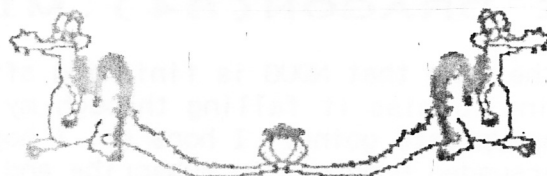


DRAGON



UPDATE

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ISSUE 128 Y3K BUG DETECTED IN WIN 2K! DECEMBER 1999

THE GAFFER'S BIT

And yet another Christmas/Winterval/New Year/Millennium/Whatever gets boring, doesn't it?, I'm sure we had all of 'em (well, except the Millennium bit) about this time last year. Anyway, from my point of view there's one change ... this should be the last Christmas Issue of Update, so next year you'll all have to rely on the family, friends, and credit card companies to bore you into heading for the pub!. Done all your shopping yet? ... you should have, all the stores have been having Christmas Sales ever since their August ones finished, and of course, you've attended to all those seasonal essentials, like carefully informing everyone you know that you'll be away in Tasmania (or somewhere equally distant) over the entire holiday period so that there's no chance of them "just dropping in" to nick the last of your Tesco Sherry and bring you the repackaged totally useless presents you gave them last year ... you HAVE told them, haven't you? ... oh well, too late now, you'll just have to make up a stack of turkey sandwiches immediately, so they'll be nicely stale and dried out by the time anyone turns up ... that ought to get rid of them if nothing else does!. Of course, there's that extra hazard this year (no, not Cousin Ethel!), the Dreaded Millennium Bug, but as most of the stuff I've got here is so old that it was Y1K compliant I don't think I've got much to worry about. So it might make your Windoze software crash? big deal, I thought it was designed to do that at regular intervals anyway, and I know my computer is OK ... you can still move the beads along the wires just as easily whichever year it may be. Actually, it could well have some decidedly beneficial effects ... think of it, BBC and ITV transmitters all crashing out before they get a chance to show all those repeats of "The Best of..." compilations they've been showing ever since television was invented!. Yes, things could definitely be worse!.. Have fun!. Paul.

The Editor's Bit . . .

It's a conspiracy, I reckon. Manufacture low-quality computers which crash often and frequently, thoroughly annoying the users. Users become so punch drunk by the repeated freezes and GPFs that they think it's a good idea to invest in some form of system crash monitor, such as (for the sake of argument) Norton CrashGuard. Purchased software (manufactured by a company which has been bought up by another, larger, company with more than a passing interest in PCs) is then installed on computer, where it manages to have the same effect as driving a car through a lake full of industrial strength glue and crushes the PC's speed down to about 33mHz, whilst flagging errors every five seconds (under the guise of 'updating sensor information'). User gets thoroughly distressed by appalling speed of "latest" machine, to the point of convincing themselves that the only way around the problem is to buy a new, faster, better computer. Which in reality is a low-quality computer which crashes often and frequently... It's enough to make you yearn for the good old ?FC ERROR. But remember, you've only got two more issues to do your yearning. Stephen

