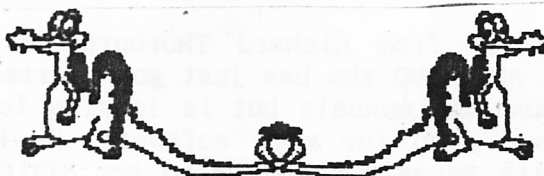


The Newsletter of the National Dragon User's Group

DRAGON



UPDATE

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ISSUE 109

*Here we go yet Again*

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**THE GAFFER'S BIT . . . . .**

Someone just reminded me that this is now Year Twelve of the Group and Update! ... just goes to show how much dedicated masochism there is on the computer scene, doesn't it?. After all, this is now officially the Age of Information Technology, whatever that may be, the time when everyone would be computer literate if only they could spell it, the age of technological sophistication, when 50% of the population look on computing as "heap big magic from big magic heap" and imagine they are some kind of super-shaman because they spend most of their time crouching before Icons, praying that the Great God Gates will send them a copy of the Win95 spell with working mouse drivers. (Driving meeces appears to be some kind of perverted ritual that Gates devotees go in for ... reason unknown!). Almost all of the remainder are convinced that These Computer Thingies are the cause of all evil, and are responsible for extortionate gas bills, bank statements which show their money has disappeared, hens not giving milk, cows refusing to lay, and similar curses, and that a Pentium is one of those diagrams witches draw on the floor when raising the odd demon or two. Come to think of it, they may well be right. Of course, somewhere between these groups there is a band of Dedicated Idiots who cling to the pathetic belief that computers should be able to actually do something useful ... these are known as Dragon Owners and are generally believed to be extinct, rather like dinosaurs, car running boards, wild haggis, and similar legendary items of mythology, but some DO still remain, even if numbers are decreasing steadily. Perhaps someone should start a Save the Dragon Owner campaign, hold protest demonstrations about the lack of Government funding for the Care of Disabled Dragons ..... you never know, it might even work!. Let me know if you try it!. *Paul Grade.*

**The Editor's Bit...**

Yes, it's that time again. You know...Nearly Christmas. Next issue will be our Chrissy issue, so how about writing us an article before you get bored to death by the repeats on television...?

It's also THAT time of year again. You know...Update's birthday, now celebrating twelve glorious years, nice one Paul. It seems something like magic that Update is still here today. Well, at least, that's the way I look at it. I send away a package full of stuff to Paul every two months, and magically hope it will transform into Something Joyous and Wonderful to Behold. Never does, sadly. The magic must be wearing off. Most likely something in the water in Worthing. Probably people. SW.

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You just HAVE to be joking, all we get in the water around here is rotting seaweed and raw sewage!. Worthing, the Last Resort!. *Paul.*

**PEEKING THE DRAGON(65) .MIKE STOTT**

I have received a letter from Richard Thorburn, Willowbank, Gladstone Road, Huntly, Aberdeenshire, AB54 8BD who has just got started with OS9 and has managed to acquire some software and manuals but is looking for manuals for some of the software he has got and also for more software. He has already got RMS, SRS, BASIC09, CASH & VAT with manuals. He has also got STYLO and DYNACALC without the manuals but hopes to get the STYLO manual shortly. He needs the OS9 USER GUIDE, OS9 PROGRAMMER'S MANUAL and any information on DYNACALC. If anybody has got any of these or any other OS9 software which they no longer use why not contact him at the above address or give him a bell on 01466 792832.

Richard tells me that PSE and Bob Preston still have copies of C, RMS, SRS and CASH & VAT (RP) for sale if anybody else is looking for them. My advice to Richard and anybody else who is looking for any Dragon items would be to look out for ads in Micro Computer Mart or why not put a free ad in yourself. I bet there are still people hanging on to old Dragon software and would be glad of a few pounds for them. In the past I have picked up quite a few Dragons and software by advertising in local papers. Another way is to visit Car Boot Sales where computers and software can often be picked up for buttons. Sometimes you can even pick up items in the bargain boxes at Computer Shows. Good hunting anyway and I will certainly let you know if I hear of any of the above items that are going for grabs.

