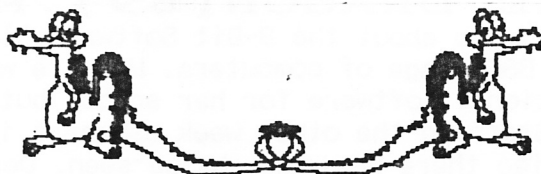


The Newsletter of the National Dragon User's Group

DRAGON



UPDATE

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

That's nice, a long Editorial bit this time, so I only have to write about a dozen lines for this page!. Well, much as I regret it, this issue has to start with an old complaint, though this time from Ray Smith. Up-2-Date is suffering from an acute lack of material, and still worse, it's subscription list has shrunk to the point where VERY serious consideration is being given to closing it down altogether. Not only would this be one less source of income (however small) for the Group, but YOU would lose a damned good disc magazine. So, if you have a disc drive, why aren't you subscribing?, at least try ONE issue to see if you like it, and if you ARE one of the few already on the subscription list, why not send Ray something he can include in future issues ... while there still is a future!. For what it's worth, Update is in serious need of more material as well, so sharpen your typing finger and try writing something .... think of it, Literary Fame Can Be Yours, you could be as famous as Ignatius Phlugelbaum!. So you've never heard of the Famous Phlugelbaum? .... nor has anyone else, but they would have done if he'd written something for Update, wouldn't they?. P.G.

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

Is it me, or is the current round of console price cuts a bit too familiar? Atari 2600 vs Mattel Intellivision vs Colecovision at the turn of the Eighties, Sinclair vs Commodore vs BBC vs Lynx vs Jupiter Ace vs Dragon vs Oric a few years later. The winners? The ones with the biggest range of software. Finger painting by a bunch of bored two-year-olds would look more impressive than the graphics from the Atari, but with games like Pitfall and ET (tragically poor indeed) the choice was there, whilst the Intellivision had to make do with providing the "advanced" displays in the car out of Knight Rider. We had the faster chip, but the Spectrum had Jet Set Willy first. So with Nintendo's much-delayed N64 now at just 149.99, the price may be right, but the range is strangely absent. The ubiquitous Mario and a fortuitously well-timed Star Wars tie-in will not be enough to satisfy, no matter how fast or powerful the unit is. Besides, the race to victory has surely already been won, by the PlayStation. The use of their motor-racing game on ITV's stupendously appalling coverage of Formula One (who, having spent seventy million pounds on the TV rights obviously didn't have any spare cash to fund a proper 'guide to the circuit' feature) is without question a nail in the coffin of the other consoles, who can now only hope that ITV buys the rights to table-top Micro Machine championships and spectacular Jet Ski events. Which, given their talent for providing crass televisual entertainment, they might yet do. Meantime, owners of the doomed "other" machines can be comforted that, fifteen years from now, small groups of users will look back fondly and think "...oops." The reality is, however hard the manufacturers try to dress it up with serious packages, we like playing games on computers. PC or Mac? The Windows 95 card game is not a patch on Eric's Solitaire on the Macintosh. Apparently. SW

## PEEKING THE DRAGON(69).MIKE STOTT

In my last article I told you about the 8-Bit Software Club in Yorkshire who were supposed to support the BBC range of computers. My wife wrote to them in the hope of obtaining some educational software for her school but she had no reply. We attended the AMS at Stafford the other week as there is often BBC software and groups there but this time there was none to be seen. Despite this I enjoyed the show although it was virtually all PC. I did purchase quite a number of items including a Mouse Station which is like a mouse mat on a stand and is very useful as you can slide it over the end of the keyboard, very useful if you are short of space like me. As I am completely stuck for anything else to write in my article I am going to lumber you with some poetry. To stop me writing more rubbish please start writing some articles to fill future Updates.

To buy a Dragon, Beeb, or Vic 20?  
There really was this choice a-plenty.  
Now it is PC, PC, or PC.  
The choice it is that easy.

