

GBBS Pro News

Vol. 1

No. 7

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October 1987

Put a screen on GBBS's elusive back door

Brd: General GBBS Questions Board

Sub: Re: GBBS Back door

To: Brad Henwood

From: Lance Taylor-Warren

Date: 09/22/87 12:02:31

FOR THE LAST TIME!!!

THERE IS NO BACK DOOR IN GBBS TO MY KNOWLEDGE!!!!

Lance

[Source: L&L Support BBS]

End of discussion? Far from it. In spite of reassurances from Lance and others who have disassembled ACOS and ACOS.OBJ and those who have pulled apart every segment in the GBBS 'Pro' code, there are still complaints from sysops who claim to have been crashed through this mysterious and apparently invisible backdoor.

The latest complaint comes from Jason Cohen, who says that after a previous break-in (which he also blamed on the supposed back door), he modified his system so that the only entrance to the system.seg was by using his user number from local. And yet... someone broke in again. Cohen caught them after they had deleted all of his messages and as they were perusing the options of the system.seg that he had so carefully hidden.

First, a little history: supposedly there WAS a back door in GBBS II. The reactions of the sysops who learned this, however, seem to have chilled out the possibility of back doors in present and future generations of GBBS, including our beloved 'Pro.'

Not knowing Cohen's system or his modifications, it is difficult to comment on exactly how the malicious hacker is accessing his system. However, several system operators have suggested ways that the hacker might have wreaked his/her havoc, and many have given advice on how to keep it from happening again.

"There are lots of ways people can mess with you, if they are devious and you are trusting enough," Greg Broiles posted.

The methods suggested by various sysops may leave you

feeling naïve or overly trusting. The hackers out there are extremely devious and creative, to say the least.

As to the dead messages, one of the first suggestions from a sysop was that the hacker had posted 100 messages, then killed them all off, thus rolling over the message base and effectively destroying it. Cohen said, however, that he had already installed a modification that allows users to post only a maximum of 15 messages on a given sub-board. And, he said, it didn't explain how this hacker could access his system.seg.

Another sysop (I'd give you credit, but I can't find your post...) explained a horridly devious way to enter someone's system.seg: through an otherwise useful modification released in the public domain. For example, Hacker DØØd writes a long game segment, but somewhere in it, he/she/it imbeds a line: if i\$="<>" link system.seg. A sysop who just sticks public domain mods into his/her system without checking them carefully, could suffer serious damage at the hands of such a hacker. Dave Hart suggested that sysops be especially wary of "those folks who keep wondering when you are going to put THEIR mod up."

If you think this might be happening to you, one way to catch it is to change the name of your system.seg (fixing appropriate links in the standard 'Pro' segments), and write a new "system.seg" file whose entire purpose is to write the name, user number and time of day of the "hacker" who got in, and log him/her/it off. Another way -- granted, a pain in the neck -- is to remove ALL links to

"There are lots of ways people can mess with you, if they are devious and you are trusting enough." -- sysop Greg Broiles.

system.seg, making it only accessible from the ACOS startup screen. Again, it would be best to change the name of the file, if you still have trouble with someone gaining access.

Sysops also cautioned against using pirated versions of ACOS or ACOS.OBJ, because some pirates may have installed their own back doors in the pirated files. Most registered owners of 'Pro,' however, agreed that anyone using pirated 'Pro' would be getting his/her just desserts if there were an unlocked back door in a pirated version.

See There's, page 8

Highlights:

L&L: (303) 420-3568
The Apple Pack:
(703) 370-4223

Lance Taylor-Warren says he met several fellow 'Pro' sysops at the AppleFest in California, where he also met some hardware reps and got to talk to them firsthand about compatibility problems with GBBS.

Most of the discussion has come directly from L&L; I am not sure whether the novelty of the link wore off or if Ron Gabbert just hasn't had as many 'Pro' messages posted on his GBBS sub-board.

Hardware: David Bruner was able to get his system to boot from the system turnkey as explained in the GBBS manual, but he had another problem. He runs an educational BBS from an office building to which he doesn't have access on the weekends or over holidays. So, if the power goes off and comes back on, the system would boot, except that his hard drive takes longer to power up than his system does.

