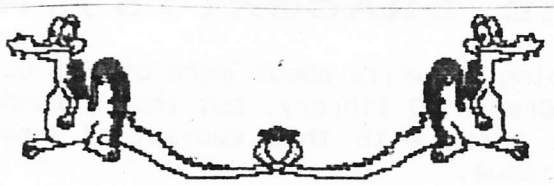
The Newsletter of the National Dragon User's Group

DRAGON UPDATE



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ISSUE 119 *DOGS GET FLEAS, D64'S GET MEECE!* *JUNE 1998*

THE GAFFER'S BIT - - - - - - - - - - - -

Happy Christmas to all our readers .... no, hang on a minute, it's Summer, isn't it?. Not that it seems to make a lot of difference these days so far as the computer scene is concerned, there hasn't been anything new for ages. Still, I suppose that was inevitable once the computer scene condensed to one type of machine and one software/operating system supplier. After all, what CAN you have that's "new" if everything has to be (at least in theory) universally software and hardware compatible?. There can't be any progress, just the occasional new gimmick to ensure that you still spend your money trying to keep up with the Gates'. Of course, from that point of view the Great Millennium Bug is the real Gimmick of the Century .... so far as most users are concerned it won't make the slightest difference, and for some peculiar reason no-one seems to suggest that businesses etc that are using "custom software" which can't make sense of dates ending in 00 should haul the suppliers to court for flogging goods not of merchantable quality and unfit for the purpose for which they were sold .... come to think of it, the same could apply to hardware .... but of course it won't happen, everyone will mutter the usual curses and trot out and spend a fortune on replacing everything in sight with the latest gimmick, software and hardware which is "guaranteed millennium compatible"!. The manufacturers must be laughing themselves sick!. Wonder how people would react if they bought a new car and when it ran out of fuel discovered that there was no way of putting any more into it, but when they complained about this omission were told "hard luck, we designed it that way because it made the design easier to draw .... but you can buy a new one complete with another ten gallons if you like". Same difference, no?, so why not the same reaction?. Are people REALLY this stupid?!. The brainwash must be working better than I thought, it's washed them away completely!.
Well, there IS one new item, although not on the PC scene, rodent facility for the old D64!. That should give you something to experiment with at least, adapting all your software for meece control instead of keyboard!. Have fun. PG.

The Editor's Bit...

....ter and twisted. No surprises there.
However, bitterness and twistedness have been put to one side (briefly, you will be pleased to know) because inside this very copy of Update is the first step to having your very own Dragon mouse driver, which puts us right back there with the big boys of computing, in the sense that will we all now need bigger desks for our computers.
This news is worthy of rejoicing for several reasons. One, someone has actually put a lot of effort into getting a new Dragon project together; two, the potential for our favourite Welsh export is still viable after all these year; and three, most importantly, it gives Chairman Grade the opportunity to do a nice little sideline in NDUG Dragon mouse mats. *(Not true!. PG).*
Click your right hand to turn the page... SW

PEEKING THE DRAGON(75).MIKE STOTT

For this issue I was going to write about more of the software that is available from Keith Nash at the Dragon PD library, but then I wondered whether our readers might be getting a bit bored with this subject. I have decided to leave that subject until the next issue.

So what can I write about? As you will have noticed from the heading this is now my 75th attempt to give you something interesting to read. Believe me it is not easy, especially when so little is happening on the Dragon scene. Also I am finding it harder to find the time to type up these articles.

I noticed in the last issue of Update an enquiry about the software available for the Dragon emulators. If you have a PC and access to the internet I am fairly certain that there is some available there as there was mention of it within the Dragon Offline Web Pages software from the PD library that I wrote about in the last issue.