PEEKING THE DRAGON(84).MIKE STOTT

So we have finally heard the news that NDUG is finishing after the April issue of Update. I am certainly going to miss it falling through my letterbox every other month. Will Ray Smith keep Up2date going?. I hope so. I hope that my review over the last two issues has persuaded hundreds to subscribe and Ray will have to keep it going. I can dream I suppose. With the news of NDUG's forthcoming demise I wondered what I should write about. I have decided to relate a story with nothing to do with computers but you will all see the relevance later. During my wife's half term holidays from school we now visit Leeds where David is at university. It gives us a break in a hotel for a few days and saves David cooking. During our last visit we went round the Tetley's brewery where David found out why real ale is best. On the last full day there we could not decide where to go so we collected a pile of leaflets for local attractions and discovered that the Yorkshire Air Museum was situated at Elvington near York. Some years earlier we had taken my mother there as they were rebuilding a Handley Page Halifax bomber and my father had flown in them in the war, being missing presumed killed just a few months before I was born. At that time there was very little to see as they were still gathering bits to build the plane. One largish part of the fuselage had been found in a farmer's field being used as a hen coop and it was difficult for them to get all the pieces needed as all surviving planes had been broken down for scrap. Around the inside walls of the hangar which houses the Halifax are walls built with bricks purchased by relatives and friends of Halifax aircrew with the money used to fund the rebuilding. We found our bricks and attempted to take photos in the poor light. There were lots of other planes in the hangar and it was impossible to get a full shot of the Halifax but I took as many as I had on the film in the camera. Looking in the visitors book we found that our last visit was November 1995. A woman approached us and asked me if I had any connection with the Halifax and I told her about my father. She then asked me if I would like to go on board and I was allowed on with David first and then with Nora. The front of the plane has been more or less fitted out with dials, knobs etc and I saw where the crew sat on take off and sat in the radio operators seat and listened to the working radio. The best part of all was to see where the bomb aimer lay across the glass at the front of the plane looking through the sights, and the switches used to drop the various types of bombs. This was where my father had been nearly 60 years earlier. The bloke who showed us round the plane explained about the various items on the plane. He told David as he sat in the radio operator's seat that most occupants of that seat would have been younger than him. The couple had only been there on that particular day as there had been a reunion and they had decided to stay on and do some work. Also they said that my mother would be allowed on if she went over on a Thursday when people work on the plane. The general public are not allowed on board unfortunately. This was a very emotional time for me and I have never felt so many different feelings at once. I was sad at being in a place where I felt that my father had met his death and yet I was happy at being allowed to be inside the type of plane he had flown in so many times. I felt amazement at the cramped conditions the crew had had to work in and I felt proud of what my father had done. I wondered whether I would have had the guts to do what my father and so many other young men did in the war. I learned that many bomb aimers used to hold tin hats in front of them as they felt exposed lying on their stomachs on the glass at the front of the plane. So what has that to do with computers and the Dragon in particular? Well I have got similar mixed feelings about the end of NDUG. I am glad in a way that I will not have to struggle to write an article for every issue to a deadline but I am very sorry that an era is drawing to a close. I feel proud at what all the contributors have written over the years and especially Paul who has put so much time and effort in over the years keeping NDUG going for so long. I do not think anybody else would have kept it going for even half that time. Sincere thanks from me, Paul, for all your efforts in doing such a marvellous job.

Phoenix & The Dragon...Bob Smith

So NDUG is closing down in April next year. There's no way back. The melancholy news made me depressed for a while, but then I got thinking. Is there really now way we Dragon enthusiasts can keep up the bonds that Paul and Stephen have made during the years? As I was already a member of an E-group (nothing to do with computers) it struck me that those of us with access to e-mail could still keep up a Dragon club. I then thought about those of you have sent your addresses for publication in Update, and I thought that if most of you were interested there would be enough support for the idea.

My next step was to get some advice from Paul Grade, and to find out what he thought of the idea. He liked it, so I sent an invitation to all the addresses in Update. I got a very encouraging response. What I hadn't realised, though, was that there are already several e-mail groups of people interested in the Dragon computer. My only excuse for this ignorance is that I live a very blinkered existence here in the north of Norway, and I do send my abject apologies to all concerned. However, encouraged by Paul, I am going ahead to see if we can't make a go of it. The Group has been named IDUG - International Dragon Users' Group. My next concern is for all of you who don't have email or some form of computerised communication. We do have an RS232 connection on the Dragon, and plenty of really skillful Dragon experts. Maybe, who knows, a Dragon and a cheap modem might be the answer? If you've got any ideas on this score, please send an e-mail or write to me at:

Bob Smith, Sneppen 1, N-8614 YTTEREN, Norway.

