

I.O.U.

The Voice of the Independent Oric Users' Group

ISSUE No. 5 - late September 1985

EDITORIAL

It seems that my comment about O.P.E.L. : 'this firm is virtually Tansoft reborn so I leave it to you to decide how advisable it is to buy direct from them' has caused some confusion leading to some letters from users and a threatening letter from O.P.E.L. . I would therefore like to make the following clear :-

O.P.E.L. Ltd. and Tansoft Ltd. are two entirely separate companies. I at no time intended to imply that they were the same company and apologise to those people that misunderstood my comment and to O.P.E.L. Ltd. for any subsequent inconvenience.

In my handwritten version of issue 4's editorial I had written 'this firm seems to be' but in the rush to get issue 4 typed up it came out as the above. My concern was that all the available evidence suggested that O.P.E.L. was a new firm set up to take over where Tansoft left off but without meeting Tansoft's debts. However the letter from Mr Steven Hopps, the operations manager at O.P.E.L. informs me that O.P.E.L. has been selling Oric hardware since 1983. It was, in fact, the official export distributor for Oric Products International outside of France and certain Benelux countries prior to Eureka's takeover. O.P.E.L. decided to market within the U.K. following the collapse of Oric and the corresponding decline in foreign demand. Of course if O.P.E.L. had made this clear in the computer press after it started taking enquiries from people writing to Tansoft then there would have been much less confusion.

In my strongly worded reply to Mr Hopps' letter I asked a number of questions which, if answered, will once and for all make clear the circumstances of Tansoft's cessation of trading and O.P.E.L.'s appearance in the U.K. market. At the time of writing no answer has been received. Should a reply arrive in time you will find it further on in this issue, otherwise I'll let you know what has happened in issue 6.

As for the change in format to A4 this has been forced upon me by time considerations. The old format was produced by photocopying two A5 sheets mounted on A4 paper and then cutting down the middle, as I am sure that most of you have deduced. With over 80 copies of issue 4 distributed already you will understand that I no longer have the time for this. With the university academic year about to start in October the I.O.U.G. will have to take second place to my studies. I remain committed to the I.O.U.G. but more than ever I will be relying upon you to cooperate by following the steps for receiving issues and contributing to the letter; the details are inside this issue. This will enable me to ration my spare time efficiently.

I considered the tone of Mr Hopps' letter to be unnecessarily threatening and somewhat insulting to my intelligence and therefore made what I think was the necessary strong reply. I am hoping for a more amicable communication between O.P.E.L. Ltd. and myself in the future. Whilst I accept that the phrasing of my statement in issue 4 was a mistake it was made in good faith and based upon the available evidence. I am sure that you will agree that this incident has made the situation much clearer. I feel that as consumers we must search for the truth about our suppliers to protect ourselves from possible loss and I would appreciate your opinions about this.

Gary Ramsay

NEWSFLASH

Eureka have finally got round to naming firms to provide official U.K. distribution and after sales service. The distributor is Dudley Langmead Enterprises, Bedford Street, Hitchin, Herts. SG5 2JG tel. 0462-31225 .

Micromend will provide the after sales service on 01-398 8055 .

Orpheus didn't reply to my letter but Ian Brown from Toddington phoned them. They said that they would bring out some new Oric software if Eureka say something official around October.

Stuart Wright of the Byte Drive User Group has contacted me. The B.D.U.G. magazine is released periodically on disc and has a wide variety of content. More from Stuart at

Chelmsford Road, Clacton-on-Sea, Essex CO15 5DJ tel. 0255-812 057

RESPONSE

John Dibnah from Hull has suggested Royal National Institute for the Blind postal wallets for the postal exchange of cassettes. You can get these from R.N.I.B., 224 Great Portland Street, London tel. 01-388 1266. Quote :-

PO19475 small postal wallet for compact cassette price £ 0.81

PO19480 large postal wallet (8½x10½ inches) price £ 1.29

Note: these are minimum prices so feel free to pay a little more. John says that they are very strong and will last many trips. John would like to know if it is possible to make the Oric simulate an 80 column screen. Its something about being able to see what a display will look like when sending a message to an 80 column terminal on Prestel. Can this be done and is it necessary?.

