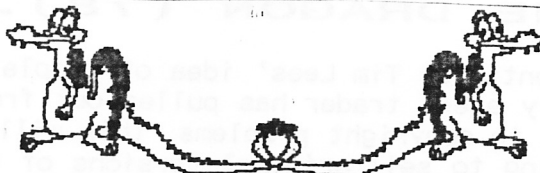


The Newsletter of the National Dragon User's Group

DRAGON



UPDATE

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ISSUE 122

A HAPPY HANGOVER TO ONE AND ALL!

DECEMBER 1998

THE GAFFER'S BIT

Another year, another Christmas ... or is it?. Maybe it's just my imagination, but this year there seems to be an almost universal lack of interest in the subject. Sure, the supermarkets are trying to convince everyone that a turkey is for life not just for Christmas so make sure you buy one big enough to last that long, but other than that, virtually nothing. By this time most years both BBC and ITV have been well into publicising their list of "Christmas Entertainment", and the shops have made a start on those depressingly tacky "festive seasonal decorations" in the vague hope of persuading someone that they ought to buy something, and the kids are already dropping heavy hints about what they would like "someone" to get them for Christmas but this year? ... not a sign!.

Not that I'm complaining, you understand, as a long term sufferer from Christmas Allergy Syndrome (a very painful condition which involves severe cramp in the wallet and a compulsion to respond to "Merry Christmas" greetings with suggestions that the person concerned should go into Turkey Emulation Mode, plus offers to provide the Paxo.), I'm all for the idea of ignoring the entire Christmas thing altogether ... but until now the idea has been rather unpopular ... hence the surprise. And on the subject of surprises, the biggest one of all is that the NDUG is still staggering on ... smaller, slower, and definitely shorter on funds, but still operational well, just!. It's a ridiculous thought, but if it survives for another Christmas we may end up with people worrying about whether the 6809E is Y2K compliant!!. Bet the types back at Mettoy never took THAT possibility into account when they decided to produce a home computer!. Well, I suppose the Editorial Staff will be demanding time off again this year ... I gave them a whole hour free time last Christmas day, and I'm sure it was a mistake ... they're bound to take advantage of my generosity and demand the same this year as well!. Anyway, have fun, and don't eat/drink TOO much. PG.

The Editor's Bit..

Zoinks! It's Christmas! And, yes, we all know what that means. It means that very soon it will be New Year, and that if we all wish to see Update make it into 1999 then we will need some material to put in it. Well, it's no fun if I can't be Scrooge on the front page of the Christmas issue...

I know it may seem inconsiderate of me to moan at you all, whilst you are surrounded by presents and people, but seeing as they are probably presents you didn't really want or need and people you didn't really wish to see that much, then frankly, "just nipping off to write an article or two for Update" seems the perfect excuse.

A large thank-you to everybody who has submitted material this year, but now that 1998 has finished, your quota for the New Year kicks in, so please put ink to paper for us all to enjoy. We really DO need it if we are to carry on with the newsletter.

So until the first week in January, which is the deadline for the February issue (an unsubtle hint), a merry messy Christmas.

SW.

PEEKING THE DRAGON (78) - MIKE STOTT

In my last article I mentioned Tim Lees' idea of people passing software to each other now that virtually every trader has pulled out from supporting the Dragon. Well, unfortunately due to copyright problems, this will have to be a non-starter unless people are wanting to sell **original** versions of software. If anybody does want to buy or sell any particular item of software I am more than willing to mention your requirements within my article. To start it off I would like SPIDERMAN from ADVENTURE INTERNATIONAL as I have promised this to Tim Lees but have been unable to find either my original or my two backup copies which appear to have gone adrift somewhere.