When first I bought a 32.  
I just did not know what to do.  
Press a key here, press a key there.  
Very soon I was tearing out my hair.

Dragon Mountain in the deck,  
Soon I was a nervous wreck.  
Go North? Go South? Go East? Go West?  
Oh Which direction is the best?  
Many months later I cracked this game.  
Now I think it is really tame.

A printer let me have hard copy,  
But what can I do with this floppy?  
I had to buy my first disk drive.  
Now my computer really came alive.  
Programming the brute became a must.  
Then, I really could do it.  
Just!!!!!!

Reviewing utilities and games,  
Now I was really called some names.  
What right had I to say what was bad  
Or good.  
Some even said that I was mad.

My last buy was a 64.  
Now I could do even more.  
The memory just sort of grew, man.  
Now I could play the game called Pooyan.

I joined the Dragon Users Group.  
Paul Grade is the leader of this troop.  
We all live in the distant past,  
And we are such a motley cast.

If you think you can do better.  
Send me your efforts in a letter.

Yes I know that my poem is pretty rubbishy but at least you have had something to read. What do you mean, you would have preferred a blank page so you could let the baby scribble on it.

**Safety In Numbers 5...Bob Smith**

Let's have a look at how the computer handles numbers. It works at bit level and can do sums like this:  $0+0=0$   $0+1=1$   $1+1=0$

A computer can carry on merrily doing these sums until the cows go mad, but this is not very useful to us. It has to be told to "carry one" every time it adds 1 to 1. Every other calculation we are interested in from simple arithmetic to advanced calculus is based on the three sums above. It adds, for example,  $10+10$  ( $2+2$ ) and gets the answer 100, which it then converts and tells us that the answer is 4. To prove it's usefulness the computer is also programmed to perform three logical operations: AND, OR, and XOR (exclusive OR). Now  $4 \text{ AND } 6=4$ ,  $4 \text{ OR } 6=6$ , and  $4 \text{ XOR } 6=2$ . In Dragon BASIC, write ?4 AND 6 then try ?4 OR 6. I would have liked you to have tried ?4 XOR 6 but Dragon BASIC does not have an XOR function, so this time here is a sub-program that performs the XOR function. It is not very fast because the XOR is written in BASIC. I've wrapped the subroutine into a little program that prints out the results of the XOR operation., Save it. Logical operators test each bit in the two numbers being compared:

AND leaves 1 if both bits are 1, otherwise 0

OR leaves 1 if one or both bits are 1, otherwise 0

XOR leaves 1 if just one of the bits is 1, otherwise 0

AND can be used to test whether a number is odd or even. By taking any number and ANDing it with 1 we get the answer 1 if the number is odd, and 0 if it is even, thus  $123 \text{ AND } 1=1$ . A use for OR was given in the previous article where the ASCII value of a letter was ORed with 32 to yield a lower case letter independent of whether a lower or upper case letter was input. XOR can be used to generate a pseudo-random number, and in the next issue I will show you a program to do this. A pseudo-random number is a random number generated using a "seed" - 'pseudo' because the same seed will always produce the same number.

```

1900 DIM N(2)
1910 FOR J=1 TO 2
1920 INPUT "1ST NUMBER";N(1)
1930 INPUT "2ND NUMBER";N(2)
1940 IF N(1)>255 OR N(2)>255 THEN J=1 :ELSE J=2
1950 NEXT J
1960 GOSUB2000
1970 PRINT:PRINT N(1);PRINT N(2);" XOR":PRINT"-----":PRINT RAND$
1980 PRINT:PRINT N(1);"XOR";N(2);"=";INT(RAND)
1990 END
2000 REM XOR SUBR (1 BYTE)
2010 DIM N(2)
2020 FOR K=1 TO 2
2030 NUMBER=N(K)
2040 LFTOVER=NUMBER:QUOTIENT=NUMBER:N(2)=""
2050 FOR I=1 TO 2
2060 LFTOVER=(QUOTIENT/2-INT(QUOTIENT/2))*2
2070 N(2)=CHR$(LFTOVER+48)+N(2)
2080 QUOTIENT=INT(QUOTIENT/2)
2090 IF QUOTIENT>0 THEN I=1 :ELSE I=2
2100 NEXT I
2110 IF LEN(N(2))<8 THEN FOR I=1
      TO 8-LEN(N(2)):N(2)="0"+N(2):NEXT I
2120 NEXT K
2130 RAND$="":FOR I=8 TO 1 STEP -1
2140 X$=MID$(N(1),I,1):Y$=MID$(N(2),I,1)
2150 IF (X$="1" AND Y$="0") OR (X$="0" AND Y$="1") THEN RAND$="1"+RAND$ :
      ELSE RAND$="0"+RAND$
2160 NEXT I
2170 RAND=0
2180 FOR I=0 TO 7
2190 M=ASC(MID$(RAND$,8-I,1))-48:RAND=RAND+M*2^I
2200 NEXT I
2210 RETURN