Nobody has contacted me yet about the THIRDERBIRDS game that Sotos Mandalos is looking for, and unfortunately he has not come back to me to let me know what the game is like so I am afraid that, up to now, we have had no success with regards to this.

As many of you will have noticed in the last issue of UPDATE Stewart Orchard has returned to the Dragon scene and has converted BALLDOZER and ROTABB (Revenge of the Alien Bongo Beast) to disk and presented them to the group. Paul rang me a month or so ago and asked me if I would review these new disk conversions if he sent me copies. Unfortunately they have not arrived, probably victims of the postal dispute like many other items. I can however still review them as I have got copies of both these programs on cassette and on disk (although they are not the author's conversions).

BALLDOZER - Anybody who has got a copy of DRAGON USER from December 1988 can read my review of the cassette version of this program. When I did this review I had only had it a few weeks so what do I think about it nearly eight years later.

It is based on BRICKOUT but has more features than all the other versions put together. I still get this one out and play it and I consider it to be one of the best games ever for the Dragon. There are thirty normal screens and you have a paddle at the bottom of the screen with which you have to hit the ball against the bricks to remove them. Some bricks need hitting more than once and occasionally a balloon drops down the screen with a letter inside.

If you catch the balloon with your paddle you get an extra attribute like being able to fire a laser at the bricks. You soon discover what each letter means and whether you want to catch one for that particular screen.

In 1988 when I wrote the review I had only reached the eighth screen without cheating but I have since been able to complete every screen and reached the final screen which is completely different. This is one of those games which is very addictive as you try to complete a screen so that you can see what the next one looks like. Picking up extra lives from the bubbles certainly helps in your quest to progress through the game. BALLDOZER on disk is available from the group for only three pounds and at that price has got to be a must for everybody's collection.

I have got numerous versions of BRICK OUT for the Dragon and PC and this is far superior to any other version, in fact I do not even like BRICK OUT.

As there is not enough space left for me to do a review of ROTABB in this issue I will review it in my next article. ROTABB is available on disk for three pounds and fifty pence.

**DRAGONS & DESKJETS2. ROB SCHOFIELD**

So, you've successfully connected the printer to your D64. This is where the second major problem comes into play - the lack of software to drive the printer properly. There are a number of different levels of capability you can now achieve, so let's look at them one at a time. You should at least be able to print straight ASCII text in the default font that the Deskjet powers up with, and get it to page feed. Possibly, you could manually change the default print font during printing, but this is not wildly satisfying. This sort of setup is no big deal, it's not especially fancy, and it doesn't give access to a lot of the special effects and features you know you have in the printer. Disappointment would be the reaction at this point having blown X pounds on your expensive Deskjet (on my advice too...oh dear). Trouble is, to exploit it, you have to know something about the language the printer speaks and send it the correct control codes to make it do the things you want it to do. If you're running vintage Dragon software then it is highly unlikely that you will have a suitable driver for a modern printer like this. So you're now stuck if this is the limit of your technical skills. So let's look at the next option; emulation. When you buy, you don't necessarily have to aim just for a Deskjet. There are alternative bubble jet printers on the market that emulate the (now ancient) Epson FX 80/85 type printers that were around at the time the Dragon was on sale (also the older Deskjets have either built-in emulation or a separate cartridge, but HP add-ons are not cheap, so be warned). In theory you could operate the printer in Epson mode and benefit from improved print quality and have the effects you have available via your word processor software. The third option is to consider working out a way to program something that knows about the printer's control language. The way the emulation we've just looked at works is to put a filter between the printer and the data coming from the computer so that the printer can understand the particular language of the computer and vice versa. Epson printers speak a dialect called Esc/P and Esc/P2 (depending on their age); Deskjets speak PCL (page control language) which is the HP competitor to the PostScript language, and is in fact far more versatile and powerful than PS. Most printer manufacturers will, for a price, supply you with a language reference manual telling you how to manipulate the printer with its control language. All you have to do(!) is read the book, then use your favourite programming language to take in an ASCII source file line by line and add into the lines the appropriate control codes to achieve special effects such as Italics, Bold, etc. It's all very well for me to say this as a programmer, I suppose; however, it's not impossible to do, and may well prove to be an enjoyable and challenging project for you to get your teeth into. Who knows, you could give the program to the group and achieve eternal (well, lasting anyway) fame. I have to confess to you that I do this sort of thing on modern equipment, so the idea has not occurred to me. I would be using my D64 for other things more suited to its nature, such as rewriting bits of OS9 for things like E-mail or Ethernet connections. Then there's the SCSI disk interface project, the Hitachi 6309 performance upgrade, and so on...