What sparked this off originally was Tim trying to find out the full list of software put out by this company. Somewhere I have got a list provided by ADVENTURE SOFT (UK) LTD who handled their sales in the UK. I met them at a show and bought several items before they ran out of Dragon software. The Mysterious Adventures were as follows:-

- 1) THE GOLDEN BATON
- 2) THE TIME MACHINE
- 3) ARROW OF DEATH (PART 1)
- 4) ARROW OF DEATH (PART 2)
- 5) ESCAPE FROM PULSAR 7
- 6) CIRCUS
- 7) FEASABILITY EXPERIMENT
- 8) THE WIZARD OF AKYRZ
- 9) PERSEUS AND ANDROMEDA
- 10) TEN LITTLE INDIANS
- 11) WAXWORKS

The Scott Adams adventures are as follows:-

- 1) ADVENTURELAND
- 2) PIRATE ADVENTURE
- 3) SECRET MISSION
- 4) VODOO CASTLE
- 5) ?
- 6) STRANGE ODYSSEY
- 7) ?
- 8) PYRAMID OF DOOM
- 9) GHOST TOWN
- 10) SAVAGE ISLAND PART ONE
- 11) SAVAGE ISLAND PART TWO
- 12) THE GOLDEN VOYAGE
- 13) SORCERER OF CLAYMORGUE CASTLE
- 14) ?

Does anyone know what the missing three adventures were called? Was MYSTERY FUNHOUSE one of them? There were also three in the Marvel series:-

- 1) THE INCREDIBLE HULK
- 2) SPIDERMAN
- 3) THE FANTASTIC FOUR

As I have already said I would like to obtain SPIDERMAN as I have promised this to Tim, but I would also like to buy THE FANTASTIC FOUR as I have never even seen a copy of this piece of software. Does anyone know how to make backup copies onto disk of the ADVENTURE INTERNATIONAL items of software? Over the years I have acquired disk versions of many of their titles but I still have a few which are only on tape which is the only format they were released in as far as I know. ~~Someone~~ once told me that it was similar to the method used for copying cartridges to disk but that entailed sticking a piece of Sellotape over one of the contacts to stop the auto-run which does not apply to cassettes so I have been unable to do it. If I could stop the auto-run I should be able to PEEK the start, end and exec addresses and it would be an easy matter to save it out to disk.

Memoirs of an ancient Dragon user...Nigel Monson

To give a hint of how long I have worked with computers: as a young engineer I was honoured to be entrusted with the task of collecting the enormously expensive magnetic core store (RAM) for the prototype of my company's latest computer; this store had a capacity of 4096 words of 44 bits - big for those days. The first production computer filled a large room with 6ft high cupboards and had a printer the size of a garden shed which burst into flames whenever the paper stopped moving at the wrong moment. The customer's acceptance test required the generation of 1,000 random numbers which had to be sorted into order and shunted between various magnetic storage devices before printout - about half an hour's work! This computer could be had for a mere 660,000.00, a lot of money in the fifties. I remember that we hardware engineers worked by day and the software people, working on a revolutionary idea called a housekeeping routine (operating system) were allowed access to the machine at night.

About 25 years later I was designing 6809 processors into communications equipment at work, and when a home computer based on that processor appeared, I bought a Dragon 32 in 1983. I had great fun with that machine, and so did my 11 year old son who played records by the Madness group incessantly while on the computer; although I don't like pop I still get pleasure when I hear their music today.

A year or so later a lack of software engineers at work forced me to turn myself into a programmer to port OS9 to the company's hardware. I became intrigued with this operation system, and decided that my Dragon must have it too, thus providing an excuse to buy a disc drive and increase the RAM to 64K. I discovered that my computer had been built with 64K RAM, and I added a 7400 chip (four 2-input NAND gates in a 14-pin packet) so that the hidden 32K could be accessed. Full of hope, I bought a copy of OS9 only to find that I was unable to persuade the Dragon to boot it, however hard I tried (Update of July 1985 had the answer, but that was many months too late). My solution was to persuade my employer to buy me a Dragon 64, which I did in November 1984. When I took this computer out of its box, I was impressed by how much lighter than the 32 it was, but was less impressed when I discovered the reason - I had bought an empty case! This left me with the task of going back to Boots and convincing them that I wasn't the one who had purloined the mother board, and if they didn't believe me, of telling my employer that I had spent 150.00 of his money on an empty case! (Boots gave me another one).