```

## 2000 And All That...Paul Burgin

This article is about a current issue for the IT industry known as the Year 2000 Problem. With now less than 1000 days to go before the year 2000 most people will have heard at least something of the problem, but what is it? Perhaps before getting into it I should first touch on something that it is not, which is whether or not the year 2000 is a leap year. As we all know, leap years generally occur every four years, yet there are two exceptions. Firstly, as some people have realised, every year which is an exact multiple of 100 is not a leap year. However, an overriding but lesser known second exception states that every year which is a multiple of 400 is a leap year. This fact is convenient for software developers because it means that any software which ignores both of the exceptions when it calculates leap years will continue to work correctly up until 2100. Thus the year 2000 is not a problem for leap year calculation, except for that fact that many people mistakenly believe that 2000 will be a leap year and, upon discovering that the software which they have just purchased disagrees with them, have delighted in reporting the software to be faulty. Microsoft and DEC receive thousands of these bogus complaints every year. DEC now even has a web page dedicated to politely explaining the truth to their customers.

So what else awaits us in 2000? In a nutshell, the problem is the failure of computer systems to represent the dates 1st January 2000 and beyond in a meaningful way. Traditionally, the year component of a date has been represented by computers using only two digits (or one byte) with the other digits ignored, e.g. 23rd November 1996 shortened to 23/11/96 and represented as the value 961123. All date logic then assumes that the numerical value of the date increases as time goes by. Age is calculated by subtracting a birthdate value from the current date value. This works fine up until 31st December 1999 (991231) but on 1st January 2000 the value becomes 000101 and at that point the result of the age calculation becomes negative. The effect of this is that people will become younger by a century or cease to exist altogether. Loans will mature as soon as they were taken out, and goods will exceed their sell-by date the instant they leave the production line. In the computing world, the consequences could include new versions of files being superseded by outdated ones and widespread system lock-outs due to software licences expiring prematurely. In real-time systems there could be grave consequences if timers fail to trigger important system safety activities.

The result is chaos, occurring already. Any non-compliant systems which deal with future dates are already experiencing problems. For example, last year some 103-year-old people in the USA were instructed to register for primary school, and this year it will be the turn of the 102-year olds. Closer to home, credit cards issued with expiry dates beyond 1999 are being refused in some shops because the equipment thinks that they have already expired. It's madness of course, but how did we get here? Today, anyone writing software which manipulates dates knows that they need to use two bytes for the year. But the problem exists largely in software originally written decades ago, from the 1960s or 70s when hardware was expensive, comms were very slow, and software engineering was little understood. In such times it is understandable that a programmer might decide to save 1K of valuable memory by using only 1 byte for the year field in a 1000 transaction database. The problem occurred probably not because no-one realised that the code wouldn't work in the year 2000, but because no-one had any idea the code would still be in use in the year 2000. It's an unfortunate fact that once it has been written useful code may never die. Prototypes become products, form the basis for new products, are amalgamated into libraries, etc. Problems may also exist that application programmers have no control over, for instance in operating systems bought off the shelf. Some colleagues of mine recently discovered that the "fopen" call will not work in the year 2000 and beyond on a leading vendor's version of UNIX. Other systems may confuse 2000 with 1900, 19100, or even 19:0.

