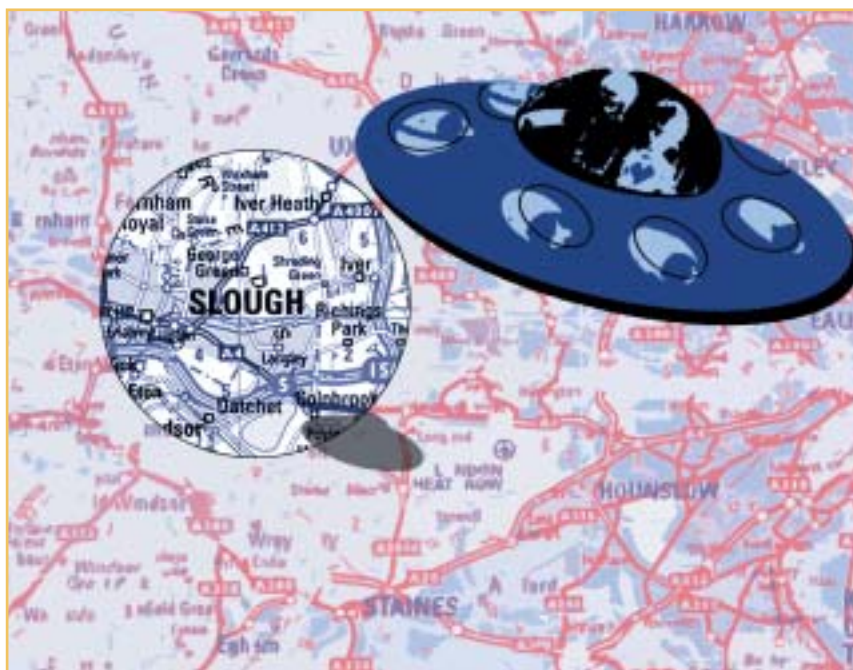# readers' writes

Do aliens have Slough in their sights? Are ill-equipped school ICT staff causing more problems than they solve? And just how grammatically confusing can a dialog box be? Here we find the answers to these and other questions picked from our October postbag

🔲 Where they won't shove their fat pipe

Living on the outskirts of a trading estate in Slough, how soon do you think I will be able to get broadband connection? Answer: never, according to BT. Although the main exchange is enabled I have more chance of being abducted by aliens than getting broadband – even starting a campaign would prove worthless according to BT. It is all very well spending thousands of pounds on TV adverts, how about investing it in getting the job done?

The reply I got from a lady by the name of Julie Russel was "the signal gets weak if we go past 5km". Surely in this day and age it is not too difficult to come up with a solution? The only advice I was given was to move to somewhere near an exchange. So I'm afraid to say things ain't so easy as your July 03 article *Can't get it, won't get it?* makes out. Hold on, I think I just saw a flying saucer outside.
R M Venn, Slough

Guy Dixon replies: we sympathise with your position entirely. BT recently extended ADSL's reach to include households between 5.5km and 6km from their local exchanges. If you're further than 6km from the exchange, it's unlikely you're going to get ADSL any time soon.

What's more, if BT is telling you there's no point in even starting a campaign, it sounds like your household area isn't one of the 1,500 exchanges to have its trigger level set before the end of August. This means you fall into the dreaded 10 percent of households in the UK that won't see broadband in the foreseeable future.

🔲 Reviewing the situation

As I am ready to upgrade to a DVD writer, I have been studying the Top 10 charts in your magazine and was interested to read the explanation of your scoring and testing procedures in the August 03 issue.

You seem to place a lot of importance on the speed of writing although the top five differ very little in this respect and there is no mention of compatibility. Shouldn't you be testing for this? After all, what's the use of writing a DVD of the family's recent video holiday if it won't

play on your Nan's standard DVD player? My preference so far is for the Teac DV-W50EK. It isn't the fastest DVD-R, but from what I have gleaned from various sources it is more likely to be compatible with standard DVD players. Perhaps you can enlighten me on this issue?
C Tyers, via email

Will Head replies: in an ideal world we would only have one DVD writing standard and it would work with all DVD players. Unfortunately due to the current standards war and, quite frankly, the mess that is writeable DVD, this isn't guaranteed.

Why is it a mess? Well, certain multinationals would rather it was their bit of technology that earned them 10 cents for every writer sold, rather than see the money and the glory go into someone else's pocket. This burdens the consumer in the short term for their long-term gain.

Going back to the ideal world thing, to combat this we'd obviously like to be able to test all discs in all players and give you an affirmative yes or no as to whether a disc you burn is going to work in your grandmother's player.

But, as you can imagine, there are hundreds of different players out there. Even if we had the budget to buy them all (which unfortunately we don't) we wouldn't have time to test each disc in every single one. It's a mammoth task, with no realistic way to tackle it comprehensively.