Owe Fransson from Sweden has the following questions:- In 'The Hobbit' I have managed to end up in the goblin's dungeon, how do I get out from there?. 'Kilburn Encounter' is this a dud game?. It seems that I can't leave the road. Any ideas?. 'Dambusters' I couldn't get this game going until I changed the first subprogram, obviously there is some fault with the M/C routine which checks if there is a joystick attached. Gullrands väg 199, s-145 64 Norsborg, Sweden. (a 22p stamp will take a letter under 60g to anywhere in Europe)

Mark Greenwood would like to know if the Oric Prestel software is available on cassette and is any user to user software included or available for the modem. 39 Anchorage Lane, Doncaster, S.Yorks DN5 8DX tel 0302-785 018

Alan Beales of Bures has been using the 'Address Book Program' from the 'Oric Handbook' with the addition of GRAB to record 600 entries with 4 fields. Occasionally it takes upto 15 minutes to locate and delete an entry. This is obviously a 'garbage collection' problem but does anyone know a way around it. 1 Friends-Field, Bures, Suffolk CO8 5LH

Alan Shepherd of 144 Oakley Green, West Auckland, Co. Durham would like to know if anyone has written a machine code 'Pole Position' type game for the Oric Atmos. He has also heard that 'Daley Thompsons Decathlon' might come out for the Oric - is this true?.

Arthur Jackson has a Tandy Line Printer VII which double spaces between lines in response to LPRINT and LLIST. His printer does not have a line feed disable control code nor dip switches so does anyone know the machine code solution. He would also like to know if anyone knows how to modify Author to allow the APPEND command to work with disc. 56 Driffold, Sutton Coldfield, W. Midlands B73 6HP. He is also interested in hearing from other disc users, particularly those who use the microdisc for serious/business uses.

John Richings from Durham City has found an Oric repairer near to him - Errington Computers, Central Arcade, Spennymoor, Durham. He would also like to know how to use the floating point accumulator and machine code routines that make use of it.

Stuart Alger would like help with Level Nine's 'Snowball'. He can get onto all the coffin levels and the one above but nowhere else. 89 Green Lane, Great Sutton, Cheshire L66 4LQ.

I.O.U. - The New System

I have decided to introduce a limited subscription service in response to a growing demand. The subscription will cover upto 6 issues depending upon costs of production. There are two options:-

- a) £ 2.88 ie 6(0.35+0.13) plus 6 self-addressed A5 envelopes.
- b) £ 3.12 ie 6(0.35+0.17) plus 6 self-addressed A5 envelopes.

This covers second-class and first-class post respectively. As second-class post will be going down for a while some of you may have a few pence in credit. I must insist upon A5 envelopes (approx. 210 X 148mm), they cost between 5p and 7p each when bought in packs of 10. Cheques/P.O.'s only (no cash please) made payable to 'Independent Oric Users' Group' (do not abbreviate this). Mark your envelopes in the top right, ie where the stamp will go, with a 'S' for second-class or a 'F' for first-class as appropriate.

If you have been put off subscription by past experience then you can still get one issue at a time.

Will inform you of the target dates of the next issue in each I.O.U. and its prospective price excluding postage. If an issue is late then bear with me as this will be caused by a heavy workload. Contributions and questions etc. must arrive no later than two weeks before the first date mentioned to stand any reasonable chance of inclusion in the next issue. Please note that due to the number of questions being received I cannot guarantee to include all of them. The same goes for adverts for I.O.U. Exchange.

I cost out I.O.U. on the basis of the cost of producing a single to allow for flexibility in the number that I have photocopied at any one time. When I have a large batch done there is the prospect of a discount. What I propose to do with any such surplus is to keep the first £3.00 or 50%, whichever is the larger, myself and to put the rest into the I.O.U.G. 'Fighting Fund'. The amount that I keep myself would go towards what I don't include in the cost per issue ie typing paper, typing ribbons, writing paper, postage for I.O.U.G. business etc. , as well as being a token recognition of the time that I put in on I.O.U.G. matters. The 'Fighting Fund' would be used according to your democratic wishes. If you disagree for any reason then write or phone.

There is one more way that you can be of a great help. If you are posting something to me that will not fit through a standard letter box either because it cannot be bent or is too bulky then please post it to arrive on Monday to Friday inclusive. The postman knocking on the door at 7.30 a.m. on a Saturday morning wakes up my parents as well as myself and is none too pleasant !! .