After all, what else are you supposed to use a PC for except for word processing?

**WHY BOTHER?! . EDDIE FREEMAN.**

In the June Update there were adverts from two subscribers who were looking for items ... so being 'Elpful Eddie, I replied to them. Subscriber number one was looking for a copy of Update Issue 1, or to borrow a copy so that he could photocopy it. Rather than send my original I went to some expense (as having retired I do not have use of a copier) getting a copy made of my original, which I duly sent. Subscriber number 2 was looking for Scott Adams adventures. and I advised this person that I had two copies of Colossal Cave (when I could find them, having recently moved!). I have not received a reply to EITHER communication. I assume that in the first case if I had sent my original I could have kissed it good-bye!. **WHY BOTHER ASKING PAUL TO PUT REQUESTS IN UPDATE IF YOU DON'T RESPOND TO REPLIES? AND IN FUTURE, WHY SHOULD I BOTHER TO REPLY ANYWAY?. IN FUTURE, I WON'T!.**



**HenceForth(25) . Bob Smith**

As promised, here is a description of Nomonem, last issue's program. Screen 299 is the data for the program. As usual with Forth, the subwords used in the final program (Nomis) have to be built before the final program can be built. The first word (IFD) is a separate entity to check whether John Payne's DSKTORAM is loaded onto the system. After building IFD, -FIND is run on £CHK (a subword to DSKTORAM) which leaves "false" on the return stack if it doesn't exist and two numbers (pfa and length) plus "true" if it does exist. IFD checks whether the result is true or false. If true, it removes the two numbers and terminates, otherwise it loads DSKTORAM from screen 13 and then terminates.

Now the program proper. The first two words provide two random numbers depending on whether we need a vowel or a consonant. Forth doesn't have a random number generator so we have to use a BASIC command (I'm working on a Forth RND - more anon) to generate the random numbers 1-6 or 1-19. B[...] is the Forth word that executes a BASIC command. The random number is POKed into address 30000 where it can be accessed by Forth. The next word (FETCHWT) fetches 2 characters from screen 299 with a given address. The value of the first character is found by subtracting 48 from the ASCII value fetched, and this value is then multiplied by 10 and added to the value of the second character, thus leaving the weighting number on the return stack. The next word (GETNOM) reads the contents of screen 299 into RAM, in this case from the disk in the second drive. DSKTORAM reads upto 28 screens into RAM starting at address 3072 - this info is on screen 13 on the Forth disk.

NOMONEM begins the nitty-gritty of constructing a seven letter nomonem. A DO loop running from 1 to 8 is executed 7 times (a Forth DO loop stops when the counter is incremented to the highest value before repeating the loop). A BEGIN..WHILE..REPEAT has to be used so that a letter is discarded if it does not meet the weighting criterion. First the counter is read, divided by 2, and the remainder left on the return stack as a true/false flag, so that it can be used to decide whether we need a consonant or a vowel. If it is true then we need a consonant, so an IF gets a random number from 1 to 19, fetches this number from address 30000 and duplicates it, adds the topmost to 3071 which gives the RAM address of the consonant whence it is fetched. This is then swapped with the duplicate random number which is now multiplied by 2 (there are two characters in each weight) and added to 3198 to give the address of the weight. FETCHWT fetches the weight.

ELSE (false flag) does the same thing for the vowels. The WHILE loop then generates a random number from 1 to 99 and checks whether the weight is less than this number. If it is then the WHILE loop repeats until the weight of the new letter chosen isn't less than the new random number. The WHILE loop terminates and the letter is put on the display (EMIT). The DO loop repeats this until the seven letter nomonem is complete. The DO loop then terminates.