Obviously this lends little help to your predicament, but the more pressure we can put on the industry to sort out the situation rather than fighting over the intellectual property rights in each standard the better. Bang their heads together and don't give them any dinner until they've sorted it out, I say.

🔲 Foreign correspondent

Today I came across a Norwegian-published article which referred to your August 03 Technofile on inkjet consumables. In the article there

was a section about 'chipping' printer cartridges so that it's possible to print up to 40 percent more.

I have an Epson Stylus Photo 890 printer and I just bought a new colour cartridge. After printing only a few pages it started so say that I need to change it. It's so annoying. Could you please tell me how to bypass this? Or at least give me an idea of where I could find a 'chipper'?
Eric Nilsen, Norway

Andrew Charlesworth replies: the program you need is the Eurojet universal chip resetter. You can find this on www. eurojet-cartridges.co.uk. Happy printing.

Error message

Reading your answer to the Helpline query on invalid page faults in spool32 brought a wry smile to my face when I compared your direction to "select Selective Startup under startup selection" to your front-cover strapline 'Expert Advice in Plain English'.

Three different forms of the same word in a single clause is a little removed from plain English I think. I'd challenge you to find anyone who didn't really need to read that gem twice. I wonder if you are daring enough to show the hallmark of the true expert, admitting an error, by rewarding my pointing this out with a BackupBuddy?

My cynicism suggests not, for fear of starting a 'spot the non-plain English' avalanche of letters to yourselves. My faith in the overall quality of your publication suggests 'maybe, just maybe – maybe they will'. I hope my use of the same word-form three times in that last clause brings an wry smile to your faces…
Ant Smith, via email

Andrew Charlesworth replies: how about "Choose Selective Startup under startup menu"? Is that better? I think I'd still have to read it twice, but we've done the 'expert' thing and admitted a mistake. Prizes are given for the star letter only, so no BackupBuddy for you, Ant.

School for clowns

The ICT staff at one of my local schools are trying to set themselves up as something they're not – technical! I have visited a few times, on each occasion discussed why they should do backups, why they need to do more than play with

Star letter

Having spent a lot of time deciding on a portable digital music device I finally decided to spend my hard earned cash on a Sony Digital Network Walkman, which has its own industry-approved copyright protection. I was pleased with its performance, even though it was quite expensive.

Imagine my frustration when, having purchased Avril Lavigne's latest CD, Sony's software failed to recognise it due to, wait for it, built-in copy control. The disc would only play on my PC CD-ROM if I used the media player that was supplied on the CD.

I firmly believe (as you do in your August 03 article, *Music to my peers*) that I am perfectly entitled to transfer a legally purchased CD on to my PC or Walkman for my own personal use. And I am especially entitled to do so given that I have intentionally bought into technology that protects the copyright of the owner. Now the very industry that developed and supports the use of this technology is preventing me from using it.

Fortunately, I am slightly technically proficient so I hooked my portable CD player to my sound card and transferred the music to my PC anyway. The record companies are obviously struggling with the digital age and I believe, as reflected in your online survey, that providing value-for-money music – either in the shops or over the internet – is the simple and only solution to their problems.
Anthony O'Brien, Co Cork, Rep of Ireland

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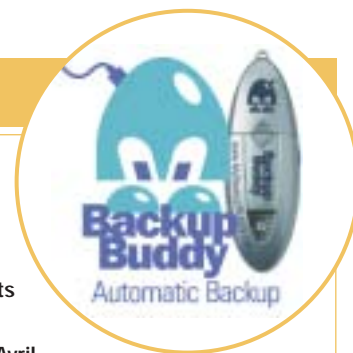
internet messaging while the problems rack up, and why they don't really need three staff to manage 40 PCs. The problem lies in the heads of departments not knowing enough about IT to make realistic judgments on what they do and don't need as a school.

This means some ICT staff swing the lead a lot, resulting in a poor level of service, children and teachers without useable PCs and badly implemented solutions. As an example, up until a few months ago all pupils logged on with admin accounts, allowing full access to staff data. This was until one child (bless them) changed the admin account password, requiring a full system rebuild as neither staff nor pupils could access the data.

Did this make them take notice? No. I still had to go in and replace the backup device, which had failed three weeks earlier, and give advice.

As these ICT staff are so unhelpful, the teachers have to work their way through the patchy lesson plans and try to educate the children based on lessons downloaded from the internet. It's not what we expect from our education system, but until the heads understand more about IT these con artists will continue to get paid significant sums of cash for playing the system.
Dave Snape, via email

Andrew Charlesworth replies: IT standards in education vary greatly from school to school. We've come across some that are models of good practice and would put many large companies to shame.

But you're right, those are usually where there's one influential teacher (it doesn't have to be the head) who understands the issues and has the drive to see good practice implemented. ■