As my television was over ten years old and the picture kept playing up all the time we decided to go out and treat ourselves to a new one. We quickly decided that we would get one with stereo digital surround sound but spent a long time humming and harring between normal or wide screen. Eventually we chose the wide screen and I am glad we did. I am now typing this up and looking at the words spread right out across a really wide screen. Alright it is still only the same number of characters per line but it makes it so much easier for me to see at my age. Have not yet put any of the games on to see what they look like as I have not had the time but I am really looking forward to seeing this. At first I was worried about whether the Dragon would work with the new TV as I have known problems in the past but I stuck with Phillips and lo and behold it was very easy to tune into the Dragon and I thought all my troubles were over. Not so. When I first taped something with the Dragon on as well the picture went haywire. As the video recorder was new as well I turned everything off and started reading the manuals thoroughly for the TV and video. I found out that the modulator frequency could be adjusted on the video, or even turned off completely provided a SCART lead was used between TV and video. I adjusted the frequency and the Dragon and video could then be used together. Although I do not subscribe to Sky I have a satellite dish and watch some of the sport on the free channels. When I tried to do this I found that the video and satellite clashed so I had to alter the modulator frequency yet again until I could get the Dragon, video and satellite to work happily together. Luckily all now seems well although I thought afterwards "Is there a modulator in the Dragon that I could have altered?" I am sure that there is but I am not technically minded. Maybe somebody would write an article for Update explaining how easy it is to do this. Has anybody tried to purchase a new dot matrix printer recently? At work one of them packed in completely. I decided to look round the shops in Widnes, where I work. There were only lasers and deskjets to be found. Eventually while I was looking at the catalogue in Tandy the manager said that he had one upstairs but he was not sure whether it was all there and working. He would let me have it for thirty pounds instead of the full cost of one hundred and ninety nine pounds, as well as letting me take it for a free trial first. It was only an 80 character wide printer but I thought that we could use the condensed print option to fit the reports on the paper. Persuading the users of the printer that this would suffice was not easy but was eventually achieved. The ribbon was completely tangled and took about an hour to free. Then another hour was spent getting it to work with the computer using the sheet feed option. Where was the tractor for the continuous paper?. A telephone call to Tandy told us that we would probably not be able to get one so we were back to square one. Eventually our local Inmac told us we could have a 132 character printer for just over three hundred pounds or a narrow Epson for less than one hundred. We chose the narrow one and are happy with it although it took a long time to go through the various menus to program it to print in condensed mode. There must still be demand for dot matrix printers so why are they so difficult to obtain.

Understanding The Net. S.Mandalos.

Introduction

The Internet is truly the network of networks. It is a massive collection of computer networks that interactively connects millions of computers, people, software programs, databases, and institutions.

Any two connected computers can be considered a network. Any two connected networks become an Internet. Technological advancements over the last few years have enabled virtually all computers to be networked together, giving birth to today's Internet.

The Internet was created in 1973 by the U.S. Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to ensure that their communications systems would continue to work in the event of war. For most of its existence the Internet was primarily a research and academic network. More recently, commercial enterprises and a vast number of consumers have come to recognise the Internet's potential. Today people and businesses around the world can use the Internet to retrieve information, communicate and conduct business globally, and access a vast array of services and resources online.

To address the needs of this burgeoning market, AST Computers has introduced a new line of Internet servers. The Manhattan Commerce PRO Series offers unique features for the special needs of the Internet user. AST has created the perfect ready-to-run solution to meet Internet/Intranet requirements.

Who owns the Internet?

No particular group or organisation owns the Internet. It is actually a worldwide network that links thousands of other networks together. Volunteer groups of individuals do set some standards for Internet technologies, but there is no central body that governs the structure.

What will I find on the Internet?

Millions of people use the Internet for its electronic mail capabilities. AST's Manhattan Commerce PRO series provides Internet e-mail capability. Electronic mail however, is only a small part of what the Internet offers. Users can join any of the thousands of Internet discussion groups, search for specific information in vast libraries, or transfer a variety of files to their computer. They can also explore the World Wide Web, the Internet's multimedia service. Over just the last few years, Internet-based resources and services have grown exponentially. Based on current projections this rapid growth will continue into the next decade as more businesses and consumers make the decision to move onto the Internet.