The last word, NOMIS, is the final program. It first reads the data screen (299) into RAM, then starts a WHILE loop that continues until you answer "N" to the question "OK TO GO ON?". The While loop starts a DO loop that produces 10 nomonems by running NOMONEM 10 times. This loop also sends a carriage return before each nomonem, and also resets the return stack pointer to save the trouble of checking for unwanted numbers on the return stack after each operation. KEY 78 = 0= fetches the ASCII value of your reply, compares it with 78 (ASCII value for N) and terminates the program if "N" is what you type.

**IMPORTANT . . . . PLEASE NOTE.**

The Postal strikes appear to have resulted in a large amount of mail getting totally "lost" in transit rather than just delayed, so I would appreciate it if anyone who has sent cheques etc since the strikes began would check their bank statements to see if they have been presented . . . . all/any cheques received here are paid into the Group account within a week of receipt, so if the one you sent isn't on the statement, the odds are I didn't get it!. Paul Grade.



## **Mightier Than The Quill?. C.Scott**

Our Chairman, bless his cotton socks, is always trying to convince us that the Dragon can do anything that the fastest Pentium PC can do. Sadly, we all know that this is not true.. One only has to look at developments in word processors to realise this.

WPs available for the Dragon are very basic, allowing the user to enter, change, and print text but little else. They are only one step up from a typewriter, but are adequate for letters and the like.

Mail Merge was one of the first additions to WPs, allowing you to merge a list of names and addresses, for instance to a standard letter. Now everyone could emulate Reader's Digest. Spellcheckers and thesauruses were added next to help poor spellers and typists but are unable to spot the wrong use of a word eg there/their, or missing words. Grammar checkers came along to eradicate these types of errors but unfortunately don't stop there and usually make derogatory remarks on your writing style.

With the advents of Windows and more sophisticated printers, users were able to change font styles and sizes, the resulting documents, if overdone, was usually a dog's dinner. Colour printers allowed you to compound the problem by letting you print it in glorious technicolour.

DTP made us into budding Rupert Murdochs and soon these features were added to WPs - columns, inserting graphics and charts, drop capitals, kerning etc, but they never taught the fundamentals of good design and some of the results were a complete mess. True WYSIWYG is essential to layout a complex document, which anybody who has tried it on WordPerfect 5.1 will agree with.

Accountants can now insert tables of figures either from their spreadsheet or from the internal table generator into reports and other documents. It is no longer necessary to print them separately and attach them as appendices at the end of your report. The facility to add lines, boxes, and shading puts your local printer out of business because you can now design your own forms.

Internet mania has meant that features have been added so that you can not only connect to the Net from your favourite WP but also design and upload your own Web home pages. Of course, if every amateur sets up their own Web page it will become a nightmare to sort out the useful bits from the dross. The latest idea is to add workgroup features, where you can write a document, email it to somebody who will then make their own comments and changes and email it back to you without a single sheet of paper being used, much to the chagrin of the Post-it note people.

Luckily, most of the idiot features - wizards, genies, tips of the day - can be switched off or ignored.. Unfortunately it is a sad fact of life that productivity drops the more facilities you have. A typist could produce a simple document in five minutes but your highly paid manager will spend all morning titivating it.

As a Dragon user, you will not have that problem - but then, you didn't spend over two grand for the necessary hardware and software, did you?

## **Problems Solved...?**

Some of us can use a soldering iron, but need to be reminded of all the advice we have boggled over in past volumes:

1. Dragon DTP program version 7.

Fontchange including Font menu.

My intention of putting my own font in has so far been frustrated. Why doesn't it work? (D64 with SuperDOS)

2. Printout from Dragon DTP not bold enough - what can be done?
3. Can you run a VGA monitor from a D64? If so, how?

J.S.Mitchell.

(All replies will be passed on, as well as being included in a future Update.)