It is envisaged that the cost to British business of the Year 2000 Problem will



be at least five billion pounds, with worldwide costs at 400 billion. Data gathered from the USA indicates an average upgrade cost per affected program of 1,000 pounds. With so much work in prospect, there are new IT companies springing up in droves to meet the demand for Year 2000 solutions. A large proportion of the work is on COBOL, so anyone proficient in it (quite rare these days) can earn big money over the next four years or so.

The big question that remains is what will actually happen when the year 2000 arrives? At present it looks unlikely that all of the bugs will be ironed out in time. In some areas of business two out of three companies still have to allocate a budget to address the problem. As observers we can only expect news stories of daft bills, bizarre banking errors and various other incidents to increase as we approach the next century. Perhaps it is both comforting and worrying that almost all airlines will be grounding their entire fleets over midnight on 31st December 1999!.

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## Lottery Number Generator 2.

Not won that million yet? .... then try this number picker from Dave Bateman .... after all, ONE of them must work!.

```

0 KEY OFF:CLS
1 PRINT:PRINT:PRINT:PRINT"THIS PROGRAM WILL GENERATE AND SORT SIX RANDOM
NUMBERS."
2 PRINT:PRINT"  PRESS ANY KEY TO CONTINUE"
3 A$=INKEY$:IF A$="" THEN 3
4 CLS:PRINT:PRINT:PRINT:PRINT:PRINT
5 FOR Z=1 TO 6
6 RANDOMISE TIMER
7 Y(X)=INT(RND*2000)
8 IF Y(X)0 OR Y(X)>49 THEN X=X-1:GOTO 20
9 IF X=1 THEN 19
10 IF Y(X)=Y(1) THEN X=X-1:GOTO 20
11 IF X=2 THEN 19
12 IF Y(X)=Y(1) OR Y(X)=Y(2) THEN X=X-1:GOTO 20
13 IF X=3 THEN 19
14 IF Y(X)=Y(1) OR Y(X)=Y(2) OR Y(X)=Y(3) THEN X=X-1:GOTO 20
15 IF X=4 THEN 19
16 IF Y(X)=Y(1) OR Y(X)=Y(2) OR Y(X)=Y(3) OR Y(X)=Y(4) THEN X=X-1:GOTO 20
17 IF X=5 THEN 19
18 IF Y(X)=Y(1) OR Y(X)=Y(2) OR Y(X)=Y(3) OR Y(X)=Y(4) OR Y(X)=Y(5)
  THEN X=X-1:GOTO 20
19 PRINT Y(X);
20 NEXT X
21 Z=Z+1:PRINT"  RUN";Z;"SORTED";
22 T=0
23 FOR L=1 TO 5
24 IF Y(L)<=Y(L+1) THEN 26
25 E=Y(L):Y(L)=Y(L+1):Y(L+1)=E:T=1
26 NEXT L
27 IF T=1 THEN 22
28 FOR L=1 TO 6
29 PRINT Y(L);
30 NEXT
31 PRINT:PRINT:PRINT:PRINT:PRINT:PRINT"PRESS Q TO QUIT OR ANY OTHER KEY
  FOR ANOTHER SET OF NUMBRs"
32 A$=INKEY$:IF A$="" THEN 32
33 IF A$="Q" OR A$="q" THEN SYSTEM
34 GOTO 4

```

The program is written in GW-Basic but should be easily adaptable for the Dragon.

**Machine Coding 6. Tony Shellard**

The time has come, the walrus said, to draw a few conclusions. Hopefully, the last five episodes haven't been just so many variations on a theme, but a series of examples of several aspects of machine code, touching on nested loops, indexing, direct addressing and self modifying code en route.