To be continued.

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Getting Connected - Clive Scott.

My brother and I bought a Hewlett Packard 3P laser printer in 1991, for which we shared the cost since it cost 800.00 at the time. So we could both use it, we connected it via serial cables through a serial switchbox - our machines are not in adjacent rooms but are on the same floor. We used it this way until about a year ago. It worked but printing through the serial port is very slow. It operates at about one tenth of the speed or the parallel port. We toyed with the idea of networking the two machines, which were both 286s, but at the time networking hardware and software were expensive.

When we both upgraded our machines to Pentiums, the printing problem was much worse because Windows print files are considerably larger. However, the software problem was solved because Windows 3.11 which we were using was already network capable. All we needed was the hardware. My brother bought two 8 bit 3Com network cards from a computer fair for only 2.00. About this time my employer was moving offices and they weren't taking the old network cables with them, so I disconnected them when we moved and with their permission took them home, complete with T connectors and 1 terminator.

Whilst the cards were fully working, we had difficulty identifying the exact model and obtaining the correct drivers. My brother eventually downloaded the right drivers from 3Com's web site, but despite a lot of work we couldn't get them to go with Windows. Due to the age of the cards, the drivers were not compatible with Windows.

My brother's employer was upgrading from BNC ethernet cabling to the thin ethernet cabling, and some of their network cards were no longer of use, so we managed to acquire two. They were also 3Com cards but a much newer vintage. At about the same time, I obtained a 386DX40 for nothing from my firm because nobody wanted it as it had no hard disc and no-one wanted to spend money to upgrade it. I bought a second hand 540Mb hard disc and upgraded the RAM from 4 to 16Mb. That was also obtained second hand from my brother's firm after they upgraded the memory on their file server. We decided to use the 386 as the print server for the laser printer. My brother bough a 386SX base unit for 25.00 from a computer fair for his amateur radio hobby. That machine was also to be included on the network.

My brother downloaded the correct drivers for the 3Com cards and successfully networked his two machines. The 386DX40 came with a network card already installed. We managed to identify it as an Adaptec card and after a lot of trial and error managed to get the right drivers and added that to the network. My firm was upgrading a number of their machines and they sold a 486SX25 to a staff member. It contained a network card that he didn't want, so he gave it to me. After a lot of research, we were not able to work out who the manufacturer was, and after much experimenting we never got it working reliably. For quite a few months nothing happened, and our network remained incomplete. Luckily, my brother managed to source another unwanted network card at his firm, and we finally were able to add my Pentium to the network. All told it took about 9 months to complete the system.

The network has been a great success with printing now being as fast as having the printer connected locally to the PC. There were other benefits too; the Pentium has a CD ROM which I have been able to use for installing software on the 386 which doesn't have one. The 5.25 floppy drive on the 386DX can also be shared between the two machines, should the need arise. I have also been able to rationalise the software and data between my two machines. We have since upgraded the Pentiums to Windows 95 which went off without a hitch and the network works just as well, with some machines running Windows 95 and others 3.11. My Pentium now only runs 95 while the older 3.11 software and some DOS software runs on the 386DX. Therefore, apart from the upgrade costs for my 386, the network was installed for just the cost of one terminator. Most people now have more than one machine, due to upgrading older PCs, but usually have only one printer. As long as you are running

Windows 3.11 on both machines you will be able to network them. Many firms are upgrading their computer systems so there is a glut of hardware around which can be bought very cheaply, either directly from companies or from computer fairs. You might get most of it free - a lot of hardware is just junked.