Two solutions were suggested: Steve Schneider uses a floppy with a modified startup program that sits in a kind of loop for about 30 seconds while waiting for his hard drive to power up, then boots the harder. Secondly, Forrest Jerome suggested an electronic device called a time delay switch. He uses one with a 6-second delay, so that power goes on to the monitor and hard drive first, then to the computer. "You have to be sure to get the base for the switch and be careful in the wiring," Jerome says. Sounds like something NOT to mess with if you aren't a hardware-oriented individual.

Bugs: Doug Granzow, replying to someone who was getting an occasional syntax error when hitting CTRL-L, says that's probably caused by not having "on nocar goto" set. You will also get an error message if you hit CTRL-L after a user has logged off, Granzow says.

Leonard Fagen was having some trouble with his local screen showing some characters. Dave Hart suggested configuring his monitor as a IIe, rather than a II+, to get the IIe keyboard driver. However, Hart warns, "you will get some unsightly field names in

the sysop window (lowercase characters)." He says that those with Franklin ACE 1000 computers should configure as a IIe in 40-column mode.

Jim Couch was having trouble with uploads from callers using Point-to-Point. He says the board is defaulting to standard Xmodem even though the user specifies ProDOS Xmodem. He didn't know whether it was a fault of x.up, but he didn't have the same problem with downloads from GBBS to Point-to-Point.

Steve Schneider found a missing quotemark in one line of the msg.seg of v1.3j. He doesn't know whether it was fixed in other versions. Under the label dn.xmdm, the 11th line needs a quote mark between the backslash and the word Numb.

Steve has also made a list of his favorite GBBS bugs and typical programming mistakes; look for it next month.

Thomas R. Arnold, sysop of The Boiler Room, (317) 743-6762, has had problems getting the configuration program to work for him. He wanted to change his storage, but when he loaded config.system, it put the graphic screen on his screen and then locked up. I've had that happen, too, in particular when I was running the board on a IIc for a while when the IIe was down. Anyone know why it does this, or how to fix it when it does?

Mods: I literally have an inch-high stack of printouts on my desk of mods that people have been posting. Keep up the good work!

Among the longer ones that are not likely to be printed in a Pro News because of lack of space or general interest, Andy Nichols posted a machine-language "use" routine written with Orca/M-GS to create sub-directories in the currently logged volume. He is also working on some super-high-speed (17400- and 19200-baud!) drivers, and he hopes to be able to update them with Pro/Link, when that's released.

For those using SuperTac, your users' time online will likely be overwritten constantly, because Lance used byte(7) to store that information, and Super-tac uses it as one of its counters. Lance has talked to the Supertac's author, and that bug is to be fixed in Supertac v3.0

For those who have ProSel and

know how to use "Block Warden," Dave Hart says it is possible and not terribly difficult to add or create your own custom modem initialization strings. Such a string is extremely useful when you have an off-brand modem that just won't listen to GBBS Pro. He posted that he was going to try to put together an instruction file for Pro News on making that and some other changes within acos.obj, such as the "Sysop is on-line" message.

(Dave also says he has taken his BBS down?! He says don't worry, he plans to put up a new system in January, "after some ferocious modding and horsing around," and there's also a chance that he'll be doing it from Los Angeles, rather than Denver. I'll keep you posted on Dave's whereabouts and status of his BBS, if I can keep up....)

Hardware: Dave, a CMS drive dealer, says the super cheapo deal on the SC40a drives may not have been such a great deal after all. He says one of the lights stays on constantly, and now CMS has delayed shipping any more SC40a drives until they fix the problem. He says the delay should be three to four weeks, but you can still order one through him....

Ethics of mail: Several users have been discussing the ethics of looking at other users' e-mail, in response to a question from a sysop who was having trouble with some bulk mailers. As kind of a summary, Greg Broiles noted that a system operator is legally liable for everything on his/her system: e-mail, posts, uploads, etc. I'll tell you from my experience of covering the federal courts that if your users are trading MCI codes in e-mail, the U.S. Secret Service can come in and confiscate YOUR equipment and charge YOU with possession of those codes, even though you ostensibly didn't know they were there. A future issue of Pro News is going to address these ethical vs. legal considerations of running a bulletin board service. This is NOT an issue to be taken lightly.