Let's make a few things clear:

- 1 - this is NOT a takeover of NDUG. NDUG is definitely closing down next April.
- 2 - Paul Grade has already joined the new IDUG group but, at his express wish, as a 'common' member. We now have quite a sizable membership.
- 3 - The e-group is non-profit making, and will not cost you anything other than the cost of local telephone calls if you join. I can assure you that my personal stake in this is purely out of affection for the Dragon, and that I shall not get any money, or other reward, from members or from the e-group.
- 4 - The e-group is sponsored by selected advertising. If we don't accept this then we will have to pay a monthly subscription. As I said earlier, I am a member of another e-group, and so far I've not received more than one advert at a time, usually related to the group interest. The e-group has a spam mail detector to screen out mass circulation of unwanted mail.
- 5 - Any mail sent to the group from non-members is not accepted unless I personally approve it. This has been tested. Paul sent a letter from his second email address which wasn't registered in the group. I had to OK it before it could be circulated. As far as I'm aware, nobody can join the group without my approval, but this has yet to be tested.

Following the advice of quite a few of you, we shall be setting up a home page in the form of a magazine where we can take in all those marvellous articles you will all be writing, but don't forget there are still two more issues of Update to fill. Information, small ads etc, can be circulated directly to all members by sending an email to the group.

Here are some addresses:

Email to all members - dragonuser@egroups.com

Email to me - robert.smith@mitransport.no

IDUG homepage - <http://www.egroups.com/group/dragonuser>

The address of the homepage for the magazine will be activated later. I'll let you know when this is done. I've always enjoyed the present Update, so personally I should like to have a similar layout for the new "Update", but I'm open to suggestions - anybody with an idea for a new title?

Don't forget to note down the addresses - I'd really hate to miss out on good copy because someone (not you, of course) couldn't remember where to send it.

Speed Of Obsolescence.Clive Scott

The speed of development of computers and software is getting faster and faster. As a result, computers are becoming obsolete long before they reach the end of their useful lives. In the days of the Dragon, computers were rendered obsolete because the manufacturer went broke, as was the case with the Dragon. It was also common practice to bring out new models which were totally incompatible with the models that preceded them. This was particularly true with Sinclair, where all his computers were incompatible with each other.

The Japanese tried to create a common standard with MSX computers, but the machines were overpriced and the specification was already out of date when it was announced. It was also too restrictive and stifled innovation, and was therefore only adopted by the Japanese manufactures, and completely bombed out in the European market.

The almost universal adoption of IBM compatible computers in the home and offices should have ended that nonsense. With their open modular construction, a fairly standard specification, and a common operating system, each PC was guaranteed to run PC software and the machines were easy to upgrade. In the early days, this was certainly true. However, when Windows was universally adopted as the GUI that every machine needed to run the new software that was coming out, everything changed.

XTs and 286s were simply too slow and underpowered to have any chance and were immediately only fit for the skip. The increasing dominance of Microsoft with their well deserved reputation for bloatware made the situation even worse. Hard discs became too small, PCs had too little RAM, and the processor was too slow. After a while, it became uneconomic to upgrade the hardware, and it made more sense to buy a totally new machine. The growth of multimedia and the internet fuelled the urge to upgrade to a machine with all the latest facilities and processing power.

With new processors coming out almost every month, and software being upgraded at least every year, PCs are made out of date at an alarming rate. Whilst it is not necessary to upgrade every time new software comes out, you can only delay for so long because you will find that you cannot share files with other people as your software will not be able to read their data files. With the increasing use of networks and the encouragement by the software companies to introduce group working, it becomes a very important consideration. The cost of hardware is getting ever cheaper and this encourages people to upgrade quicker than they might otherwise have done. But what happens to all the obsolete but perfectly functional computers that companies and individuals no longer want? Most companies are reluctant to give them away to charities or similar organisations because they can't be bothered ensuring that all sensitive data is erased. As a result, thousands of computers are dumped in skips every year and since no-one has yet designed a bio-degradable computer yet, we must be filling up our refuse sites with them.