A word of warning - Windows 3.1 and earlier is not suitable, it has no networking software. If you buy second hand network cards, try to get them with the correct driver disks, or at least buy cards made by well known manufacturers. Even if you have to buy brand new, the costs would not be that high. Notebook computers can also be networked but the way you do it depends on their specification. If the portable takes standard internal PC cards it will be just as easy as desktop PCs. If they don't, but contain PCMCIA slots, you can buy PCMCIA network cards. The cheapest is about 50.00 but it is unlikely that you will find second hand ones. If the portable has neither, your only option is to buy a parallel network adapter which costs about the same as the PCMCIA variety. It follows that you can only network PC compatibles using Windows, though I suppose if the other machines were running a PC emulator it might still be possible e.g. Acorn RISC PC. Since most companies have computer networks, any experience you gain networking your own machines can only help your career.

Dragon In Business 4. Edwin Lilly

We found premises in a nearby market town - a shop unit of 500 square feet in a listed building a little away from the centre. After some conversion work and decorating by the landlord we moved in early in 1985. The front of the building is a computer shop and the rear is the label printing (and profitable) part. As we are still both together, we can share telephones, faxes, etc, and cover for each other when we nip out to the shops etc. It works quite well.

The Dragons have served us well. We have two businesses with a turnover approaching 200,000 pa built up partly on Dragons. The last Dragon 32 was retired just before Christmas 1996, when the last of the labels were used up. All the printing is now done by thermal transfer for speed and quality. The largest and fastest machine is a TEC B872, which will print 8" wide labels at 8 inches per second; it is linked to a Pentium 100 running Windows 3.11 and a specialist label program. Print quality and productivity are superb.

We now have a computer shop selling (dare I mention them) PCs, but mainly all those ribbons, cartridges, cables, paper, disks, and all manner of things for your computer. If there were demand for things Dragon I would stock them, but even later machines such as the Amiga have started to disappear.

In the rear of the premises my other half slaves away over several hot printers producing millions of labels for all sorts of companies - some well known national companies and some much smaller. You will see our labels in Argos, Index, and on goods from most of the major mail order companies like Freemans, GUS, Littlewoods, etc. She now has some help during the afternoon packing and dispatching. I man the telephone and take orders, fend enquiries, and run the computer shop.

What we have learned in our time:

- The Dragon is a very good 8 bit computer and stood up well to a lot of work.
- The Dragon 64 with twin drives and OS9 programs was a powerful business tool during the 80s and even into the 90s.
- A solid and sustainable business takes time to get started, to build up assets and cash reserves, and to be profitable.
- A good niche market and a sound business plan are essential for success.
- Newer technology has to be embraced and used to remain competitive and profitable. Older technology can be continued with up to a point.

I still have the Dragon 64 set up in the garage workshop and we still keep some heat in there as we have books and furniture stored in there, so it is not too bad in there in the winter. However, I find myself using the machine less and less - partly because I don't do much on any computer in the evenings, as I am involved with them all day. We also have a couple of 32s but cannot see a requirement for them now, but you never know.

If anyone wants a copy of the label program and wants to start a label printing business, let me know.

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Of Mice And Dragons. S.Orchard.

If you have a Dragon 64, or compatible serial port on a D32, and you would like to attach a mouse then this is for you.

The type of mouse required is a Microsoft compatible serial mouse with a 9 pin D connector. These are freely available and you should be able to pick one up just about anywhere for under a tenner, usually considerably less. If you have a spare for your PC, then lucky you!

Many mice (mouses?) have three buttons, but in Microsoft mode only two are usable, the middle button being redundant. You will have to make an adaptor cable to connect mouse to Dragon. For this you will require a 9 pin D plug plus suitable cover, a 7 pin DIN plug, and a short piece of 4 core cable. The diagram next issue will show the views when looking into the holes in the sockets. This

is the same view that you will get when you solder the leads to the backs of the plugs. The connections are as follows: GND to GND, RX to RX, TX to TX and RTS to DTR. Also make a bridge connection from 12V to CTS on the seven pin plug - a blob of solder should do the trick.