REVIEWS

Trouble In Store - from Orpheus (Oric 1/Atmos)

This highly polished platform derivative takes place in Harridges - not quite Tesco's, I can tell you, and features speech (no hardware required). When the game has loaded (3-4 mins) the high score table is displayed and you must press a key to start the game. A grating crackle is then emitted from the speaker, and it took me about 4 days to realise that it was actually saying 'Harridges'.

3 controls are used - left, right and jump, as well as music on/off but no pause is provided. The object of the game is to get the manager of the store through the 32 departments without getting nobbled by the various zany, imaginative inhabitants, including llamas, flared trousers, teddy bears etc.. The control of the manager is not exactly true to life as he can cling to ceilings with his head and climb up vertical walls. Sometimes it is necessary to jump off the back of a nasty. In doing this you seem to die at random, even though the instructions tell you that just a bit of care is needed. Whether this is intentional or just a quirk of Oric colour attributes I'm not sure, but it can be frustrating. I was also disappointed to find out that after room 32 nothing happens. It just goes straight back to room 1 without even a message of congrats.

The game has very impressive, large smooth graphics, an excellent 3 voice background tune and represents good value for money at £6.95 . Thoroughly recommended.

James Hibisch

Waxworks - from Channel 8 Software (Oric 1/Atmos)

This game starts you off in the rest room of a wax museum. As the museum has shut for the night your task is to escape from it.

The graphics which accompany each location are very well drawn and are very fast too. The adventure also has some humorous touches, for example when you can see some toilets in the wash room if you type 'GO TOILETS' the program responds with "aahh....That's better...".

All round a very good adventure but a little on the easy side, probably for beginners.

Ian Brown

The Ultra - from P.S.S. (Oric 1/Atmos)

This is an frills shoot em up game. There are 16 sheets (all of which I once completed in a freak game) and each requires a distinct technique. On sheet 2 for instance you should start from one side (left is best) and only shoot aliens as they approach you, i.e. don't chase them. The game could have been made better with a facility to take the sheets in any order. As it is the average player is unlikely to see the sixteenth sheet unless they experience a major fluke.

This game is just zap zap pow and not for the cranially inclined, but if you're puerile (like me) you'll think its fab.

STAR RATING **** VALUE THRESHOLD £5

John Platten

Book Review - 'Exploring Adventures On The Oric 48K' by Peter Gerrard

This book cost me £6.95 and since it was first published in 1984 that is probably the price you will have to pay for it. However for anyone interested in adventure programming it should be worth every penny. I quote from the introduction "it is aimed at the person who loves to get absorbed in a game for hours on end, has always wanted to write one of his own, but has taken one look at a listing of someone else's game and thought 'There is no way that I could write something like that!' ".

The book explains how to write an adventure game and contains sections on room mapping, data structures, input routines, verb handling etc.. There are three listings in the book so you will also get three adventures for your money (and a lot of typing). The main game is gone through line by line explaining what is going on. There is also an interesting section on how to solve adventure games and this gives the novice quite a lot of useful tips. The three adventures are also available on tape for those too lazy to type them in (doesn't seem much point in buying the book in that case, does there?).

Duckworths address is:- The Old Piano Factory, 43 Gloucester Crescent, London NW1

Also by Peter Gerrard from the same publisher 'A Pocket Handbook For The Oric' @ £2.95 . I have not seen this one yet so if anyone else has how about an appraisal?.

Derek Howard

I have received a number of programs from a couple of users for review.

First up is James E. Blair's JEBISOFT programs. All the programs are written in BASIC and are left unprotected so that the purchaser may have a look at the techniques used. Here are my brief comments:-

1. The Wishing Well £1.99

This is a computer version of those adventure game books that you can buy. Thus you start off with randomly determined factors such as luck, skill and strength. These factors then affect your fortunes as you search for clues and fight your enemies. Combat is also determined by the computerised 'roll of a die'. You pursue your task by selecting options. There is a lot of action, the game is consistent and has a good response time. It's like one of those books but you don't have the hassle of dice and paper and pencil. Full instructions are provided.

2. The Maritime Collection £1.50

Two two-player games - Battleships and 'Seek and Destroy' - a graphic simulation of a sea battle. For Battleships fans

3. Escape From Stalag 7 £1.25

The only program that I disliked. It's an arcade game written in BASIC and it is much too slow.