OS9 now worked but started to become demanding; a second disc drive (to fill the hole in the dual-drive case), a mono monitor to make the characters readable (a second hand ex-Reuters KGM unit supplied by Paul Grade and still working 13 years later), a Dragon Plus upgrade to provide 80-column display and lots of software, which by then was going quite cheap. My wife was now beginning to suspect that her husband's toy was gobbling up significant amounts of cash, so I had to invest in a printer and introduce her to the Stylograph word processor to see if that would sweeten the pill. This worked so well that my own access to the Dragon was seriously curtailed and I realised that sooner or later I would have to buy another computer.

The idea was to get an Atari ST and equip it with OS9 and a dumb terminal so that we could use the computer at the same time, using OS9's multi-user capability. This expensive and difficult-to-justify project was approached by stealth. Step 1, buy a pair of Atari external drives, remove their connecting cables, and tee them into the ribbon cable to the Dragon disc drives; the Dragon now had two 5.25 and two 3.5 drives, data written on the 3.5 discs could be read on the future Atari/OS9 machine, and the 3.5 drives could be used on the Atari when the Dragon was pensioned off. Step 2, get hold of manuals to check that the Atari/OS9 was worth buying - the only way to do this was to buy the package, but it was good value at 100.00 for the operating system, word processor, text editor, spreadsheet, database, BASIC, assembler and C compiler. Step 3, buy the computer, so that the money spent on steps 1 and 2 was not wasted!

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Now, in 1992, we had two computers: a ten year old Dragon (1 MHz 8 bit processor 64K RAM, fading monitor screen, crumbling keyboard) and a brand new Atari Mega STe (16 MHz 16 bit processor 4MByte RAM, hard drive, beautiful bright screen) ready to take over and give the Dragon the rest it had so faithfully earned. However, (you've guessed it) my wife could not bear to be parted from her trusted Dragon, we still run two computers (plus the inevitable IBM compatible for work). I now have the Dragon emulator discs for the latter unmentionable machine and when I get that working I will be back in 1983, once more able to enjoy my Dragon.

The Power And The Glory. C.Scott

We all read in the press about the ever increasing pace of development for computers. No sooner has the latest super duper processor been released when the next even more powerful one comes out. This is not driven by the needs of the users, who rarely put much stress on the machine they currently have. Most people use their machines for wordprocessing which hardly stretches the average processor. Even software developers can't mop up the power of the latest processors with their bloated software products.

The computer industry and computer enthusiasts are dominated by men. I believe it is their obsession with power and size which is the driving force behind the race for faster computers. The average male user wants the fastest processor, largest amount of RAM, and the biggest hard disk they can afford. Need doesn't come into the equation. In many ways, the PC is a sign of a man's virility - only a wimp would admit to having a PC with anything less than a Pentium, 64mb or RAM and a 6Gb hard disk. Many would consider you to be a complete anorak to still be using a Dragon 32!

As a result, PCs are replaced long before they have outlived their usefulness. It is for this reason that the user usually has a far more powerful computer at home than he does at his place of work. PCs are bought by companies for purely commercial reasons since they are merely tools to help them make more money.

Although members of NDUG may be more enlightened, I can't help but notice that most members use their PCs as their main machine - even our illustrious Chairman admits to owning one. My main machine is a Pentium P166 bought several years ago, and I must admit to salivating at the thought of owning a 400mhz Pentium 2 with 128mb RAM, 12Gb hard disk, and 32x CD ROM with 19" monitor.

We can't help ourselves; it is bred into our genes. The computer industry of course just feeds on our desires. One can only speculate what our computers would be like if women were the dominant gender in the computer industry and amongst users instead of men. I am sure that computers would be quite different. Is this the reason why most new and innovative ideas tend to come from men? Women seem to be more logical, cooler, calmer thinkers, and possibly, therefore, development would progress at a slower more considered pace. Am I taking too simplistic a view on life, and are there other factors to consider?

My apologies for any women reading my article, as it is not intended to be sexist, but merely my observation of male behaviour. I welcome their, and any, views.