To check that the connection works, you will need the 'detect mouse' program next issue. If all is correct, you will get the message 'MOUSE DETECTED', or 'FAILED' otherwise. The program loops continuously, allowing you to wobble things about to check the reliability of the link.

For those who are interested, here's some tech info. The serial format is 1200 baud, 7 data bits, 1 stop bit, and no parity. The mouse transmits information whenever an event occurs, an event being a move or a button press or release. The information consists of three 7 bit words. The first word is a status byte with bit 6 always set. Bits 5 and 4 reflect the state of the left and right buttons, bits 3 and 2 are the MSBs of the Y motion value and bits 1 and 0 are the MSBs of the X motion value.

The second and third words transmitted are the bottom six bits on the X and Y motion values respectively - bit 6 is always clear. The motion values are signed 8 bit numbers and represent the amount of movement since the last transmission.

Now, how does one write the software? The data comes in thick and fast, at about 120 words per second when the mouse is in continuous motion, equalling 40 updates per second. If you are going to write your own software, it is going to have to be FAST, so that data isn't missed. Realistically, you would have to use the serial receiver interrupt, The service routine could then maintain a set of co-ordinates by accumulating the motion values.

This is where the big scary hex dump, in the next issue, comes in. It is an interrupt driven driver, written in position independent code, containing a number of functions allowing you to use and control the way the mouse operates. It implements a non-destructive pointer in text mode and in all PMODEs, and being interrupt driven, the pointer moves about the screen just as smoothly as it does on a PC (nice!).

If you fancy typing it all in, here's how the hex loader will operate. It prompts you to type in a four digit hex address to start at and then waits for you to type in the data. When you have typed the 16 digits (backspace works, if required) then the checksum is calculated and printed. If this matches the one in the hex dump then you can proceed with the next line; if it doesn't match then you can press CLEAR to do the line again. Note that it doesn't check if you've typed a line out of sequence, so pay careful attention to the addresses printed at the beginning of each line. When finished, you may SAVE "MSDRV10",30000,31169,30000. I would recommend breaking out and saving a couple of times on the way, in case disaster strikes.

Also in the next issue, I have written a short demo program which allows you to draw freehand with the mouse. Hold down the left button to draw, and press the right to quit. It is very basic, but it demonstrates how to use the driver.

Now, there are some limitations. DragonDOS doesn't protect itself from serial interrupts. This will result in a trashed disc if you write to disc with the driver enabled and move the mouse. The way around this is to disable the driver before disc access and re-enable it only after closing ALL files. This is why there is a CLOSE command in the demo program.

The second limitation concerns use of the graphics pointer. In order to display the pointer correctly in all PMODEs, the driver loads its information from BASIC system variables when enabled. This means that PMODE changes won't be noticed by the driver unless disabled and re-enabled. The danger is in PCLEARing to something less than the current screen requirement with the pointer display on. This will cause the pointer to wander into whatever basic program is running at the time, with unpredictable results.

Finally, I have just discovered that pressing reset disables the serial interrupt. If the driver was active at the time, it will be partially disabled. You will have to call the disable function to do the job properly. (I will include reset handling in the next version of the driver).

Anyway, there should be enough in these articles to get you up and running, and I welcome any feedback on the subject. I will certainly be writing more software to take advantage of rodent control, and I urge you to do the same - there's life in the old beast yet!.

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A Final Demand

So, having tried asking nicely, and having tried asking not so nicely, in the end it's not very surprising that we have had to resort to more -ahem- unorthodox methods.

We could simply point out that without some more material in time for the next issue, there won't be a next issue. But instead of issuing the usual polite requests, we've decided to step up a gear, and get all together more sinister in our approach. How?. Blackmail!!.

It's a shame that it has come to this, but ordinary methods having failed, perhaps a more radical stance might prove more fruitful. This is how it's going to work.