What is the answer? Jump off the bandwagon and just stick with the computer that you have got? Many in our Group have done just that. If you are interested in computers, however, it is very difficult to resist the urge to buy the latest machine or software to see what it will do. There is a sign that computer users are becoming jaundiced with the speed of software releases and are not upgrading as often as they did. Windows 98 has not sold anywhere near as well as 95, and I expect the same will happen with Office 2000. Users have all the facilities they could possibly need - all they really want is software that is reliable and doesn't crash every five minutes. Software companies should put more time in sorting out the bugs in their software instead of issuing new versions with even more.

**** It's a wonderful idea, Clive, but can you honestly ever see it happening?. All the time that punters are prepared to put up with lousy software and especially lousy GUIs, why should the software industry change?. It will only work when people refuse to accept the bug ridden rubbish and demand their money back on the grounds that it is "not of merchantable quality"!.* Paul.

Safety on the Net. Sotos Mandalos

It is true to say that growth of E-commerce is being slowed down by the perception of consumers in general and to a certain extent small business, that there are serious security problems on the Internet. There is no question in my mind that this is what we think before we log onto www.amazon.com with a view to buy a book, etc. If you think about it, the exponential growth of Internet use, it seems that consumers are yet to be convinced that the Internet is a secure environment, it is the way forward for today and in the future. I can safely say that the Internet is a trustworthy environment for performing credit card transactions and of course exchanging information with e-mail messages that travel all around the world before they get to us. A number of companies that use the Internet for transaction operations, claim that these transactions are probably safer than those when we have to pay cash and queue at our building society to pay a bill. And yet customer perception remains that in the electronic world, fraud is easily performed and worse of all that it happens all the time! So of course businesses that live in the E-commerce world have to change the perception and gain the trust of the electronic buyer. Believe me, it is very easy, cheap, quick and flawless! I wanted a piece of software that performed a particular function that could help me with my problem, and I searched the Internet, downloaded, and used it within minutes. And it was the best service I have ever received from any company. Nothing about all this claptrap about personal service and the like. Come on, we live in the E-commerce world and the sooner we accepted and use it the better. Ok, I believe that there are people not fortunate enough to be able to use the Internet for various activities, but let me just tell you one more little story that happened about a year ago. My mother had no experience with mobile phones, but she decided to go with my father away for a while and went to a holiday resort in the Greek hot summer of 1998. To make use of a public phone, she had to walk to the telephone centre. Since she had recently undergone a triple by-pass operation, and couldn't receive calls from us she was a bit handicapped and therefore decided to invest on a mobile phone. She paid her money, got it up and running well and she called me. Now my mum is 70 years old, and nothing could be better for her, to be able to be away from everyone, but at the same time keep in touch. I used the Internet to send SMS messages (www.mtnsms.com) and I could also call her. Prior to that convenience though, she was laughed at by the next door neighbour. How come a lady of 70 years could carry and use a mobile phone! This was unheard of in the small Greek village where my parents live. Coming back to the Internet, with facilities providing us with free access to the web (in the US even the phone is free) and the new technologies coming down the line with cable connection, the Internet will be as necessary as TV in our lounges! But building it with security in mind, there are two main issues that companies have been slow to respond. Again in the electronic world, lack of standards (same all over again) and of course widespread confusion about what technologies go into building a secure E-commerce business. I believe that the four main issues companies need to put their efforts to build security on the Internet are encryption, integrity, non-repudiation and of course authentication. Companies also play a destructive role in the justification for the lack of trust by the consumers!. There are a lot of E-commerce sites that have not yet implemented any kind of security. Some of them will not invest until they get hacked, and it is very easy to get hacked I can assure you. Just think about a very simple form of intrusion, the plethora of computer viruses that exist. And what do we do? We get anti-virus software to protect us. Now how many of you have been caught? Be truthful. A lot of us have had a virus, we had to clean it and said: "Never again will I get caught like that!". I am going to play Mr Dig on my Dragon 32; I know it is crap in terms of graphics and slow to play and load, but I am still enjoying this game you know. And of course there is no virus in the file using the slow cassette recorder, nor there will ever be. In the next issue, I will concentrate on the four main issues that I mentioned above: encryption, integrity, non-repudiation and authentication.