There is a general trend for the programs to get faster as they evolved, not so much because I was concentrating on the speed aspect as that I started with a pretty small specimen and had little chance to reduce it, so size appears to be a secondary consideration. Bearing this in mind we can compare each successive alteration like so:

1. Our unsophisticated starting point. It works.
2. Uses direct memory-altering instructions to substantial advantage.
3. Reduces loop-overhead processing effectively.
4. Eliminates CoMParisons with little improvement.
5. Complicates itself almost pointlessly.
6. Exploits earlier lessons rather well.
7. Oh dear.
8. Appears to be bogged down with fixed offsets, but it don't 'alf move!

The most general lesson to be learnt is KEEP IT SIMPLE. In addition to the fact that there is little to be gained from complication, simplicity becomes a blessing when improving or adapting a routine in the future when it's finer points of operation may otherwise become forgotten (no-one uses enough comments, not even you!). If you want to use one do so but please heed the warnings about lack of generality, where applicable. If you are calling one from machine code also note that no registers are preserved and do so as required, either on entry or from the calling routine. The method of totting up cycles is rather cumbersome so don't bother doing it unless you're torn between two similar routines. Since I've already done it here I'll explain the TB (time/bytes product) and TB% columns. These give a figure of merit when comparing a program to SCNINV1. Although somewhat arbitrary they do have limited use, and are better than nothing. SCNINV2 is a star performer by this reckoning as a result of it's respectable speed coupled with it's minimal size, despite the existence of faster models.

The problem with TB% is that it gives no feel for why a program receives it's rating. For example, SCNINV8 looks little better than SCNINV1 despite being the speed record holder. This is due to speed and size being given equal weighting as this is a general index of performance. You must also consult the T or B column and decide which is most important to you.

The least useful point underlined is that in programming there is no one 'right' answer. Every program listed works so any one does the required job. The question is which works best, but again there is no concrete answer; it depends on the context. If you are writing a fully machine code DTP (please, I'll buy it!) you'll have to achieve Gradian levels of meanness with your memory so SCNINV2 is a clear winner. If you prefer to write a space shoot 'em up with arcade speed you'll need the stout but shifty SCNINV8. And don't forget my royalties!

**Up-2-Date an Awful Warning!**

Don't want to worry you, but I've just received a letter from Ray Smith, in which he says "...numbers are falling and I seem to have shot my bolt with the best of the programs I can feature, although a few good ones do still keep coming along ...". He also goes on to say that unless subscription numbers improve VERY rapidly, and he gets more material contributed, he will have no alternative but to reluctantly "pack it all in". Be warned, and do something about it before it's too late and the last of the "disc magazines" disappears for good!. Paul Grade.

## PC History - Operating Systems

Of course the IBM PC it was not all hardware. In order to make the hardware work you need the intelligence which is the Operating System. There a number of Operating Systems which could be ROM based like the Dragon Basic 1.0 or the more versatile which is the Disk Operating System (ie Microsoft DOS) which could be loaded onto the PC. Of course the PC is such a flexible architecture system and therefore contributed into its enormous success and popularity, you may also load some other Disk based Operating System such as Unix or Pix etc.