Gritching session: The semi-annual GBBS-bashing session on the L&L "support" board took place last month; if you missed it, just wait a few weeks and I'm sure there will be another one. Among the few intelligent and thoughtful comments about GBBS, Doug

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Mods!

Save Message in Progress is Carrier is Lost

By Steve Schneider for the RainForest BBS, (305) 434-4927
(not PC Pursuitable)

This mod will save a message being written on a sub-board at loss of carrier and will bring the saved portion up for continuance or deletion when that user logs on again. I use nibble(10) to flag whether or not the user has a saved message waiting. I used a nibble so that in the future I can add saving mail, etc., with different headers and the system can use whatever number is stored in the nibble to know whether it is mail or a message.

This was written as a modification for GBBS 'Pro' v1.3j; certain portions, particularly the message parameters such as sb\$, tn, ti\$, may need to be altered for other versions.

MAIN.SEG

```
on nocar goto term1
if flag(0) goto main
; add the next line
if nibble(10)=1 gosub send.save

; add the following label and subroutine, which does the
; dirty work of recovering the saved message.
```

```
send.save
nibble(10)=0:print "\"One moment please.....\"
f$="b:msgsave."+str$(un):aa=0:clear#8
create f$:open #2,f$:input #2,sb$:input #2,tn,ti$:input
#2,xx,x$:input #2,bb,bn$
copy #2,#8:close #2:if sb$="" :kill f$:bb=1:return
print "\"You experienced a loss of carrier when last on the
system."
```

```
print "\"You were writing about "sb$
print "to "ti$" on "bn$" sub-board."
input "\"Would you like to start back where you left off?"
```

```
"i$
if i$<>"Y" kill f$:bb=1:print "\"Partial message
deleted.":return
gosub new.id:if bf$="" print "Unable to recover partial
message.... sorry.":kill f$:bb=1:return
kill f$:edit(1)
print "\"edit(2)" bytes entered.":aa=0:if edit(2)=0 then
bb=1:return
```

```
; Editor's note: in the next line, I think Steve has some
; variables (c4 and cr) that are non-standard; 'cr' is likely a
; credit system for a game??
```

```
print "Digging the hole.... wait.":bp=bp+1:c4=c4+1:
cr=cr+10
if (kl>0) and (kl<=msg(0)) kill #msg(kb):crunch:b=b-1
a=msg(0)+1
print #msg(a),sb$
print #6,tn,ti$
print #6,xx,x$
print #6,"Date: "date$ "time$\
copy #8,#6:msg(a)=mn:mn=mn+1:update:tm=tm+1:
clear#8
```

```
print "There! Planted that sucker.":ti$="" :a$=""
bb=1:return
```

```
new.id
d=0
me=0:bl=bb:open #1,"b:data2"
mark(1)=1120:input #1,ab
if (bb>ab or bb<1) close:bf$="" :bl=0:return
position #1,128,bb+8
input #1,bn$\bf$\b3,b4\bs,bs$\mb,kl,kb
b1=1:if b3 then b1=flag(b3)
b2=1:if b4 then b2=flag(b4)
close:if bf$="" then bl=0:return
if (b1) ready bf$:nn=nb
return
```

MSG.SEG

; NOTE: hb tells the editor whether it's message or mail.

```
; find label 'post2c' and the following lines of code:
input @2 "\"Post: [Y]es, [N]o, [X]modem "i$
if i$="N" return
; change the next line to add 'hb=1'
if i$="X" gosub up.xmdm:else hb=1:gosub editor
if not edit(2) return
; change the following line to add 'hb=0'
print "\"edit(2)" bytes entered":hb=0
```

```
; find the label 'editor' and add the first line as shown
; below
editor
if hb=1:hb=0:on nocar goto save.msg
; on the last line of the editor, remove the 'return' and add
; the following lines:
on nocar goto link.term
return
```

; add the following subroutine at the end of msg.seg to save
a message during loss of carrier

```
save.msg
nibble(10)=1:f$="b:msgsave."+str$(un)
create f$:open #2,f$:print #2,sb$:print #2,tn,ti$:print
#2,un,a$:print #2,bb,bn$
copy #8,#2:close
goto link.term
```

That modification automatically saves a message being posted if the user loses carrier while in the message base. When that user next logs on, the system reloads the partial message, prompts the user's memory with the message header as well as the addressee, the asks if the user wants to finish the message. If not, it deletes the partial message and continues its normal main.seg functions. If so, it allows the user to finish the message while still at the entrance to the main.seg, then posts it to the correct sub-board with a correct message number, and continues the user in normal main.seg activities.

