articles, but luckily, there is an answer.

YES, life, the universe, and everything, there IS an answer!

It's simple really. In order to stop me asking for more articles, just send one in for me, and hopefully I should have enough to cobble together another issue. I'm sure we can all see that the end is in sight, but it is possible to delay the inevitable a bit. Try it and see.

Next, as promised, the moan about software sales. The price of Dragon software is purely nominal these days, in comparison to the regurgitated games currently being churned out for the GameBoy and gameGear (hey, original name!) etc - I mean, 40 smackers for a Tetris cart! Easy money! Therefore, why not see if you can spare the odd three quid or so for stuff like Ramdisk etc - not exactly the sort of amount to give your bank manager a cardiac, now is it??

On the subject of software, I've been in the vicinity of some of the games for the PC under Windows, and when you consider the amount of money you have to spend buying a Windows system (still about as fast as the C64 tape loading system), they aren't actually up to much. I mean, why spend tons of cash just so that you can play Patience or Solitaire?? And playing Patience with a Touch screen? Isn't it just getting a LITTLE bit too silly now? PC computer programmers...easy life!

AND, if the new generation of computers are all so excellent, why is it that whenever I try to use the University network, it's always "service unavailable due to essential maintenance" and similar rubbish? The system is so "advanced" that it's disappearing under the weight of repair scheduled! In five years of running a 64 system (and five years of a 32 before that), all I've ever had go down is the main crystal, and that has been the only fault. It may not be a 486 but then again it barely ever goes wrong. The current computer scene is definitely a case of "more is less"...

Besides, a record of the exact time and date when you saved a particular file is just SO useful, don't you think?

End Of Transmission.

Stephen.

We are NOT amused!..

I seem to remember (and so does a certain Mr.Preston) a lot of Dragon owners in the South Western area, especially South Wales, complaining that there were never any Dragon Shows within range for them. I wonder where they all disappeared to last month when the Bristol Show was on?.

No-one expects a mad rush of punters at computer shows now, but fifty or so seemed a reasonable minimum to expect, possibly even a hundred if things turned out well ... the former might just have covered the expenses and the latter would have shown a small profit on the event. SEVENTEEN bothered to turn up, and a couple of those wandered in by mistake!. Result?, a considerable cash loss for Bob Preston (halls cost money to hire, quite a bit of it!), and no-one even covered their travel expenses, let alone made any profit!.

To those few who DID make the effort, thank you, your presence was much appreciated, and we hope you had a good day and came away with a bargain or two. To those others in the general area who couldn't be bothered you have ensured that there will be no further shows in the S.W area, and have considerably reduced the chances of further shows ANYWHERE. The next Ossett show will still be on, but mainly because it would cost more to cancel the booking than to go ahead with it, but after that Dragon Shows are likely to become history.

THE LATE, LATE BIT

Yes, it's almost Christmas once again, Season of Universal Goodwill and all that the time when all the end of year bills are being got ready for posting to you with that festive message "if payment is not received within fourteen days we're sending in the Bailiff"; the time when you stumble (cursing gently) around the shops to spend money you haven't got buying presents for people you can't stand, knowing that the only consolation is that they will spend WEEKS trying to discover where you bought the horrible things so that they can get them exchanged for something else. The time of year when the few people left with jobs have to face yet another dreaded Office/Works Party, although it shouldn't be quite so bad this time ... most of the people who could have remembered what a prat you made of yourself LAST year have been made redundant months ago. The time when you feel like trying to get the IRA to bomb the Nintendo and Sega factories so the kids will stop pestering you to buy them yet another grotty games console every time the ads appear on the box. Still, look on the bright side of things you should be able to recover from the indigestion within a week or two (although the hangover from that lousy supermarket plonk may well last longer), and you probably won't REALLY murder the kids, however tempting the idea will seem at times. Your in-laws aren't REALLY trying to persecute you, and the theory that they were dropped from the cast of the "Elm Street" films as being too horrible for the censors to pass simply isn't true it was Hammer Films that fired them!. The bills probably won't be TOO bad after all, and anyway, you can always go bankrupt if they really ARE as bad as you expect, and there IS one good point about Christmas Day it means that there are another 365 days before Christmas!.

Actually, I'm rather worried about the television companies this year. By this time they have usually got around to plugging their "Christmas Spectacular" programs ... the list of re-runs and "best of..." grot that they always see fit to inflict on us between mid-December and mid-January in the hope that everyone will be feeling too lousy to care what they are looking at, but so far, nothing!. Does this mean that we are going to have a Christmas season WITHOUT the usual 99th showing of Oliver, the Sound of Music, the Worst of Disney, the Worst of Spielberg, The Bruce Forsythe Christmas Show 1984, and all the rest of the Director General's Favourites?!. I don't believe it at all I reckon that THIS year's selection is so bad that they're keeping it secret until the last moment so we won't have time to stock up with videos to watch instead.

Anyway, enough of this drive!. You have better things to do than worry about Christmas things like writing (or even typing) several completely original interesting articles for publication in the February Update. An excellent idea, and I congratulate you on having thought of it such dedication deserves a reward, and in a truly just society you would receive one. However, this is England, 1992, and due to Gaffer's Spending Cuts you'll have to make do with the Fame (or Notoriety) which comes from having your epic published in Update. I KNOW you deserve better, so do I!. As Mike mentioned in his piece, people used to get PAID real money for writing things once, and even a page of garbage like this would have earned me twenty-five quid back in the days of Dragon User and all the other commercial computer magazines, but now there's only Update, and that never could afford to pay anyone for anything. It may not be justice, but that's life for you!.

Well, whatever else may not have happened, the old Group has managed to more or less survive another year. Don't ask me how, I don't know, and don't ask me why because you wouldn't believe the answer anyway, but we're still here, and with any luck we can keep going for a while longer yet, although unless sales improve to boost funds a bit I wouldn't care to say for how MUCH longer!. Don't worry, your subscription is safe, we aren't going to disappear without notice, but things ARE getting tight cashwise now that membership numbers are so low, so please remember that we rely on software sales to keep going ... subs alone don't cover the costs!.

Anyway, have a good Christmas, and I hope that 1993 will be a better year for all of you.

Paul Grade.

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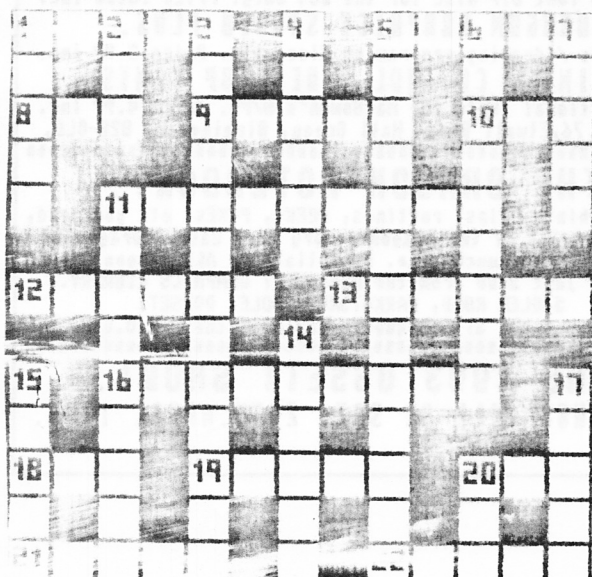
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