**Car Boot Sales. Keith Nash**

I have visited car boot sales for some years, and I often see ancient computers for sale. The machines most frequently seen are, not surprisingly, the highly popular Sinclair Spectrum and Commodore 64. Last year, for the first time, I saw a D32 CoCo 2 for sale. The price for the computer complete with joysticks, cartridges and tapes, cassette recorder, and manuals was 20-25.00 for the D32 and 10-15.00 for the CoCo. Since I already own four D32s, I did not want another, but I did buy my first CoCo 2 and a couple of Dragon tapes. The only drawback to buying at car boot sales is that it is usually not possible to plug the computer in and check that it is working before buying!. Boot sales are a good place to find out about the history of microcomputers. I acquired a dead but serviceable Sinclair QL complete with manuals, tapes, and serial printer for a fiver - perhaps 1% of their original price. The QL turns out to be a superb machine, far ahead of its time. If only Clive Sinclair had given it a conventional keyboard and a disc drive instead of the notoriously unreliable microdrives, it could have become the standard business machine of the mid-80s. This year's sales have got off to a slow start because of the weather, but I have spotted some fascinating machines that I was NOT tempted to buy - a "modern" electronic telex machine; an IBM "portable" personal computer with built-in monitor and twin 5 1/4" disc drives - not exactly a laptop, probably more at home in a 19" rack; and some tapes for the Aquarius, a machine that I had not heard of before. The most bizarre item that I have ever seen at a boot sale is a Russian military night sight. Amongst the run of the mill secondhand goods there is a wealth of half forgotten artifacts of the 60s, 70s, and 80s, so whether you are looking for a Chopper bicycle, Waddington's Blast-Off, 8-track tape cartridges, or Dragon games, why not try your local car boot sale?

**Custom OS9 Start-up Files. S. Ross**

During the initialisation of OS9 the commands in a file called Startup are carried out. This file can be customised to suit your needs. Using the echo command you can place any text you need on the screen during your Startup sequence. This is a copy of the startup file on my computer:

```
printr /d0/sys/errmsg
echo Welcome to Steve Ross's Dragon computer running OS9
echo -----
echo Please Enter the Date and Time
echo *****
setime </term
echo
echo*****
mfree
echo*****
echo
echo *****
free /d0
echo *****
mdir
echo *****
login </term
```

Any legitimate OS9 commands can be used during your startup to display any information you would like to see. I find it helpful to know the current space available on the system disk when I start, therefore I have a "free /d0" command as part of the startup routine. If you are using the Login command as I have done please note that you must have a password file in your /d0/sys directory. The password is made up as follows:

User name(up to 32 characters), password(up to 32 characters), user number (0 to 65535), initial process priority (1-255), pathlist of initial execution directory (ie /d0/cmds), pathlist of initial data, directory, name of initial program to execute.

e.g. a typical file would be: STEVE, OPEN SESAME, 0, 128, /d0/cmds, /d0, BASIC09

**Sound Inputting. Gareth Tuttiett**

Some years ago in Personal Computing Weekly there was a program for blowing out birthday candles on the screen by blowing into the microphone on the Dragon's tape recorder. This was done by the cassette data input address at 65312 (&HFF20), and a few years later I began to experiment with this and found 4 addresses that react to sound via the cassette port: 65312 (FF20), 65320 (FF28), 65328 (FF30) and 65336 (FF38). The value for each of these can be 1 or 0, depending on the sound volume and frequency, although I do not know what frequency the addresses respond to - anyone help here?

To see these addresses and their respective values, connect your cassette recorder, run Listing 1 and play a music tape. You will see that the values are either 1 or 0.

Now, this may seem uninteresting, but I immediately thought of sound monitoring as found on graphic equalisers and oscilloscopes. So how to use these values? Using Listing 1 as a base, I created a 'Disco Lights' type program using the text screen to flash black and buff blocks. Since the values can only be 1 or 0, I set up a referenced string variable, C\$(n), where C\$(0) is CHR\$(207) and C\$(1) is CHR\$(128), e.g. when P1=1 then C\$(1) is printed.