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Highlights:

Continued from page 2

Granzow came up with a list of things he'd like to see in ProLink (or for some bored programmer to write as an add-on mod for v1.3...):

1) A "workable" editor. "Doesn't have to be fantastic," he says. But he would like to be able to edit his program segments -- more than 4K -- without really leaving ACOS. He suggests something on the order of restarting to S,M,Q, or E, where E is an editor.

2) The ability to create your own modem driver.

3) The ability to use the extra memory in 128K computers or IIgs computers, using something other than a standard /ramdisk.

(On the latter, Doug, I assume you're talking about the ability to use that extra memory for longer program segments or more editor space??)

Peripherals Plus:

(214) 424-2001

EFTS: The new one, EFTS Pro, has been released. For \$49.95, or an EFTS upgrade price of \$10 with a disk, you get Ymodem uploads and downloads, additional information about each file, a credit system that can be enabled/disabled within each section, user stats, & More. See Jan's column on page 7 for more on his upgrade policy.

Europa Sysop Paul Hutmacher sheepishly announced that he, too, had crashed his hard drive after running ProSEL's ramcache utility. Hutmacher says he was using ProSEL v2.8; it appears that this cache utility is not compatible with GBBS 'Pro' and should NOT be used in conjunction with it!!

Hardware: Robert Zylka found a problem in his ProAPP that THIS sysop wishes she had seen about a month ago before her power supply fried... He found some nicked wires that may have caused a major short in the power supply. Zylka said he merely replaced the power supply with one from an old Apple II, and the drive still works fine. He suggests that if you have a ProAPP (and some idea of what you're doing mechanically), you TURN OFF AND UNPLUG THE DRIVE, check the wires leading to the drive, and cover them with electrical tape if necessary.

ProAPP just moved, so it's been a little tough to reach them. The company is now located at 1989-A Palmar Oaks Way, Carlsbad, CA 92008. You should be able to reach Larry White at (619) 931-7878 or -6922.

The Land of SPUR: Joe E. Powell has re-written the scatter mod, and Jan has announced that he will soon have a SPUR II out, a new scenario for the masses. The new scenario, rumour has it, will include some of the mods that have been posted on the SPUR BBS. It will cost money, even for current SPUR owners.

Oscar Fisher says he has a different "loan" mod, including a section that charges 10 percent interest on the loan. I'd say that's a pretty good interest rate these days.... He says he's got it up on his BBS, (301) 695-7203.

Fantasy Football: How 'bout that football strike? Jan

was waiting until some National Football League teams actually started playing before deciding whether to change his player roster to include the non-union players.

Chameleon BBS: (713) 875-9868

For those of you who weren't aware, my BBS was down for much of July while I was on vacation, after the motherboard blew a few chips and destroyed much of the rest of the hardware when it blew. One of my floppy drives is irreparable from that incident; my modem still isn't quite the same, although it does work, for now.

Well, that was not enough for whatever Supreme Sysop has been wreaking this havoc; a week before I left on another vacation on Oct. 1 (which is why this issue is so late getting into the mail), my hard drive failed, as noted in the P+ section. I still haven't decided what to do about it, since the nice ProApp man says that if the powerr supply blew, the drive might also be damaged.

The point is that if you want to send submissions to Pro News, you should send them either in e-mail on L&L or P+ (if they'll fit in a piece of mail) or in hardcopy to my P.O. Box, which is noted at the bottom of page 7.

I'm running the board on a meg of internal /ram, and it seems to work marvelously -- I LOVE the speed! -- and since I don't have a hard drive to worry about frying, with an untested partitioning program, I have no fears. I have been backing up to floppies about every third or fourth day, and it seems to be working pretty well. If anyone knows of a sysop in the Houston area who has a ProAPP hard drive, I'd like to try to borrow a power supply so I can see whether my drive is fried, before I bother to replace the power supply. Thanks for your support and understanding.