Concentrating in the IBM PC history, in my last article I mentioned that the PC is already by the year 1985/86 was 5 years old and IBM faced a major crisis in its future PC strategy. The main problem was not in the design, but its limited memory and speed have begun to stifle communications and software innovation. To migrate users to the next generation of hardware and software, a new Operating System was in fact critical. Don't forget that the original PC had the same mentality as the Dragon 32 microcomputer, ie cassette based and Basic in the ROM!. IBM was in the process of moving its Personal Computers through three generations. The first generation consisted of the original (industry standard) IBM Personal Computer, and it was based on Intel's 8088 processor. The second generation was based on the AT architecture based on Intel's 80286 processor and the latter one based on the 80386 processor. As IBM was looking forward to further enhancing the PC architecture, two other strong companies started to emerge; Intel and Microsoft. I will stay with the facts at that particular time frame, at this stage, and then I will try to explain how things have ended up today. So don't be surprised if what you read seems old fashioned and out of date. The most significant architectural during that period, ie 5 years after the IBM PC was born, was the Intel 80286 processor which includes support for up to 16 MB of RAM as opposed to 1 MB in 8088; support for multitasking--(AST developed part of EISA architecture based on the capabilities of the 286 processor called SmartSlot), and support for protected virtual memory to keep programmes from interfering with one another and the Operating System. All of this hardware capability was available to applications if the Operating System made it available. The Operating System used by the vast majority of PCs is the Microsoft's MS-DOS sold by IBM under the name of PC-DOS (for IBM PCs only). This Operating System was designed to support single-user, single-tasking applications, which no longer accommodated IBM's long term goals for the PC family. Everything has its limits (and don't we know that for the Dragon.) and DOS is no exception. The most crippling limitations were, a) 640KB of memory address, b) Couldn't handle multitasking, c) single user Operating System and d) it could support upto 32 MB of had disk space. To get around those limitations, operating environments like Microsoft Windows were developed so that they could run on top of DOS to mimic multitasking behaviour. This was a major argument between myself and David Rothery about OS/9. There were a lot of letters in the 6809 User magazine mentioning the capabilities of both the Dragon and the limited Operating Systems that supported. It is not easy to realise that the hardware and software have to coexist and cannot be apart.

The PC DOS couldn't take advantage of the enlarged real memory, multitasking and protected virtual memory features of the 286 processor. Programmes and Operating Systems must still contend with each other for the limited real memory of the basic PC architecture. This shortage of memory contains not just multitasking, but also individual application programme development as well.

Now all of us know about LIM (Lotus/Intel/Microsoft) Expanded Memory Specification (EMS) for expanded memory boards like the AST RAMPAGE. You may surprised to know that this kind of architecture has roots in mainframe and minicomputer worlds. The basic technique it employs is called bank switching, which was tried for many years before being discarded in favour of demand-page virtual memory.

I will touch upon the latest generations of DOS the next time. I am looking forward seeing you again.

Sotos Mandalos.

## GROUP SALES (5)

Books are topic of the month this time. Mr. Strain has donated this collection to the Group, and there are some rare species not often glimpsed outside captivity:

The OS9 BASIC09 programmer's Manual	
Dragon Machine Code for the Absolute beginner}	John Vander Reyden
D32 programmer's reference guide: }	
6809 machine code programming:	David Barrow
Programming the 6809:	Zaks and Labiak
Dragon Machine Code:	Robin Cowsill and Eric Cowill
The Pocket Handbook for the D32: _____	Peter Gerrard and Danny Doyle
The Dragon Programmer:	S.M.Gee
Dragon Programs:	Nick Hampshire
60 Programs for the D32:	R. Erskine and H. Walwyn.

PRICE: The BASIC09 manual: £3. All others: £1.00 each, or 75 pence each for lots of 4 and over.

POSTAGE: 50 pence each, except the Zaks and Labiak, which is £1.

The next collection is all priced at 50 pence each (£0.50), postage at 50 pence.

Exploring Adventures on D32:	Peter Gerrard
101 Color Computer Programming Tips & Tricks	Ron Clark
The D32 how to use and program	Ian Sinclair
The D32 & how to make the most of it:	" "
The Power of the D32	J. Sharp & D. Bolton
Further Programming for D32	Ian Stewart & R. Jones
The Working D32	David Lawrence

D32 COMPLETE : £10.00 (~~£14.90~~ including postage)  
 ONE D32 MAINBOARD: WITH P.S.U. BOARD, SAM chip dodgy. Good for spares?  
 £4 (including postage @ £2.00)  
 JOYSTICKS : 1 PAIR UNBRANDED £4. 1 D.D. JOYSTICK £2.  
 CARTRIDGES : EDIT+; A hi-res screen editor with extra commands added to  
 BASIC. Upper and lower case on screen.  
 RAIL RUNNER: Arcade game.  
 PRICE: £2.00 EACH, or offers for both.