**** Wonder if the same theory would apply to Apple owners? they tell me that the latest Mac types wouldn't be seen dead with a floppy!?. Does this mean they are merely sublimating their inclinations to join the Dirty Mack Brigade?!. Actually, the theory is slightly worrying ... yes, I admit to a PC type machine or three, but the primary one, the one I'm using to type this garbage, is an old 386 case, with a resurrected scrap PSU, about three Gig or so of hard drives, 48 Meg, an Asus board, and a K6/233 plus the usual odds and sods does this mean that I need a course of Viagra or should I give it to the machine?!. Paul G.*

PC Banking - A User's Tale ..Gareth Tuttiatt

After looking carefully at internet facilities, I decided not to bother as I have access via my local library. However, during my research something did catch my eye. I read a lot about on-line banking and thought that this would probably be the most useful on-line facility for me. I asked for some information and a pack arrived from Barclays with a tour of their own software and it looked most useful. In April there was a special offer on modems from Barclays to join their PC banking system. Their Windows 3.x software is free but there is a 30.00 joining fee and then 15.00 per year from then on. I ordered a US Robotics Sportster modem for 133.00.

The Barclays software is simple and works well, if a little slow. So far, I've found no bugs! It works every time without fail and has never fallen over or reported UAEs or GPFs - this is amazing! As far as setting up is concerned, it's a doddle. On this system not only do you have access to all your accounts, you can also store your manual account too. The look is not unlike Microsoft Money or Moneywise, with a menu bar across the top and the button bar is vertical on the left hand side. These buttons call up account details, transactions, bills, transfers, etc. All the setting up is done via the menu bar.

The idea behind its operation is this: you prepare any transactions to carry out, account transfers, any e-mail you may wish to send to the bank, add new payees, and prepare bills to pay off-line. You go on-line, send the operations to Barclays, and wait until the system completes its turn around and sends back the results of your operations. You then update each account yourself from the downloaded data.

To pay bills, you must first set up a new payee. Several hundred companies are listed in the appendix to the manual giving their payee ID, full name, and format of appropriate account numbers for each one. You select the company and send this for processing to Barclays next time you go on-line. From then on it is a simple case of opening a blank form, selecting a company to pay, entering the amount, and sending it for processing. The usual time for transactions to complete is 3 working days, but there are exceptions e.g. Barclaycard, 1 working day.

I have now been using the system for nearly three months without mishap. This has allowed me to control my accounts even better than before. Paying bills electronically is so convenient - 24 hours a day. Now, you might ask about security. In the software, you can set up Password access, and you need your PIN. As far as line security is concerned, Barclays have licensed from the US government a data encryption system to ensure that even if someone does tap in to your communications, they can't do anything with the data. Even with this, there is no room for complacency.

Barclays is not the only bank offering on-line services, but the others are really via the internet and not through dedicated software. Even Barclays offer internet banking via MS Money for Windows 95, but this costs money in that you have to subscribe to an Internet Service Provider first. I don't require access to the internet at this time, so using Barclays dedicated software costs me less as I'm only on-line for two or three minutes per session.

By the way, I have no connection with Barclays other than as a customer!

*** This is all very well for those people with actual money in their accounts, but will the system let you award yourself an unlimited, interest free overdraft facility as well?. If so Barclays have definitely got themselves another customer!!.* Paul G.

PLEASE NOTE.....

With effect from 1998, the period previously known as "Christmas" or "Winterval" will be known as New Deal Christmas. No holiday will be permitted, and anyone failing to send expensive presents to President Blair will have their Present Seekers Allowance stopped indefinitely and will be subject to prosecution.

Happy Days (2) . . . Spencer Davies

All in all the Dragon sounded like the ideal machine to us both (it was the built in joystick ports and cartridge interface that won it for me, even the mentioned 6809 CPU; "same microprocessor as used in the most powerful of computers, like arcade machines, etc.") The shop owner (who sadly, but understandably went bankrupt not much later) pointed us in the direction of the local Dixons who were the main retailers for this wonderful machine, so off we trotted. The nice man at Dixons confirmed that the Dragon was the best machine that they currently stocked and agreed (after persuading my father to sign up for a Dixons store card!) to order us one and phone us when it arrived. So we went home and I sweated that my new computer wouldn't turn up and all of this would prove to be a dream. My dad sweated over the expense of this new wonder toy for his son (after all £225 was a hell of a lot of money back then!). Towards the end of September we had a phone call from the nice man at Dixons to inform us our new machine had arrived and was ready for collection from them when we could get there, so on that following Saturday when my dad got home from work he went straight there to pick it up. When he got home I remember coming down from my bedroom to be confronted by this strangely wonderful looking white polystyrene packing lying on the floor (if the real monolith from 2001 had been present I couldn't have been more eagerly mesmerised). However there was one further hurdle to cover before I could dive in and start playing my beloved games, my father had opened the box in order to get at the instruction manual and he had every intention of reading it so as to ensure that this wonder machine couldn't be broken by some faultless action on both our parts.