Correspondence

Tommy Johnson, sysop of the DuckNet BBS in Lawton, Okla., wrote to fill me in on the details of Swords & Sorcery, which I had asked about in a previous issue. Johnson, who also goes by the name "The Rubber Duck," adapted the program from an Applesoft BASIC program that he got when he first bought his Apple IIe in 1983. He said he has released the game in the public domain, and it is compatible with v1.2 and maybe other versions. It is a single-segment adventure that he says is easy to play, showing the player's options at each turn: i.e., Do you O)pen the crypt or L)eave?

Johnson says he's working on S&S II in his spare time, "which is sparse," since he is a student and also secretary of his local Apple User Group. He says S&S II will be two segments, supporting "more options and situations, more facets for more character, more items, towns, castles, more goals...basically MORE of everything."

(By the way, Johnson's letter was hand-typed, rather than computer-printed. Why? "My power supply went kaput two days ago." Is this just the time of year for hardware problems, or what?!)

Stephanie McGrath

Unveiling secrets for 'Pro' hackers

This month's front-page article might cause some consternation among my colleagues. Why? Because it essentially gives everyone some ideas on how to crash (or attempt to crash) GBBS 'Pro.'

I readily admit that I don't know all of my subscribers personally, nor do I know whether we number any vicious hackers in our midst.

I do know, however, that someone is crashing the snot out of Jason Cohen's bulletin board, and whether it is symptomatic only of his particularly modified system or is indicative of a major problem, it appears that the issue of hacking GBBS has become of interest to all of us.

I admit that when I was reading the new messages on L&L, I at first ignored Jason's complaint. "Oh, another sysop who modified his system and didn't pay attention to what he was doing, or he gave out his password to someone," I thought. But as I read through the responses of my fellow sysops, I was horrified and appalled at my own naivety in the matter of hacking; I never considered that someone might try such subterfuge on my system.

For example, I never would have considered that a hacker might fill up one of my message bases with 100 short messages for the express purpose of deleting my entire message base. Nor would I have considered that a fellow ACOS programmer might viciously include a line of code that would allow him/her/it to hack into MY system.seg and do whatever damage struck his/her/its fancy. I am not aware of a documented case of such abuse, but I hope that if anyone finds one, we sysops can blacklist the hacker from the GBBS world for a long, long time.

(I use "him/her/it," because although it is unweildy as all get-out, I have strong feelings about the humanity of a person who uses his obvious intelligence in such a destructive fashion...)

Someone will undoubtedly accuse me of being irresponsible for publishing what could be considered an idea-book for GBBS hackers. But if you read it, you'll see first that most of the warnings included in the article probably would be applicable to any bulletin board system -- including modifiable non-Apple systems.

Secondly, I hope you'll realize that the purpose of the article is to warn other naïve sysops, not explain the

See A sysop, page 8

Jan Porter

P+ upgrade flack is undeserved

Call them what you wish, but lately we at Peripherals Plus seem to be getting quite a bit of flack over charging for "upgrades."

When we send out an upgraded version of a program, it includes lots of work. We could just as well forget the upgrade and work on something new and never have anything to do with the old software. We choose to enhance our products and spark new interest in them -- that's the reason we put a LOT of work into new versions of our software -- time that, as mentioned, could be spent working on different things. That's the reason we charge. We are NOT Bröderbund or Lotus or Ashton-Tate; they charge out the rear for their upgrades. We do expect some return for our work, however.

EFTS Pro, for example, took three months to finish. That includes documentation, help files, rewriting the program, and waiting on the necessary drivers to complete it. Some of you even complained about that. Three months that could have been spent working on other things or not working on ANYTHING. Some of you expect that all that should be free. If so, let us know. We are always willing to hire those who work for free. I need the house cleaned, yard mowed, car washed...

Our spare time is valuable to us, too. Darryl Ellingson and I both work full-time jobs. We work hard at the GBBS software when we have time. When we put out an upgrade, it is more than a few rewritten lines. Usually, as in the case of the Casino and EFTS Pro, there are LOTS of new options and things that work better than the original.