UTILITY TAPES: FILMASTR(database); SPRINT COMPILER(BASIC compiler); DRAGON DATA  
 UTILITIES:-Personal Finance(2 copies), Special Selection 2; Composer; Composer  
 Companion; The Tape Doctor; TELEMED (improvement patch for Telewriter);  
 Electronic Author

PRICE: £0.50 each; will haggle for batches of five and over.

There are also 20 original games tapes, including adventures, like Madness and the Minotaur, Backtrack, Golf (P.S.S.), Stockmarket, Interplanetary Trader, Grand Prix, Graphic Animator, Combat Air Patrol and 10 Spanish programs produced by Eurohard.

PRICE: £0.20 each, YES! 20 pence!, or offers for lots of 5 and over.

YOU need this stuff, and The Group needs money. What more incentive is needed?  
 As always, reasonable offers accepted for any of these.

For more details, phone me on Worthing 207585 most evenings. Ken Grade.

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**Cassette/DOS conversion**

I have a mountain of data on tape entered with UNIFILE II by David Lawrence in "The Working Dragon". I have tried amending the save and load modules for DOS but without success. Here are the relevant modules - can anybody help?  
J.S.Mitchell

```

6080 OPEN"O",f-1,"RECORDS"
6090 FORI=0 TO 69:PRINTf-1,A$(I):NEXT
6100 PRINTf-1,N
6110 FOR I=1 TO N-2
6120 PRINTf-1,B$(I)
6130 NEXT I
6140 CLOSEf-1:RETURN
6150 PCLEAR1: CLEAR 30000: DIM A$(69), B$(69)
6160 OPEN"I",f-1,"RECORDS"
6170 FOR I=0 TO 69: INPUTf-1,A$(I): NEXT I
6180 INPUTf-1,N
6190 FOR I=1 TO N-2
6200 INPUTf-1,N$(I)
6210 NEXT I
6220 CLOSE f-1
6230 B$(0)=CHR$(0)+"^"
6240 B$(N-1)=CHR$(255)+"^"
6260 GOTO 1000

```

\*\* Replies can be sent via Paul Grade.

**Idle Gossip**

There is no truth at all in the scurrilous and totally unfounded rumour that way back in the days when Little Willy Gates was just starting out in business, he couldn't think of a suitable name for his new company, so he asked his wife for ideas. "Dear", he said, (he always called her that 'cos she was) "I need a name for this company that will let people know that it's mine, one that will reflect my main characteristics ... what was the first thing you thought about me when we met?". So she thought for a minute and replied "Well, the rest of the girls used to call you 'Old Micro Soft', and my first thought was that they were so right, and that's still how I think of you". And that's how Microsoft began!. All lies of course, at least I think it is, well, probably.

I am also reliably informed that there is absolutely no truth in the rumours that John Major and Michael Howard are expecting peerages in the next Honours List, for outstanding services to the New Labour Party.

Having just read page two of this issue I can quite see why Mike Stott is expecting an Infringement of Copyright action from the Shakespeare Society ... verse of this calibre hasn't been seen since the days before aerosol graffiti when Kilroy was everywhere!. However, I do hope that the idea of articles written in rhyme doesn't catch on to the extent that I have to follow suit ... my taste in verse is for the variety that shocks Rugby club members and which used to make even NCOs blush and cover their ears, which means it would probably improve our circulation wonderfully but get us all nicked at the same time!.

You will have noticed, I'm sure, all this talk about "The Millennium" (I thought that was something to do with Star Wars?), but I wish someone would explain how it's been calculated .... I mean, what day was January 1st. 0001 .... or should that be 0000?. Was it a Monday?, or what?!. What with several changes of calender, number of months, days, year length, and no doubt seasonal adjustment as well, has anyone figured out just how Jan.1st.2K is supposed to be significant?. If so, do please tell, I mean, if this Millennium thing has already been, or is not really due for years yet, we really ought to know!. P.G.