D32 Train Driving! - Martin Tiller

When I was in my teens, two interests dominated my spare time: trains and computers. It was therefore natural that I set out to combine the two. The result was a train driving simulator written entirely in Basic on my Dragon 32. In its final incarnation, the simulator ran to over 600 lines of Basic, plus a separate data file which had to be laboriously read in from cassette. It used every last scrap of available RAM in the Dragon. The result was that you could drive a train all the way from King's Cross to Edinburgh, more or less in real time, if you were suitably idle and masochistic.

My first decision when writing the program was that it would not use hi-res graphics, just text and a simple lo-res representation of a colour light signal. For one thing, graphics would have been too slow and would have used up too much memory. For another, I couldn't be bothered with it. On starting the game, you are asked what type of motive power you want, what route, and what timetable you wish to operate to. The performance of the train depended on its weight and power, so it was up to the user to come up with something suitable for the timetable chosen. The game ended when you either got to your destination, derailed, gave up, or trashed your locomotive by persistently running it above the design speed. Over the years, the game gradually evolved. When I got my first printer, I added a feature producing a printout of the timetable and comparing your performance against it. Wheel-slip was also simulated, so if you were unlucky enough to stop a heavy train on a steep gradient, you might have to reverse to the bottom of the slope and take a run at it.

The last feature I added was a full auto-pilot. Curiously, I found the auto-pilot more interesting than actually playing the game myself. It only had access to the same controls a human player had, and sent its instructions to the main program as a one-character string which replaced the keyboard input from the player. The game had thus reached its logical conclusion - no player required!

A real computer programmer would no doubt have a seizure if (s)he looked at my code - dreadfully tangled and embodying all the worst of Basic. This is not surprising for a program which evolved through so many iterations, but it works, and never crashes, and runs adequately fast. How many PC programs today can make that claim?

People older than my generation often did not understand computer programming, not surprisingly. People younger than me often don't understand it either, because it has become so very complex and specialised (I tried to learn C++ on a PC a couple of years ago and it nearly finished me off). They can use a computer, but have no idea how to program it creatively. I consider myself fortunate to have been a teenager in the 1980s when machines like the Dragon brought about a real boom in amateur computer programming.

The train driver game was technically dreadful and (for most people) pretty unplayably slow, but it has indirectly borne real fruit in the 1990s. After leaving college I joined BR and subsequently Railtrack, and wrote (in spare moments) a program called Route Runner which runs on a PC in QBasic. This was a completely new program, and much better than the Dragon game, but a software archaeologist could easily spot the links between the two. Route Runner simulates the speed of a train of a particular type at any point on its route, and gives a desktop 'quick and dirty' way of answering questions relating to route strategy, e.g. what would be the impact on journey times if we raised the line speed on this route from 75 to 90mph?, etc. For a formal answer to these questions Railtrack would go to an engineering consultancy, but this costs us money and takes several weeks, so when an idea is just in its early stages, Route Runner meets a need. It is now in use across almost the whole country and probably about 40% of the whole rail network has been modelled on it. Railtrack now want to officially adopt it as a formal standard system and redevelop it on a more modern platform than QBasic. All this because of £200 worth of Dragon 32 and many, many teenage hours spent tinkering around in Basic. Perhaps it is inevitable, but I think it sad that in today's highly specialised PC world, such a chain of events seems unlikely to happen. Or am I just getting old?

Re-housing the Dragon.G.Tuttiett

Now to the important subject of power. This is the Achilles' Heel of the entire project - it must be right or the whole thing is scuppered! You could use a PC SMPSU, but you MUST check wiring, unit ratings (voltage range, amps, etc) to see if they will suit the Dragon (see below). The Dragon's PSU transformer provides +18v and -18v to the regulator circuitry on the power board. Then via the ribbon cable it feeds power to the motherboard.