This is America. Nobody is holding a gun to anyone's head saying, "If you don't upgrade I will blow your head off." If you don't want the new product then don't buy it. I passed up lots of Apple IIgs games this weekend at Applefest because I didn't feel they were worth the money. I did buy some things, like PrintShop GS and Mean 18 Golf Courses because I enjoy those. If you don't want to buy our software or upgrades, that is your decision. Just don't get bent out of shape because you have to pay for other people's work. I didn't see too many people up in arms because Springboard wouldn't allow them to upgrade from Newsroom to Springboard Publisher, which is essentially the same product with a lot

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There's no back door, but smart hackers are a problem

Continued from page 1

Cohen said he plans to add a modification to his system that will write all user keypresses to a text file. Such a modification has been around the 'Pro' world for a while, but Broiles pointed out that if a hacker is going to kill user files and message bases, why wouldn't he/she/it go ahead and kill off that text file, as well?

The one, obvious suggestion from every sysop who commented on the possibility of a back door was to keep the remote password an absolute secret and change it often.

A few sysops complained that occasionally a line or two from the data files echo on the screen as a user logs on. Hart and others believe it echos only on the local screen and does not show on remote. James Blackwood said he thinks the problem lies in the 300-baud driver, but he isn't sure.

The main leak of a remote password, sysops agree, is through co-sysops, or even user-friends who see it lying around on a piece of paper or perhaps are even brazen enough to look at your data and/or user files while they're visiting your house.

In one tale of horror, a sysop said one of his co-sysops had

a macro containing password and remote sysop password, and he put up his computer in auto-answer mode, but forgot to remove his macro file from the accessible subdirectory.

But while many urged sysops not to use co-sysops, there were several 'Pro' owners who said they have worked with co-sysops for years without a problem.

"It's just that you have to be careful who you select to help you," said Scott Bloom, who said he's been a co-sysop for a year-and-a-half. "Not all co-sysops are bad. After all, it's just a name."

Mike Goodner said the environment of the bulletin board should also be taken into consideration. Goodner says co-sysops are a bad idea, but running a high school computer lab BBS, he has to trust the teachers and students not to give out the passwords.

What it all means is that if your system is crashed, you'll have to go over your home-written code, because it's sure not in the stock GBBS 'Pro' code or in the ACOS or ACOS.OBJ files. Change your remote password early and often, and if at all possible, use sub-ops rather than co-sysops: sub-ops only rule their own sub-boards, rather than having run of the board.

A sysop can't prevent the unexpected hacker

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workings of GBBS for those who want to harm the system. The dilemma in writing an article like this is similar to that faced by journalists on more traditional stories -- how do you warn people about a con scam that is preying on the elderly without telling some other con man how it is done?

The simple answer is that you can't, so you explain as little as possible while still accenting the main point -- prevention.

All in all, I'm convinced that there is no back door into registered, non-pirated versions of GBBS. The pirated versions... well, they're on their own, and they get what they deserve.

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Stephanie McGrath is sysop of Chameleon BBS, (713)875-9868, a reporter for the Houston Chronicle, and editor/publisher of GBBS 'Pro' News. She writes lots of GBBS modifications in her spare time -- none of which contain any devious code -- and she plans to write some new hacker-prevention mods soon!

P+ to continue writing, charging for upgrades

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of new features! I have even had people saying they would charge a lot more for EFTS Pro upgrade than \$10. We could have just as easily changed the name and acted like the people at Springboard.

One person said we should charge about \$1 because that's what a disk, a folder and a stamp costs. Try telling Springboard that!

Anyway, I have said my piece and tried to explain our actions. You are free to make your own decisions about any upgrades that we publish.

And, yes, we will be putting a new "SPUR II -- GUILD WARS" up. And, like all our products, there WILL be an upgrade fee.

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Jan Porter is sysop of Peripherals Plus BBS, (214) 424-2001. He and Darryl Ellingson are the talent behind modifications for GBBS Pro such as the P+ Casino, SPUR and EFTS. The opinions expressed in this column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of Chameleon Publication or L&L Productions.

Know someone who has never received a copy of Pro News? I want to send them one. Pass it around: they should get their address to me as soon as possible, so I can include them on the November mailing list. In addition, I need phone numbers of any GBBS boards that were not on the list we published over the summer. November is going to be a BIG issue.