In the days to come it seemed that this wonder machine had become a surrogate train or Meccano set in the household. My father was using my new toy almost as much as I was, and he seemed to be getting more out of it. My problem was that at that age (pre teens) I was only really interested in one aspect of this new wonder machine, games! My dad wouldn't, understandably, buy me any games. He was opposed to my treating this new item as merely a toy to be played with and eventually discarded. Strong ideals were at work in his mind, ideals, which at the time I didn't hold (what child thinks beyond their immediate moment?). So I started saving my pennies diligently with the aim of buying that all-important game to help make a full and proper use of my computer. But until that magic moment I would have to make do with programs typed in from the manual and magazines, which we had. The first one I typed in proved an unmitigated disaster. I busily typed in what seemed an interesting listing from the manual, which upon running returned with an OK and no actual visible output, what had I done wrong?. After much scouring of the manual I was none the wiser, LIST didn't seem to produce the desired effect, in fact it produced nothing what so ever! After much to'ing and fro'ing I discovered exactly what I had done wrong. As I hadn't bothered to read the manual (obviously destined for a career in computing!) I hadn't read about the fact that you are meant to press the ENTER key after each and every line, I had been hitting the BREAK key instead as it had the desired effect! I then proceeded to enter the listing again and this time I was greeted with a SN error. Later I discovered that computers and especially type in listings are not perfect, which depressed me. Sometime later I saw an excellent games listing and proceeded to type that in. By this time I had managed to go through a number of the type in listings and tutorials present in the manual, so was confident of success. However upon entering the RUN command I was surprised to be greeted by an error! After much perusal and comparison of what was present in the computer magazine and what I had actually entered into my machine I could not find the exact cause of the errors encountered so gave up. What I hadn't realised was that I had learnt my second important lesson for later life, namely that programs for similarly spec'd machines do not necessarily run on others unless from the same manufacturer (the listing in question was for the Atari 400, I didn't know at the time that a computer was a computer until you tried to attain compatibility with another computer). All this initial steep learning

curve had proved very painful to me. It had, to some extent, cooled my enthusiasm for computers. I mean, don't get me wrong I still saw great potential in them, it's just that I am a person of few actions. The less expenditure of energy on my part the better! So apart from a number of further experiments with programming and the like my wonderful Dragon became merely a play toy for destroying alien creatures and such, much what my dad had worried about before buying me it. The Dragon had still been mightily beneficial beyond improving my reflexes, it had introduced me to a large part of the future, my future!. Despite this partial interest in the more beneficial aspects of computing I still carried a great admiration for this wonderful British machine (ok, so a large part of the units and components used to construct it were foreign, but this didn't bother me at the time). So it was with great sorrow that I read the news in Computing Weekly that Dragon Data were being sold off to the Spanish after its long fight to remain solvent!. And of course the rest is history. If only GEC, Eurohard or even PruTech could have done something with the Dragon we may have all been working on Dragon compatible computer systems. But for me the Dragon has helped shape the rest of my life, sometimes I might say that the shaping hasn't always been beneficial but it has been important never the less.

Blank page to fill...

There is, of course, a certain irony in trying to fill up the empty spaces in Update these days with rambling, improvised articles about the difficulties of trying to fill up the empty spaces in Update these days.

But frankly, it's never stopped us before, and it seems as good an excuse as any. We could drift off into nostalgia, along the lines of "wasn't it great when...". but the sad truth of the matter is that we simply do not have enough material for another issue, and so 1999 could be RIP Update. Somewhat fitting, if you go in for all of that end-of-century stuff; as good a time as any to bring Update to a close, etc etc.