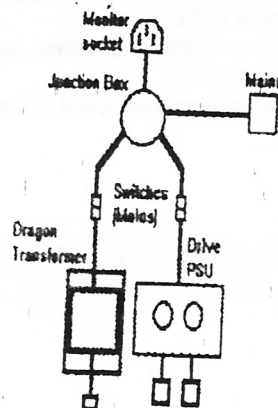
Dragon power board outputs

voltage	current
+12v	250mA
+5v	1400mA
-5v	50mA

Typical SMPSU outputs

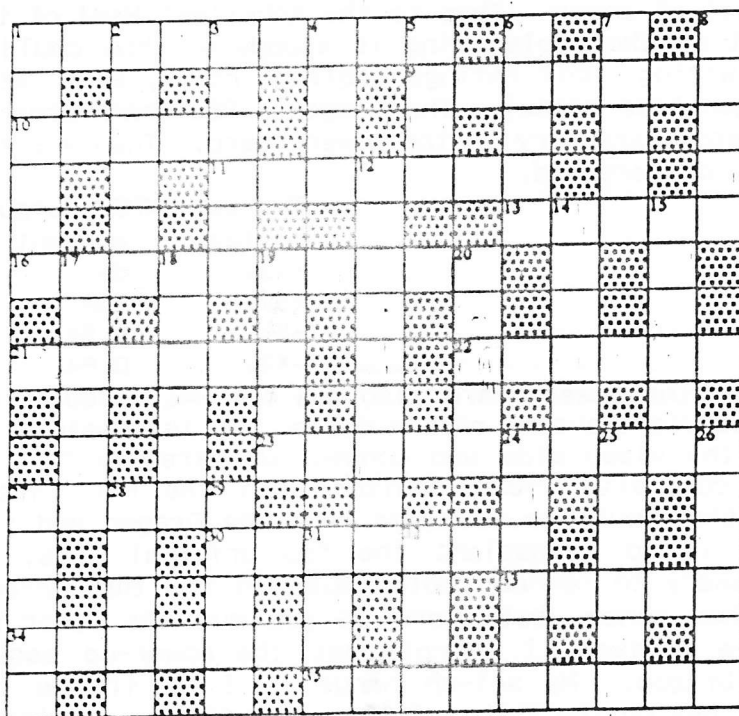
voltage	current
+12v	8A
+5v	20A
-5v	0.5A
-12v	0.5A

There is a slight snag here; the power board also has the PAL video circuitry on it and the data signals pass via the same ribbon cable. It is possible to make a mini board especially for the video side and connect up directly to a PC power unit. Or if you use a composite video monitor then the PAL circuitry is redundant. The simplest option would be to power both the Dragon and its drives via their own PSUs, that is to transplant the two original PSUs. A mains junction box will be necessary to connect both PSUs and the through-connection for the monitor. This makes sense, but where do you put the power switches? When my first Dragon drive arrived, I learnt that the power-up sequence was important - drives, then Dragon. My set-up hangs if I do it the other way around. So, two power switches on the front of the case will be required (unless you can rig up something to switch the Dragon and drives in sequence for you). Finally, remember the mains loading. It is probably best to use 13A junction box. The monitor/TV, drive box, and Dragon PSU are usually fused at 3A each - if in doubt, get qualified advice. And don't forget to add cooling to the case. I intend to use a PC SMPSU fan which needs 12v, and splice it in to the drive connectors. The 3 1/2" drives I am going to use do not use 12v, so the power is easily available. The fan will also have earthed metal ducts to remove heat effectively. I feel that the main advantages of using a PC case (other than reducing 'spaghetti') is the use of the sockets and plug on the back of the case mounted to the back plates and built-in drive cages. Of course, some modification will be necessary, especially for the keyboard and mounting new PSUs, not forgetting the connection of the Dragon ports to a back plate. But where does the keyboard go? Well, you make up a cable to connect your existing keyboard to the mainboard and put the keyboard in a case of its own. The cable can either come from the back of the case, or make an aperture in the case front. It is important to remember that the keyboard cable should not be too long - I've used one approximately a metre long with no problems and I used 15-way D connectors which can be fitted on the case allowing easy disconnection, and is fitted with Centronics clips to prevent accidents. (Obligatory plug - the Dragon circuit diagrams from NDUG have been invaluable for this project - order some from Paul as they are very useful, especially for repair).