4. Home Accounts (Atmos Only) £1.25

An extensive package covering monthly expenditure, cheque book, standing information and a year planner. Access to the program is password protected to protect your information. Following my advice more detailed instructions will be provided. Perhaps the best use of this program for tape based users would be the performing of 'what if ...' calculations when planning their budget. Disc users could easily modify the program to allow loading/saving of data from/to disc.

5. Race Analysis £1.25

A comprehensive program for close followers of horse racing. You will need a form book to enter all the information needed.

6. The Quizmaster Collection £1.99

Two games. Firstly 'Right Before Your Eyes' in which the computer displays letters and a cryptic clue. You must beat your opponent to the

tion and then give the correct grid location of the answer in the time limit to score points. There are 10 different grids. A good family game.

Secondly there is Mastermind which, as you've guessed, means test your general knowledge. Some good questions means that this has educational value. However from time to time a question is repeated in the next game.

To order a program or obtain more information write to:-

Mr J.E. Blair, 39 Gateside Crescent, Airdrie, Lanarkshire ML6 6EP

Add 24p p+p for one tape or 38p for more than one.

Chris Downs sent me a copy of 'Infobase' a card-index type data-base written entirely in BASIC with provision to load/save data using the microdisc. In general it is very good. It is very to use being menu-driven and makes good use of prompts. It also has very extensive search facilities which worked well in my review. What let it down was the sort which is inherently slow and wouldn't work with my test data. I've taken steps to remedy this by writing Chris a short SORT routine which is much better. You should hear more in issue 6 but if you can't wait that long then send a s.a.e to Chris for more info. at:-

105 Rochford Garden Way, Rochford, Essex SS4 1QJ

Do the same if you would like a list of Oric 1 only software at low prices. This reminds me that Infobase is for the Atmos only.

Gary Ramsay

ODDS and ENDS

If you want to stop your MCP 40 from giving the occasional squiggle or to speed up your programs by turning off the keyboard scan when it is not needed then use the following for both Oric 1 and Atmos. KEYBOARD OFF: POKE £30E, 64 , KEYBOARD ON: POKE £30E , 192. Note you cannot use WAIT in your program in those parts with the keyboard off. For '£' read hash (shift - 3)

Alan Norris from Leicester has sent me the following version of the 'Shell Sort'. This is far superior to the bubble sort which does not really have any practical use.

```
100 REM --- SHELL SORT
110 REM --- NX=NUMBER IN LIST
120 REM --- B$( )=LIST
125 :
130 GX=NX/2
140 REPEAT
150 FORI=1TONX-GX:FORJ=ITO1STEP-GX
160 IFB$(J) <=B$(J+GX) THENJ=0:GOTO180
170 B$(J)=B$(J+GX):B$(J+GX)=B$(J)
180 NEXTJ, I
190 GX=GX/2
200 UNTILGX<=0
```

LATE NEWS

Eureka replied to my letter. They say that the U.K. distributor will keep us in touch. Also they are working on a revised version of the disc drive with a new DOS.

p.s. Some of you will have a list of software for sale from Robert Ford. He supplied all the sheets.

J.W. Haly has an updated version of 1.1 DOS for the microdisc. Dave Cheeseman tells me that it has the following characteristics:- line printer fault fixed, cassette handling fixed, backup fixed and speeded up, verification speeded up, auto run of machine code programs very suspect. You can get a copy from Mr Haly by sending a blank disc plus return p+p to him at Berlin PC TP RE, West Germany, BFPO 45.

I think that you will need the above to take advantage of the following. Owe Fransson has written a machine code utility for the transfer of software from tape to disc for the Atmos. From the instructions I get the impression that you need the cassette recorder and disc drive connected at the same time. To get the listing, which is just over two A4 sides of hex digits, send a s.a.e. plus 21p (or 30p for quick dispatch). A cassette version should be available when I've sorted out the details with Owe. More news of that in issue 6. For quicker information send a s.a.e. or phone 061-431 4160 (after 6.15 pm) in about 4 weeks.

The target date for issue 6 is between the 18th and 30th of November. The expected cost is 35p. This gives you plenty of time to contribute (articles and listings typed or printed on A4 if possible) so please make the effort. I am also looking for more contributions for the program supplement as mentioned last issue (by the way if you want me to reuse your envelope please enclose an address label). Sorry no Exchange column this issue.