Frankly, Stewart Orchard's mouse driver is an article that I have been longing to see for the Dragon, and if someone is prepared to put in the effort and write something major like this for us all, then there is indeed "life in the old beast yet". However, instead of using it all in this issue, we've decided to play dirty. Because at the moment, we don't have more than 2 pages to offer you for the next issue. So, if you'd like to get your hands on the code for one of the biggest developments for the Dragon in recent years, we need to come to some kind of deal.

PLEASE send us an article for the August issue of Update. Otherwise, we won't bother making an August issue. Having whetted your appetite with the introduction to the mouse project, surely you're intrigued enough to write just one side of A4 for us to all enjoy? If not, then the codes for Stewart's hard work remain locked away in Update Towers for ever.

An offer you can't refuse, I think... S.W

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Alternatives? Paul Grade

Well, there IS an alternative way of getting hold of Stewart's Rodent Routines, but it will cost you money, and it still doesn't get around the point that with no material coming in there will be no Update, and it follows that with no Update there will be no Group, right?. As a very special concession to those of you who hate typing in reams of data lines, and those of you with left handed soldering irons, it has been decided that in return for a ridiculously small amount of cash, we are willing to supply you with both the necessary driver routines AND a ready made serial port to meece adaptor lead for your D64. Stewart has offered to provide the leads "at cost", which works out at £3.00 inclusive, and you can get the driver disc and documentation from me at the same price .... a grand total of six quid for the lot. Now before you all decide that this will not only save you the trouble of typing in data and soldering fiddly plug connections but also writing something for Update, let me explain the catch. As stated above the position is simple:

```
IF MATERIAL = 0 THEN UPDATE = 0
IF UPDATE = 0 THEN NDUG = 0
IF NDUG = 0 THEN OFFERS = 0
```

Get it? .... it still doesn't get you off the hook at all!, we still need material from you or you won't be able to BUY the necessary OR make/write it yourself!. Why not make an effort and write us a page ... or even half a page if you can't manage more?. What about? ... "the problems of writing something for publication when you don't know what to write about" would be a good start, perhaps. For details of where to send cheques for meece material, see the ads page. OK?. You know where to send Update material ... to The Editor!. P.G.

TAPES, BOOKS AND DISKS. . .

The stock has been thinned out quite a bit since the last Grand Sale.The tape collection is now utilities only, and the D64 has been sold. As for "Madness and the Minotaur" -it's still here - at the moment!
MADNESS and the MINOTAUR(DD);

UTILITY TAPES:

FILEMASTER (Microdeal); GRAPHIC ANIMATOR; (Salamander); ELECTRONIC AUTHOR; DREAM (Dragon Data); DRS (another tape has turned up); PERSONAL FINANCE;Special SELECTION 2; COMPUTAVOICE; DUPLIDISK 2; DISKPIX; LOAD-IT ; Music Maker;

ALL ONE PRICE:- 70 pence each inc postage(in U.K.) or offers for lots of more than 2.

UTILITY DISKS:-

TELEWRITER (DISKS and tape inc.manual);RAINBOW WRITER.
£3.50 EACH inc. postage.Barter for more than one.

MANUAL for : SALAMANDER GRAPHICS SYSTEM. 50 PENCE.

CARTRIDGE:- EDIT+ (Compusense.) £1.50 inc. postage.

BOOKS:-

The Dragon Programmer	S.M.Gee
Advanced Sound & Graphics	The Brain Twins
The Working Dragon 32	David Lawrence
TRS-80 Assembly Language; CoCo Graphics Basic and M/C;	
D32 Companion	M.Jarvis
Dragon Graphics and Sound	Steve Money
£1.25 each including postage.	
2 working Dragon 32's including all leads.	£15.00 each inc. postage

Phone me on Worthing 207585 most evenings if you want any of these whilst stocks last! *Ken Grade.*