CROSSWORD No. 3

set by P.G.Smith



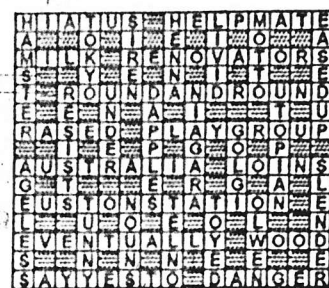
ACROSS

- 1 Staff takes year, then produces useful material (9).
- 9 Unleaded constituents -- no need in potential fish food (7).
- 10 Substance of maestro's instruction (5).
- 11 Boxer from first participating country knocked right out! (7).
- 13 "Suffer little children to enter... er..., scrub that..." Mark (5).
- 16 Smear mango over old spectacles (5,5).
- 21 Swimmer at fault -- involved in knocking back drink (6).
- 22 Some legwork required after officer receives fresh lead (6).
- 23 Maliciously named in singular situation, but, sportingly, can carry on like this (3,3,4).
- 27 Odd action this, by IRA supporter (5).
- 30 (see 3 down).
- 33 Walk around with quartermaster -- a great man (5).
- 34 Old boy right about backing game-ban (7).
- 35 Dad loses head at commencement of mum's abnormal behaviour with tissues (9).

3,30ac Practice ought ultimately to lead to striking performance here (6,7).

- 4 Boy's East End counterpart almost never looked back... (4).
- 5 ... but displays hesitant start, therefore (4).
- 6 One in twelve just quit in the end -- and with promotion in the offing! (5).
- 7 Andy audibly greets old flame poetically? (5).
- 8 Burns returned letters with flourish (5).
- 12 Superstitious groundsmen might consider using this during heatwave? (4,5).
- 14 Open container passed on with the end removed (6).
- 15 Man finds foreign article in stream (6).
- 17 They simply see something lacking in orchestral arrangement? (6).
- 18 You heard I'm out of metal? All used up by previous students (6).
- 19 Wasted one enters gung ho, and neighbours leave (5).
- 20 Brown snake that is found round here (5).
- 24 Dark horse held back by rein? (6).
- 25 Apparently not a disadvantage for such an outlaw (3,3).
- 26 City workers split, taking two different directions (6).
- 27 Leavers have treat -- end-of-June rest! (5).

- 28 Am lodged in bed & breakfast -- I am spatially challenged (5).
- 29 Smell rat about cancellation (5).
- 31 Superior and I break rank -- who am I to command? (4).
- 32 Steal copper off creep (4).



Solution to Puzzle No. 2

DOWN

- 1 Court official loses note for doorman (6).
- 2 Inflexible one receives sex change and returns transformed (6).

Updated e-Address List

Alan Greenwood: alan.greenwood@sgcs.co.uk
 Dave Bateman: dave@bateman.freemove.co.uk
 Dave Cadman: dave@davecad.freemove.co.uk
 David Linsley: dlinsley@stnc.com
 Duncan Purves: dpurves@yahoo.com
 Dragon List: dragon-list@grempe.demon.co.uk
 Gareth Tuttielt: GTuttielt@aol.com
 Graham Kinns: graham@grempe.demon.co.uk
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 IDUG (E-Group): dragonuser@egroups.com
 Marcus Ambler: marcus.ambler@yahoo.co.uk

This is the address list to date. Any more additions?. All you need to do is let me know at grade1.bigfoot.com. Paul.

A Few More Details.....