Run Listing 2 with one of your music tapes and watch. I have put the lines in horizontal strips, but you can change the PRINT@ values in lines 80 to 110 to the same as in Listing 1 (ie 10, 42, 74, and 106) to make the lights vertical. I've tested the programs on a D32 and D64 with and without disks, so you should have no problems.

Next time, I'll take this idea further.

```

10 REM SOUND MEMORY ADDRESSES
20 REM GJ TUTTIETT 1990
30 REM FOUR IDENTIFIED ADDRESSES FOR SOUND
40 P1=65312:P2=65320:P3=65328:P4=65336
50 AUDIOON
60 CLS3
70 REM SHOW VALUES IN THE ADDRESSES
80 PRINT@10,P1;" : ";PEEK(P1);
90 PRINT@42,P2;" : ";PEEK(P2);
100 PRINT@74,P3;" : ";PEEK(P3);
110 PRINT@106,P4;" : ";PEEK(P4);
115 GOTO 80

```

```

10 REM DISCO LIGHTS V1.3
20 REM GJ TUTTIETT 1990
30 C$(1)=CHR$(207):C$(0)=CHR$(128)
40 P1=65312:P2=65320:P3=65328:P4=65336
50 AUDIOON
60 CLS3
70 REM SHOW LIGHTS
80 PRINT@10,C$(PEEK(P1));
90 PRINT@11,C$(PEEK(P2));
100 PRINT@12,C$(PEEK(P3));
110 PRINT@13,C$(PEEK(P4));
115 GOTO 80

```

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## GROUP SOFTWARE SALE. K.N.G.

Whilst sorting out assorted computer junk, bits and pieces and other Dragon related things, I came across this collection. Some people may have missed these first time round, so now they have a chance to buy them and boost Group funds.

**CARTRIDGES:** DASM/DEMON; EDIT+; SOUND EXTENSION MODULE (by JCB); RAIL RUNNER. All with instruction manuals except the last.

**TAPES:** 20+, including RAINBOW WRITER; FILMASTR; SPRINT COMPILER; D.R.S. (database/filing prog. Transfers easily to disc. 2 copies.); SPRITE MAGIC; ALLDREAM (transferable to disc); DREAMPT (word proc. using Dream editor); SHAPER; PICTURE MAKER; PICTURE WRITER; TURTLE GRAPHICS (Salamander); DUPLIDISK; DRAGON DATA UTILITIES; RTTY programs (Grosvenor);

**TROJAN LIGHTPEN**, with software.

**JOYSTICKS (5)**, 2DD type, 2 other make.

**BOOKS:** THE DRAGON COMPANION, M.Jarvis; PROGRAMMING the DRAGON for Sound and Graphics, Geoff Phillips; GUIDE to the D32, Ian Sinclair; ADVANCED SOUND and Graphics, Keith and Steven Brain. All in good condition.

They are also 20 original games tapes, including adventures, like Colossal Cave, Madness and the Minotaur, etc, flight simulators, and general arcade.

**CARTRIDGES:** £5 each, or offers for the lot.

**TAPES:** £0.75 each, or offers for lots of 5 and over (postage gets heavy for tapes, so can't haggle very much).

**JOYSTICKS:** £5 A PAIR, £2.50 for the odd one. LIGHTPEN: £3.50.

**BOOKS:** £1.00 each, or offers for the lot.

If you want more details, phone me on Worthing 207585 most evenings. I can give a full list and come to an arrangement on price/postage. *Ken Grade.*

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## DRAGON EMULATORS.

Just to clear up a couple of points that seem to be causing some confusion. Firstly, all an emulator does is run a copy of the Dragon 32 ROM in the PC RAM, which effectively gives you a sort of "D32 on ram-disc", that will behave in most respects exactly like a genuine D32, and run D32 software etc. Now this brings us to the second point of confusion .... a Dragon 32 does NOT come equipped with a DOS and disc drives, right? ... those are "optional extras", and the emulators don't come with DOS either!. Unfortunately, those responsible for writing them were using tape based Dragons at the time, so didn't have the relevant information to write a DOS component into the programs, so THEY CANNOT READ OR WRITE DRAGON DISCS!. There IS a rather complicated method of feeding tape based Dragon software into them, and of course you can type in your own listings or whatever, but you can't load in from a Dragon disc. OK?. Disc-reading routines have been "on promise" for a couple of years now, but in true software writer tradition, there's still no sign of 'em. So unless someone out there cares to write one for us, the Dragon will be fetching enormous sums at Sotheby's before you see a disc-reading emulator advertised in Update!.