However, whilst there is still a flicker of life left, albeit the tiniest of tiny flames (bit like you get on a cigarette lighter with the gas turned right down), we would like to maintain the newsletter to give everyone something to read and possibly even enjoy.

The February 1999 issue has just three pages of such enjoyment at the moment, and it doesn't take a genius to realise that this simply isn't enough to justify maintaining operations; so perhaps it really IS time to box up the beast once and for all.

All we can do is ask for you to give us some material to publish. Previously we have tried shouting, of course, but apart from providing Paul and I with some amusement, the results tend to be variable. No doubt you are all as tired of reading such requests as we are of writing them, but the solution is a simple one, and could keep us going for a few months yet.

On the other hand, we could all just say goodbye here and now. The PCs continue to invade - once again, this Update is an all PC production, as the Dragon has not been revived and the 286 has, eventually, worked with some semblance of accuracy - so maybe the Dragon is a beast who needs a permanent rest.

Bit like that "Godzilla" film this year. SW.

Don't you LIKE Freebies?

Just thought I'd ask, because you don't seem to be making much use of the P.D Library these days. Seems silly really Keith has gone to a lot of trouble to build up a collection of software for you, which costs little more than the price of the media and postage, so why don't you take advantage of it before he decides that the whole thing is a waste of time and energy?. Like they say, use it or lose it ... the choice is yours, but don't complain when its gone!. Paul G.

The Schofield Solution! .

In response to Tim Lees' plaintive cry for help (issue 121), I have a bug fix. Luckily, being the true NDUGger that I am, having kept all issues of UPDATE in a carefully organised binder, I was immediately able to lay hands on the issue in question.

Issue 99 has a listing with the following lines:

```
1030 'OR TRY A CIRCLE
1040 X^2 + Y^2=RADIUS^2
1050 IF (X-128)^2+(Y-96) < 30^2 THEN Z=FRONT:ELSE Z=BACK
1060 RETURN
```

I read the various fix suggestions and dug back into my memory of BASIC. Tim is quite right in his suggestion that 1040 makes no sense (from a programming perspective, that is) but it's a good clue to the problem. The ^ symbol is of course "to the power" operator, so X^2 is x squared, etc. In the program listing, there is no other token name RADIUS, so the line will generate an error at runtime (non-existent symbol). So, by deduction, 1040 is actually a comment, a REM line describing the formula he's using to draw the circle. 1040 is, in fact, the 2-dimensional Cartesian representation of a circle - i.e., a way to calculate the position of any point on a circle's circumference (so long as the radius remains constant). So, we can confidently comment out 1040, as it takes no part in the proceedings. So why does Tim just get a band up and down the screen when he does this? Well, that's because the problem is actually in line 1050. Looking closely, you'll see a fixed radius (30), and what looks like an X and a Y co-ordinate. However, the Y co-ord is not squared, so this line actually represents:

$$X^2 + Y = \text{RADIUS}^2$$

- which is, believe it or not - a straight line. So, finally, the fix is:

```
1040 'Y^2 + Y^2 = RADIUS^2
1050 IF (X-128)^2+(Y-96)^2 < 30^2 THEN Z=FRONT:ELSE Z=BACK
```

Try that! It is, admittedly, a deduction rather than a tested fix (since I don't have a machine to try it out on) - but I'm pretty confident. Rob Schofield.

CHRISTMAS SALE... (1998)

There must be someone who wants these...someone who has joined the group recently may not have even heard of some of these programs...so it's an ideal chance to get hold of really vintage software.

UTILITY TAPES:

FILEMASTER (Microdeal); GRAPHIC ANIMATOR; (Salamander); ELECTRONIC AUTHOR; DREAM (Dragon Data); DRS; CHESHIRE CAT educational series; PERSONAL FINANCE; Special Selection 2; COMPUTAVOICE; DUPIDISK 2; DISKPIX; LOAD-IT ; Music Maker; Telemod; Telespeed; Shaper.

ALL ONE PRICE:- 50 pence each plus p&p or 7.00 for the lot (plus 4.90 p&p).