It now appears that Ray Smith intends keeping Up-2-Date going until the May 2000 issue ... trust Ray to want to have the last word! ... however, anyone intending to subscribe to that issue should please note that the Group account will be in the process of closing down at that time, so payment for that one should either be made by mid-April, or made out to Ray Smith personally. As to Update, well, two more issues to go, but just to keep records straight I'll be sending out the normal renewal notices with this one and the next. However, this does NOT mean you need to pay a full year's sub! ... send an appropriate percentage and we won't cross you off the list before "closing time"! I'd like to be able to say that no further subs are necessary, but I'm afraid postage, paper, toner, etc still cost money, so regrettably I can't make that sort of gesture. Please note that anyone who feels they are due for a refund of unused subscription at close-down has only to ask and it will be sent immediately. Depressing topic, isn't it?, but hopefully Bob Smith's "IDUG" will take off and provide some kind of replacement for the old NDUG, at least for those who have Internet access. So far it seems to be working quite well, now that most of the initial snags are ironed out. Of course, how good it turns out to be will depend entirely on how well subscribed it is ... the things all groups depend on are input and feedback, so as usual it will be up to you to decide its fate!. Paul Grade.

The Late, Late Bit

Oh well, another year over, more or less, but for some peculiar reason it seems we're supposed to get all excited this time just because next year has a couple more zeros in the date than usual. Odd ... personally I'd be more excited if my bank balance had a few more zeros on it instead, but I've given up trying to make sense of all the current garbage. Maybe it makes more sense on whatever planet our Great Leader comes from?. Frankly I reckon it's been one of the most boring and instantly forgettable years I can remember, absolutely nothing of the slightest importance or interest happened, the usual crop of "disasters", the usual political inanities, more tax to pay, less money to pay it with, weather in most parts most of the time ... situation normal.

I suppose you read/heard all those claims a few weeks ago about Worthing being "Britain's answer to Silicon Valley", and "The most profitable town in the Country"? Well, I can assure you they weren't writing about ME where the profit bit is concerned!. Actually, the whole report was based on one microscopic little firm (one of those "One man and a dog, and the dog is on holiday" firms) which has been in business for almost two years, writing "custom software", and it seems that this year they managed to show a 23% increase on last year's profits like maybe last year they made a pound, this year they made one twenty-three by cutting back on the dog's lunch allowance ... and somehow THIS makes the town (actually, they're about twelve miles outside it!) the "Silicon Valley of England", and "The Most Profitable Town .."?!. Who kiddeth whom?, and more to the point, WHY?!. Makes one wonder just how many other "reports" are based on similar stupidities, doesn't it?. Still, I suppose it's no different to all the other statistical garbage that is supposed to "prove" whatever the current political line happens to be wonder how long it will be before someone discovers that 90% of crimes are committed by right-handed people, which proves all right-handed people must be criminals?, or that most murders have been committed by people wearing grey socks, which proves grey socks turn people into homicidal whatsits?, or that over 99% of people who die have eaten food at sometime in their lives, which proves that food kills?. No, no one would be that stupid, would they? or have you heard out beloved Home Secretary recently?!. And on the topic of stupidities, does anyone know what sort of cards to send this year? Christmas?, New Year?, New Century?, Millennium? ... gets confusing, doesn't it?. Reckon I'll just try to ignore the whole thing and hope it goes away. My brain hurts. Anyway, to more important matters: like I said earlier, we'll still be sending the usual subs reminder slips out with this issue and the next, but this does NOT necessarily mean you have to pay up the full sub send an appropriate percentage to cover the remaining Updates and that will be fine. OK?. And in answer to the question you wanted to ask but weren't sure how to word in the improbable event of the Group account having a credit balance when we finally shut down, I thought it would be reasonable to split it between the "permanent staff" ... with any luck they might get a pint or two out of it, Chancellor permitting!. If it's a debit balance ... oh well, that's my hard luck, I should have listened to the Editorial words of Wisdom and shut down a bit earlier, and I'll have to cover it myself. Hopefully it should be the kind of balance all accountants dream of, zero in all columns!. OK, question answered?. Happy Y2K, Christmas, Millipede, or whatever! Paul G.

Not so Silly Answer!.

Many thanks to everyone who took the trouble to find an answer to my question about the method of making a batch file add lines to another file, but especially to John Payne who came up with the one I had been trying to remember!. It's a useful thing to know, so for anyone interested what you need is a line like ECHO"this is the bit to copy to >> C:\thisfile.bat . Simple, isn't it?, but owing to total brain failure I just couldn't remember the correct syntax!. Thank you John.

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