## AN EXPLANATION . . . . .

Somewhere on the ads page you'll find a request for either a cheap A4 scanner or an interface card/drivers for a Plustex one. Reason being that if we could do a GOOD quality scan (rather than the rather shaky type provided by hand scanners) it would be practical to include some more interesting hardware material in future Updates. I know it is quite possible to type everything in, and hand copy diagrams, etc, but (a) it's damned hard work and more than somewhat time consuming, and (b) it allows too much possibility of built-in errors!. So, if anyone is using an ancient A4 unit as a door-stop, or has a suitable interface card for my ex-junk box Plustek one, please let me know. OK?. Paul G.

**Up-2-Date and all that.**

Ray and Eddie are getting worried, and I don't blame them!. Everyone and his brother praises Up-2-Date, yet subscriptions are sinking rapidly towards the point where it isn't going to be worth the time and effort they put into producing it (and believe me, producing ANY kind of magazine on a regular basis requires a lot of both!), so what's going on out there?. DO you like the thing or are you just making polite noises?. If you don't want it, why not write to Ray and tell him so, then he can spend his time studying the growth rate of grass or observing the comparative drying times of paint, or whatever else may take his fancy instead of wasting his time trying to provide something interesting FOR YOU!. If you DO like it, why aren't you subscribing?. Of course, there may be another reason, like you just forgot to send your subscription, or your disc drive has packed up, or your cheque must have got lost in the post (well, that one I could believe at the moment, just) .... but whatever the reason, if the number of subscribers doesn't show a pretty dramatic increase VERY rapidly, your favourite (only!) disc based magazine will be no more. The choice is simple, and it's all yours ..... it's Make Your Mind Up Time NOW .... it will be no use at all complaining when Up-2-Date ceases to exist.

While we're on the subject of subscriptions, a brief word of explanation re the Group in general ..... as you all know, membership numbers are low now, too low for us to break-even. Materials, postage, etc have all increased in price horribly over the years, and every issue of Update makes a considerable loss as result of this, which means that the Group account is sinking steadily all the time. I COULD increase the subs charge, but then we'd probably lose half the members we still have, which would be self defeating, so we have to rely on people "rounding-up" their subs cheques occasionally, and on sales of Group software etc. Recently, sales have been virtually NIL, even the new disc conversions of ROTABB and Balldozer haven't attracted anyone, and while I don't expect anyone to buy more copies of software they already have, it wouldn't hurt to buy your old Dragon a new bit of software occasionally, would it?. It would certainly help keep the Group running a little longer. Have a think about it, then look through the ads page and see if there's anything listed there that would justify evicting the moths from your cheque book. OK?. Paul.G.

**Helpline List.**

*You'll be pleased to know that the New Revised Helpline List will be much easier to read ..... so far it consists of TWO names!. To those two, very many thanks, but so far as the rest of you are concerned, a little more enthusiasm might make the list a trifle more useful to YOU .... or are you trying to say that you really DO know nothing at all about anything at all?. Where's all the Experts?!.*

**IF NO-ONE ELSE WILL .....**

I suppose I'll have to dig out this issue's "PC Tip" (no relation to tea bags) myself once again. If any of you masochists are trying to run Windows (any version) on anything less than a mid range Pentium class machine, try deleting all references to SMARTDRV from your CONFIG.SYS file. Yes, I know it's supposed to speed up access times and all that, but in actual fact it has the opposite result, and Windows will run faster and cleaner without it on almost all machines, about 15% faster on a four Meg 386/SX33, slightly less on a DX40, for example. Why not give it a try?, you can always change your CONFIG file back again if it doesn't help on your machine. Talking of Windows .... if you want to give yourself a fright, next time you fire your machine up, type DIR, on your C drive .... the comma will make the "hidden" files show up as well ... then take a look at the size of the so-called "system" file that Windows wrote all across your drive when you installed it!. Anyone for DOS?!.  
Next issue, it's YOUR turn to come up with something, OK?. P.G.