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

I know, I ought to be writing about all the new and interesting developments on the Dragon scene, and if this were 1987 instead of 1997 I probably would be, but as things stand it would make a VERY brief article, about one word long, so I won't bother trying. Actually, there COULD be something new ... Graham Kinns has some very neat utilities (mainly his own work) available via his Web site (<http://www.grempc.demon.co.uk/dragon/>), and I was considering asking him if he would care to let the Group distribute some of them for the benefit of non-modem owning members, but I've not done so yet. (How about it Graham? .... on a shareware/freeware basis? ... give me a call one evening and let me know what you think of the idea.). Mention of Mr.Kinns reminds me .... he reckons his "Dragon e-mail list" is doing pretty well too with currently 79 members, which seems to indicate there's life and interest in the old beast yet!. However, that really IS all the Dragon news that I can think of, so from here on this page will almost certainly deteriorate into the usual drivel. And on the subject of drivel, I see our latest batch of political prats are following the usual pattern already .... trying to save money on the NHS by giving all their members who would normally need places in secure psychiatric units Cabinet jobs instead (care in the community?), making Sport safer by banning all cigarette advertising (well, if advertising is so effective, surely banning it will stop racing drivers stopping half way round the circuit for a quick smoke break?), banning all privately owned guns; so when you get shot they'll be able to charge the person who did it with being in possession of an unlicensed firearm, (Come to think of it, will that ban apply to the bunch of heavies who trail around after Blair & Co?, the ones in the armoured Daimler who always have their right hands stuck in their jacket pockets?), and similar sillies. Just curious, but does anyone happen to know if "New Labour" will be using the alternative words to the Red Flag at their next conference? .... the ones that go "The working class can kiss our arse, We've got the Government job at last!". Yes, I know, I'm a nasty, cynical, miserable old illegitimate person, or something like that ... who am I to argue? .... but am I wrong?. OK, so politics is boring, so let's try something more interesting, like PC type computers then. I suppose you will have already realised that the Pentium Pro machine that cost you a fortune at Christmas, the one which was made obsolete by the MMX Pentium in February, is now doubly obsolete because of the New Improved Whiter than White Pentium II (no, they haven't called it "the Sequel", that's the next model). Intel must be firmly convinced that there's a mug born every minute, and the trouble is that they appear to be right, otherwise everyone would still be using 386 machines at latest!. By the way, did you realise that thanks to the wonders of IT you can now communicate instantly with other people anywhere in the world? .... I've been doing that for years using a strange device called a telephone, or for hard-copy I use a digital system called letters ... both quite effective ... wonder if these "IT" freaks have heard of them?. Can't imagine why, but there seems to be a bug in most commercial fax systems .... firms keep asking me to fax them an order, but when I offer to fax them the money as well they appear to think that won't work .... keep asking for credit card numbers and sillies like that instead. Peculiar system. Before I forget again, and to save me the bother of having to answer the same question several times per month ... my "in use" computer systems are a Dragon 64 running 2xDS 5.25 drives under DragonDOS V1.0, and a home-brew PC heap consisting of a VIP 486 board fitted with an AMD x5/133 clocked to run circa 160, 16 Meg RAM, 2Meg Cirrus 5446, currently a pair of 830 Meg H/Ds, a 1.2 and a 1.4 sloppy, CD ROM, Advance Logic sound card, and a Plustek motorised b/w scanner, MS-DOS 6.2 & Win 3.11. OK?. Good, then I shouldn't need to keep explaining why I can/can't run various things in future!. Anyway, it looks as though there isn't much more space on this page, so relax, go have a drink, and think of all the wonderful things YOU would write instead of this page full of rubbish .... then stop relaxing, fire up a writing machine (or sharpen a new quill), and WRITE THEM! .... then send them to me for the next Update!. Simple, no?.

Paul G.

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