CARTRIDGE:- EDIT+ (Compusense.) 1.00 inc. postage.

DISKS:- TELEWRITER (DISKS and tape inc.manual);RAINBOW WRITER. 1.00 EACH inc.p&p.

BOOKS:-

DragonDos programmer's Guide Mike Kerry; The Dragon Programmer S.M.Gee; Advanced Sound & Graphics The Brain Twins; The Working Dragon 32 David Lawrence; Discover Forth Thom Hogan; Creating Adventure Games Clive Gifford; D32 Companion M.Jarvis; Further Programming for D32 Rod Stewart & Robin Jones.

1.00 each including postage.

2 working Dragon 32's including all leads. 10.00 each plus postage.

Phone me on Worthing 207585 most evenings. Ken Grade.

SPREADSHEETS . . . Ken Grade .

There are some formatting commands which make the display easier to read (or more impressive, depending on how you think of it). Headings for Columns/Rows can be:

Centre:-Precede with ^; Left Justify:- precede with ' ; Right Justify:-precede with " ; This works with Lotus and AsEasyAs. Column widths can be altered via the Worksheet menu in AsEasy and Lotus. I said that rows or columns can be totalled using the @SUM(FORMULA), which is true, but the way to enter that formula is rather like using the COPY command. It's easier to use an example to explain the method, so I'll use a spreadsheet which balances income against outgoings over a given period. Set up the column headings (centred, of course) for the various expenses. These could be RENT, RATES, GAS (in columns B,C and D), or Wages, Materials, Fuel etc., if it were a business. The total of each column needs calculating and those totals adding together. To total columns, place the cursor in the cell after the last one (e.g. B33, if the last one used is B32) and type in @SUM(then move the cursor up one cell and press the full stop key. This should produce two dots after the cell number. Continue moving the cursor upwards till it reaches the heading. Close the brackets ")", and press enter. A cumulative TOTAL column, to show the addition of each row is done the same way. Move cursor one cell past the final one in use, type in the @SUM(and then move cursor along the row, press "." and continue moving it till it reaches the cell you want the calculation to begin from. To make things absolutely correct, there should be a check to prove that the total of the column totals is the same as the final figure shown in the TOTAL column. The total column is the sum of the rows, e.g., B2 to D2, C3 to D3 and would have the "@SUM(B2..D2)" formula for each row of data. So @SUM(E2..E32) should have the same figure as @SUM(B32..D32), if row 32 is the last one used. There is a neater way of checking this, but it will only work with Lotus @IF@SUM(E2..E32)=@SUM(B32..D32),@SUM(B32..D32),"ERROR"). Enter that mouthfull into E33, or E34, to allow some space and that should prove the total of the columns is the same as the total of the rows, or tell you there's an ERROR!

If the same exercise is done with the Income figures, say in columns G to I, or further, if needed, then total outgoings can be deducted from total income. If that isn't enough to put you off spreadsheets, then there's scope for more analysis. @AVG(Range) gets the average value in a group of cells; @MIN and @MAX give minimum and maximum values. The RANGE need not be just a row or a column. It can refer to a "block" of cells. The @SUM, @AVG commands etc will all operate on a block by using the cursor and full stop "." to cover a group of cells. Type in @AVG(, move the cursor up, down or sideways, press the "." key and then carry on moving the cursor to cover the block you want. The other method is to specify the beginning and end cells of the block from the keyboard e.g. C3..H15.

There are two very useful commands in the ASEASY macro vocabulary. {Get Cell} and {Inkey cell} notice the curly brackets - part of the syntax; they accept the next key pressed and put the value in the specified cell. The specified cell can have a formula or command to do something, depending on the input. There is an {IF} test, which is a Boolean test - if "true" then it executes the next cell, if false it executes the next row. IF there were four of these tests each checking an operator " + - * /", on consecutive rows, then it wouldn't be too difficult to make a calculator type spreadsheet. {Get Cell} to get a number and store it, and again to get an operator, once more to get second number and output the answer. A1 could have the first {Inkey cell}, followed by the four tests on the operator on rows 2,3,4, and 5. A6 would be the third keyboard input. Note that this will only work on single digit numbers! All right, you've already got a pocket calculator, so why make a spreadsheet try and do the same thing? There's no practical need to do that, but if you wanted to check the effect of altering one value, the temporary value could be input from the keyboard and the result of the alteration shown in a different cell to the one used by the sheet.