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QBASIC . . . .KEN GRADE

I've had TWO replies to my query re QBASIC manual - thanks to Dave Bateman and Bob Smith for their help. Here's a QBASIC (data)file read and write sequence for sequential files. I'm still reading about direct/ random access files...

```
130 OPEN P$ FOR OUTPUT AS £1
132 PRINT £1, J$
134 PRINT £1, M$
136 PRINT £1, D
138 PRINT £1, B
140 FOR X = 1 TO 40
142 PRINT £1, A$(X)
144 PRINT £1, B(X)
146 PRINT £1, C(X)
148 PRINT £1, D(X)
150 IF A$ = "*" THEN 154 ELSE 152
152 NEXT X
154 CLOSE
```

```
160 CLS : INPUT "filename"; P$:
162 OPEN P$ FOR INPUT AS £1
164 IF EOF(1) THEN CLOSE: GOTO 188
166 INPUT £1, J$
168 INPUT £1, M$
170 INPUT £1, D
172 INPUT £1, B
174 FOR X = 1 TO 40: IF EOF(1) THEN 188
176 INPUT £1, A$(X)
178 INPUT £1, B(X)
180 INPUT £1, C(X)
182 INPUT £1, D(X)
186 NEXT X
188 CLOSE
```

(£should=#of course)

Odds & Sods. Paul Grade.

Just a couple of items on which your assistance would be greatly appreciated. The first one is a request from Stewart Orchard (yes, the mouse man!). Some of you will surely recall that some years ago he produced a speech synth board for the Dragon. So OK, sales were less than brilliant at that time, but he would like to know if there would be any interest in a "re-release" of it, perhaps with some improvements, or even a software version. Obviously there is a lot of work involved, and there would be no point in him going ahead if no-one was likely to want the end product, so if you have any views on the matter, one way or another, do please drop him a line and let him know. OK?. You'll find the address on the ads page. Second item is a request from me .... does anyone know where I can find an early PC "capture card" .... one that will work with Win 3.11 drivers instead of the current Win 95 versions?. They DID exist a couple of years ago, relatively cheaply, some were basically TV cards with a "capture" facility, some simply straight capture cards, but frankly I don't give a damn which variety I end up with so long as it has a composite video input (and preferably output) and runs under Win 3.11. There were several different makes and models, but they all seem to have disappeared around here .... like anything else in the hardware line which isn't next month's model!. New, Second-hand ..... who cares so long as it has the right drivers with it?!. Your help in locating such an item would be invaluable. Oh well, that's all, I think .... except that I've still got that pair of ICL 286 base units advertised in the last issue .... they're perfect "spare" machines, or ideal for anyone wanting to learn how to use PCs rather that how to get used by Win95!, and they are neat little beasts, not those old IBM style portacabin size things!. Paul G.

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Request Time!.

I've had a couple of requests for us to include some simple instructions and or explanations on how to install and use the Dragon Emulators and the Graham Kinns utilities. Now I know that both discs do contain pretty comprehensive README files, but some people do get confused, especially when they run into *.ZIP or *.ARC files on a disc, so would anyone care to let us have a brief simplified piece or two on the subject which we could include in the next issue perhaps?. Come on, you can't leave EVERYTHING to Mike, Steve and I, so pass on a little of your expertise and give us something to print at the same time!. Paul G.

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Up-2-Date Famine

It appears that it isn't only Update that is rapidly becoming an article free zone ....Up-2-Date is in a very similar state!. How do I know? .... When Ray Smith has to ask ME to write something for Up-2-Date things really DO have to be in a bad way!. What are you after, Updates full of blank pages?, Up-2-Date discs with around 174Kb blank space?. It's no good pleading illiteracy, 'cos I know that most of you were at school long enough ago to have actually learned to write. Lack of time isn't really valid either, not if you haven't written anything for us in the past ten years or so!. "Don't know what to write" is getting decidedly tired now ... is life and computing really so uneventful that you can't recall ONE reasonably interesting item to tell us about?. Come on, you don't have to compose a literary masterpiece, half a page or so of anything vaguely interesting would be a great help, even if it's only half a page of new excuses for why you can't think of anything to write or why you don't have time to write it anyway!. You don't have to use a word processor, or even joined up writing if you don't feel up to it .... inscribed stone tablets (so long as you pay the postage), or even audio tapes will do!. Excuses won't!. Paul G.