**The Late, Late Bit . . . . .**

I wonder if anyone will ever read this? .... if the current mail foul-ups continue it seems unlikely. I can understand post getting delayed by strikes, but some of the delays appear to be infinite!. Someone, somewhere, is working one Hell of a fiddle, because several tons of undelivered mail takes up a lot of space and unless it has been deliberately destroyed there must be a lot of sorting offices that are knee deep in the stuff by now. Funny that no-one seems to have noticed it, isn't it?.

I suppose the lack of mail must account for all those PC based articles that never arrived .... the ones so many people said we ought to include in Update. I know you've all been busy writing them, so what other reason could there possible be for their non-arrival?. Personally, the more I see of the PC scene the more it bothers me .... people are so damned gullible!. Get a tin box, stuff a cheap and nasty PSU into it, add a low specification main board that sells for about £30.00 in the trade, add £25.00 worth of 486 DX4/100 chip, a fifty quid hard drive, the cheapest possible video card and a twenty quid CD ROM player, plus a four Meg SIMM (worth all of £17.00), call it a Multi-Media Computer, and the punters will rush to buy it for around £800.00 plus VAT!. Stick a thirty quid fax/modem card in it and you can claim it's an "Internet Ready Multi-Media Computer" and add a couple of hundred to the price!. Why, when home computers have been around for at least sixteen years, are people STILL daft enough to pay such inflated prices for such low quality rubbish?!. The same people worry terribly about their machine getting a virus .... particularly the sort that gets into the operating system and causes the hard drive to be filled up with garbage files that are "hidden" so you don't notice them until your machine crashes, and which makes the machine run slower and slower every time it's used .... yet they willingly PAY to have an identical one installed ... the one called "Windows", perhaps you've heard of it?. One thing about the old Dragon, at least most of the bits and pieces marketed for it were useful, which is more than you can say for the PC class machines. Is the PC a better machine than the Dragon? .... it's certainly bigger!, a D32 could just about leave you with 24K of RAM by the time it was up and running .... the PC I'm typing this on has roughly 11,980K left to play with, although with the rubbish that most software firms are producing now most of that disappears without doing anything useful at all. Faster? ... the old Dragon was doing well if the 6809 could run at 1Mh .... this X5 runs at over 133Mh, but my typing speed is still about the same as always, so what's the advantage?. The real test is whether a machine can do the job you need efficiently, and on that basis the Dragon IS still superior, and more to the point is a far simpler machine to program, so if the software you need doesn't exist you can still write it yourself without taking a five year degree course first!. Surely that has to be an advantage?. Current software has all the gimmicks, but do you NEED them? ... ever thought how many gimmicks you could give the Dragon programs if the Dragon had 12 Meg of RAM space for them to run in?!. The biggest word processor for the Dragon had to fit onto a single sided disc .... many of the current ones need more than TWENTY 1.4 Meg disc, even in compressed state, and you should see the size they uncompress to on your hard drive!. Great!, loads of extras that the Dragon programs never had, but what the Hell do you use a word processor FOR? ... processing words, I hope!, typing them in, editing out your mistakes, formatting them neatly, and dumping them out onto a sheet or three of paper .... the Dragon w/p's could do that perfectly well, so what else do you get for your money? ... pretty coloured screens?, the ability to send your typing out via a modem? (the Dragon could do that, too), lots of funny bleeps and squawks from your sound card? .... OK, so you get spelling checkers, but they aren't a lot of use as they can't tell what word you were TRYING to spell ... are they spell checkers or spell chequers?, who nose?. Grammar checks .... most of them seem to be Yank based and certainly don't agree with anything I ever learned at school ... so just what DO you get for all that extra money .... if you think you know, write an article about it for Update and let us all in on the secret!. *Paul Grade.*



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We're currently attempting to compile a NEW "Helpline" list, so if YOU can help with problems of any kind, let me have details as soon as possible, please. P.G.

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