To be continued next year

The Late, Late Bit

Almost the VERY late bit this time!. Dunno whether Mike sent the wrong disc to Stephen, or Stephen sent the wrong one to me, but whichever it was, I was half way through printing page two when I realised that the content looked familiar ... TOO familiar, it was the same page two that I printed in the October issue!. Fortunately Mike had sent me a printout of the December piece, but less fortunately the print copy was just good enough to make my OCR software think it was written in old Chinese, so there was much hurried typing and Seasonal Cursing as result!. Ever get the feeling you're being got at?!.

I suppose you've all read the current Up-2-Date disc? ... Ray seems to have discovered some of the "free" ISPs, and listed some of the snags and catches in their offers, although he has missed one important point about them, that almost all can ONLY provide software for W95/98 & NT4 not a hope for anyone who wants to keep their machines clear of such garbage and use 3.11 or DOS. No, it isn't because the software is so new that it can't operate on the older systems, it's a deliberate block!. How do I know? ... well, being curious I decided to run some of the "Install.exe" files through Debug, just to take a look, and surprise, surprise, what do I find but messages that read "this installation requires Windows 3.1 or above and should be run from File Manager"!. It appears that the software was originally written for W3.1 etc, but at some later date modified to reject anything earlier than 95!. Now why would anyone do that when they could leave the original version intact and merely add a 95/88 etc version to the disc as well?. Peculiar, no?. Ray missed another funny too ... one of the ISPs claim their software runs on Win95, and I agree, it contains versions for 95, 98 and NT4 ... but they also claim that "Min. system requirements are 286, 8Meg, x2 CD" which is a little strange when you consider that 95 refuses to install on anything lower than a 386 (don't even think about NT!), and while I've met some odd machines, an 8 Meg 286 with CD and Win 95 installed is something I'd just HAVE to see to believe!. By the way, if anyone ever discovers a "freebie" ISP which does provide for machines not infected with 95, do please let me know ... such an enterprising firm would deserve publicity!. Me?, I'm waiting for a totally free ISP which uses DOS and a Freephone access number instead of a local rate one!. Now that really would be worth signing up with!.

Completely off subject, but is it just me that finds the current political babble about Iraq reminiscent of those old "Elephant" jokes that were doing the rounds yonks ago?. You know the sort of thing .. "Why do elephants paint their toe nails red? ... so you can't see them when they hide in cherry trees! ... You've never seen an elephant hiding in a cherry tree?, then that proves it works!". So what's so different between that and jokes(?) like "We know Iraq has hidden chemical/bio weapons because we can't find any, which proves they must be hidden!". So OK, maybe it's just my sense of humour at work again. Or maybe not. On the subject of politicians, what is it about New Labour which reminds me of an ancient Sci-Fi short story I once read? ... the one about the Nice Friendly Aliens that land on Earth and offer to prevent all aggression, provide food for everyone, and similar altruistic stuff. Everyone is so impressed with them, so friendly, so kind, so wonderful, etc ... one of the Aliens even writes a book about Earth (in his own language, of course) to be published on his home world, and when it is revealed that the title is "How to Serve Mankind" everyone is even more impressed with these wonderful beings ... until some time later when someone learns the alien language and discovers it's a cookery book!. OK, OK, So Blair isn't an alien at least I don't suppose he is, I mean, he probably isn't, I think!. Is he?.

This is terrible!, almost at the end of the page and not a mention of Christmas!, not even the usual moan about how much I hate it!. Don't worry, I haven't changed my mind about it or anything ridiculous like that, it's just that the whole thing annoys me so much that I just couldn't face the thought of writing about it at all this year!. Go ahead, overheat your credit cards, get yourself a hangover that will last well into 1999, and don't forget the matching indigestion to go with it!. See if I care!. May you still be eating turkey sandwiches in April! (you probably will be!). What more can I say except Bah!. Humbug!!. Paul G.

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