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The Late, Late Bit - - - - - -

I'm sure that Sotos would disagree with me, but I've just been reading a piece in my local paper which is ranting on about a "Wonderful New Information Technology Centre, Full of State of the Art On-Line Computer Equipment", which according to the blurb is supposed to do wonders for "Education" .... and my reaction, perhaps predictably, is "Bullshit!". Dunno about you, but I am sick and tired of listening to people (usually political or media morons who think that additional RAM is a way of making female sheep happier,) drivelling on about "Information Technology" and "Education" as though the two terms are interchangeable. A tin of spray paint and a blank wall could be considered information technology, a pencil plus a toilet door likewise, ditto a telephone or a printed book, but the morons appear to imagine the term refers only to "computers", because these "can access the Net". Leaving aside the all too obvious point that no-one is being taught anything at all about the REAL "technology", the actual hardware involved, there is the perhaps more important fact that all anyone can get from the Net is DATA, some of it accurate, much of it not, but in either case data alone is virtually worthless. Download the alphabet and you have all the data you need to write a book, list all numbers from zero to infinity and you have all you need to understand mathematics, work through an Encarta CD and you know all about everything .... not so?. Actually, from an educational angle the Net is worse than useless, because there is no means of checking the contents to discover what is accurate, ignorance, superstition, deliberate mis-information, or someone's idea of humour!. If you are relying on using "Information Technology" as your teacher and source of all information, who or what can you check with?, and I'm very much afraid that this IS the way 'net access is being (mis)used .... after all, if it's on the Net it must be right, mustn't it?!. Tell you a story .... a few miles from here is a Community College, one of those pretentious dumps which started life under the label "comprehensive" and were the product of a couple of merged and mucked-up Sec.Mod. schools. The staff and Governors are very proud of themselves, having wasted about half their budget on stuffing the place with over-priced PC systems, and are currently boasting that not only are the brats there "learning to handle Information Technology", but adults can also take advantage of this wonderful educational opportunity by attending evening courses. Sounds fantastic, doesn't it?. So why is it that not one of the brats there even knows what type of machine they are using except that "it's a Windows PC"?. Why is it that not one of them has the slightest idea of how to configure a machine or even write a CONFIG file?!, why do the teaching staff know even less?, why, when someone gets finger trouble and crashes a system, do they have to wait two days for a "systems engineer" to turn up from one of the local bodge hardware emporiums and sort it out?. THIS is "Information Technology" as she is taught?!. Would it be sarcastic to suggest that if the Internet is really so Educational and contains so much Information, they could have at least learned how to rewrite a hard drive boot sector from it, or clear a typical Win 95 lock-out?.

OK, OK, don't agree if you don't want to. I know all too well that criticising The Internet is about as rewarding as being Elmer Phudd's stunt double, and if everyone started to agree with me I'd be certain that I'd got things all wrong somewhere!, but at least try thinking about it ...., it may not be politically correct, but they can't nick you for that ... yet!. Of course, that may change soon, what with all these New Deals from New Labour. I'm sure the firm that handles their PR is more used to doing soap powder commercials ... everything has to be "New!" something or other, and guaranteed to wash whiter than other Major brands!. Why do I get the feeling that it's time someone told New Dealer Blair that he should get a New Deck and stop dealing from the bottom before people start to get really peeved with him?. Dunno why I'm bothering to write any of this anyway ... no-one is reading it, you've all gone off to the Costa Wotsit on holiday, haven't you?. You really are an idle bunch .... you ought to be back home, slaving away over a hot Dragon, writing the material for the August Update. Oh well, the end of the page is nigh, so time I found a drink. Cheers. Paul G.

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